

Abstract

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The study explores changes in the Baltic Sea Region related to new prerequisites for transborder cooperation, arising both through geopolitical transitions in Europe and the development of network services based on new information and communication technology (ICT). The aim of the study is to throw light on how these new conditions have influenced regional development. Regional development refers to (1) *economic revitalization*, involving a strengthening of local industry's competitiveness through increased network cooperation and enhanced abilities to learn and innovate. (2) *Deepened democracy* through e-government and e-democracy. (3) The ongoing integration of the former divided Baltic Sea Area into a more coherent region. Thus, studies of *regionalization* in the form of network cooperation between local and regional actors both on a subnational and transnational regional level, are made. These three aspects are processes that have been triggered to a high degree by the European integration and a growing use of network services.

The geographical area of this thesis comprises Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The coastal regions of southwestern and southeastern parts of the Baltic Sea Region are at focus by studies of Pomerania and Baltic (transnational euroregions) and the subnational regions Blekinge (Sweden) and Pomorskie (Poland). The time-span is from 1988 to 1 May 2004.

The studies show that the prerequisites for ICT-based networking have changed since 1989. A variety of actions have been taken aimed at the diffusion of network services at different levels in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region. Universal access to network services has partly been achieved in Western but not yet in the Eastern Baltic Sea Region. One exception is Estonia that has achieved the same level of ICT-use as Germany. E-government has (in contrast to e-democracy) been developed in all ten countries but with varying levels of ambition. The citizens' use of e-government has increased since the end of the 1990s.

The transborder cooperation has changed entirely since 1989. Cooperation between local actors without the central state or national organizations acting as mediators has become more common. Network cooperation has been developed in the fields of economy, culture, politics and social issues and has contributed to creation of knowledge and problem-solving. In this way resources in the form of education, competence and organizational capacity can be used more effectively. In comparison with EU, Japan and USA, the Western Baltic Sea Region has a strong economic position. The gaps between Western and Eastern Baltic Sea Region have gradually diminished but still occur in most fields. A high growth in the reforming countries and an increase in trade are good prerequisites for enhanced welfare and integration in the Baltic Sea Region.

Keywords: Baltic Sea region, integration, networking, ICT, Internet, transborder cooperation, regional development, economic revitalization, deepened democracy, regionalization.

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