

BALTIC EUROPE – 40 YEARS OF INTEGRATION

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Abstract: Baltic Europe, i.e. the sea and inland hinterland, form a unique macro-regional unit. Strong collaboration links as well as competition in the Baltic Sea Region are an inherent feature of the region from the beginnings of its civilization development. The article shows the forty-year-long Baltic integration process and the Polish scientific contribution to the process. Since 2004, the Baltic has become an internal EU sea. This fact no doubt strengthened cooperation of the countries around the Baltic Sea. In many spheres, these ties take the form of networking. An important stimulus for further integrations is the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Political stabilisation and economic development may transform, in a longer time span, the emerging transnational Baltic Europe into a new economic and cultural European centre.

Keywords: Baltic integration, Baltic Europe, regional co-operation

JEL codes: F 15, O 21

Introduction

Political, economic, social and territorial changes at the end of the nineteen eighties and the beginning of the nineteen nineties of the twentieth century awakened the renaissance of regional thinking in Europe. Areas earlier remaining in the outskirts of the main series of events of European political and economic life became animated European cooperation actors. This peripheral role fell to Baltic Sea countries, which were limited in their search for partners by their affiliation to contrary integration groupings. The disintegration of one of them allowed for the development of a new order for international Baltic cooperation in the last decade of the twentieth century. In the following years, the countries lying around the Baltic Sea developed a dense network of state, institutional and self-governmental programmes and nongovernmental organisations. Their activity contributes to closer ties of societies inhabiting Baltic Europe.

Forty years of Polish studies, initiated by Zaleski and Wojewódka (1977), are an occasion for reflection on the Baltic integration process. The imperative to undertake the subject is rooted in the reflection of Jerzy Zalewski, who undertook the theme over 30 years ago and inspired studies on Baltic Europe¹ – a concept just ‘sprouting’. A short analysis of the developing new (macro) region² and related studies underlie the article’s framework. The aim of this paper is to refer to scientific experience of key researchers of the region and to present a short review of the Baltic Europe integration process, starting from the concept itself up to contemporary times, specifying the achievements, problems and new research challenges relevant for the region.

The study comprises five parts. The first part presents the theoretical aspects of the region, macro-region and macro-regional strategies. The second part illustrates the complex delimitation problems of Baltic Europe. Part three covers a synthetic social and economic characteristic of the region. Part four gives a short presentation of Baltic Europe. The content of part five depicts Baltic Europe in terms of a research subject. The article closes with conclusions.

Presently, Baltic Europe is more than a configuration of independent state bodies located around a common sea. It has become a region gaining importance in the European Union, which features growing internal interactions. Though Baltic Europe lacks overall institutional forms of governing the integration process, it can be perceived as one of the new emerging regions with great political and economic potential, which appeared on the map of united Europe.

The region, the macro-region and macro-regional strategies

The literature about the region is abundant as it falls under the basic categories in geographic studies. Although many scientific disciplines describe various phenomena and processes in the region they rarely attempt to explain the phenomenon of the region and the intensity of factors affecting its structure and development, and resultant functions (Łoboda 1978).

The representatives of particular scientific disciplines studying the region represent such specialisations as geography, economy, sociology, political science, law, demography, biology and others. In geographical studies, the dynamic development of the regional paradigm took place in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties of the twentieth century. Geography then gained new theoretical and methodology solutions. A new research trend developed, represented by Isard (1959) and called regional science. However, attempts to construe an overall review were tainted with individualism, whereas team research concerning the region was conducted primarily by specialists in the same or related areas. This led to isolating particular issues in the regional framework and the achievements of particular disciplines explained solely a specific problem of the region.

¹ The term Baltic Europe is used interchangeably with the term Baltic Sea Region (BSR)

² The introduction of the term macro-region for Baltic Europe in its entirety and sub-region for its part helps to clarify the nomenclature.

Political, social, economic and cultural transformations of the late nineteen eighties and the beginning of the nineteen nineties in Central Europe stimulated the renaissance of studies on the region. The attempts to interpret the nature and the role of the region were reflected in such philosophical trends as structuralism and realism, which strongly affected fundamental transformations of geography fundamentals (Chojnicki 1996 after Cloke et al. 1991). Clear trends also appeared towards showing its relation to social science theories and their application. Dziewoński (1967) identified three concepts of a region: region as a research tool (analysis), as a subject of cognition and a vehicle for action.

In international relations, we often use the term region with reference to natural premises such as the catchment areas of big rivers, seas and locations facilitating transport (Białocerkiewicz 1978). Such a geographical basis for the forming of a region is, among others, the Baltic Sea, The North Sea and the Mediterranean. They link and unify countries along their coastline. The functionality of marine regionalism results from common maritime law standards referring to regional solutions (Górski 1978).

Contemporary coastal regions need not be national outskirts but can be locations of permanent and direct contacts of a state and local society with partners inhabiting regions lying on the opposite side of the sea. Access to the sea in the life of nations and countries always played an important role. Coastal regions usually featured animated economic activity and faster civilisation development (Palmowski 2000).

The development process of European regions is of a twofold nature: a top down initiative of central authorities aimed at establishing politically defined regions, and bottom up initiatives resulting from regional actions where benefits from economic co-operation do not mean the loss of autonomy and cultural identity (Veggeland 1992). Experience up-to-date seems to indicate that regional development does not start at the central and state level but is instigated by endeavours and agreements on the local level. The unquestionable asset of regions (their various levels) is their stabilising function. Regionalisation provides an opportunity to strengthen a common local, regional and national identity, and develop interaction between particular societies.

Though Baltic integration is part of regional research trends, an inherent part of economic geography (Czyż 2004), the studies are also of an interdisciplinary nature. The wide pool of knowledge about the region provides a source, which adequately used can optimise the region's further development and functioning (Łoboda 2012).

“The idea of a region (macro-region) is both a conceptual aspect of a region and the views on the collective role of the region. The idea need not refer to the real components of the region but may also include the image of the character of the region and its history. It does not depict the full picture of the region, nor does it usually delimitate its territorial character” (Chojnicki 1996).

“The significance of the Baltic Region as a European macro-region has been appreciated, as well as the opportunity for it to serve as a bridge linking the old West and East” (Törnquist-Plewa 2015).

The concept of macro-regional strategy is founded on a shared sense of regional identity, which affects social, economic and cultural development, may be used to build action plans and strategies beyond the solutions of today and trigger the potential in particular regions covered by these strategies. Nonetheless, this concept is also part of a political plan to restructure European territory and strengthen transnational regional identity. It is also embedded in the concept of multilayer management, where the European Commission acts as the moderator and the causative factor (Słomczyńska 2014).

The necessity to see EU development in terms of transnational regions opens the option of interpreting anew such terms as space, territory and ruling. The regional approach is an area in international relations, which requires in-depth analytical reflection as the dynamics of regional collaborations goes beyond the traditional approach to international relations studies and the functioning of such players as the European Union (Hurrell 2005).

Macro-regional strategies are an element of a long term development vision of the European Union published in 2010 in the new EU development strategy *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. The document refers to the role of regions, which became full-fledged participants of political processes, equal to EU Member States and institutions (COM 2010).

The funds for implementing macro-regional strategies³ are part of strategic planning under cohesion policy programmes in EU regions and Member States. The States also guarantee that in locations where macro-regional strategies and strategies for marine basins are introduced, their implementation in relevant cases is supported by all funds under the common strategic framework.

Delimitation of Baltic Europe

The physiographic point of departure to define Baltic Europe is the Baltic catchment area. This area covers a territory of approximately 1381 thousand km² and is one of the criterions for identifying the macro-region. It creates a dependence network of the region, which need not neighbour each other, but depend on economic management in the catchment area. Delimitation based on the river network is justified and is significant in solving environmental problems⁴.

To delimitate the Baltic zone historians adopted, as the fundamental criterion, the tending of characteristic goods, offered by the hinterland, towards Baltic trade (Konopczyński 1947).

Three criteria were identified to specify the Baltic region for political and economic purposes:

- Access to the sea, i.e. a country's own Baltic coastline;

³ Regulation EU of 22.04.2013

⁴ This criterion was adopted in the international agreement on environmental protection around the Baltic Sea in 1974.

- Relations of the region with the Baltic Sea is reflected in social and economic spatial structure, settlement structure, and the location of industrial and port centres;
- The range of maritime port impact, i.e. the catchment area of a given port referred to as the hinterland or port service market, indicated by the volume of goods delivered to or leaving the port (Zaleski & Wojewódka 1977).

Baltic Europe was defined by many researchers, among them, Zaleski (1993), Hedegaard & Lindström (1998), Ruszkowski (1999), Palmowski (2000), Piskozub (2004).

Under the spatial development strategy *Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010* (VASAB 2010), initiated in Karskrona in 1992, Denmark Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia (Murmansk, Leningrad, Novgorod and Pskov, Kaliningrad Oblasts as well as the Republic of Karelia and Sankt Petersburg), Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Germany (Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Berlin, Brandenburg) belong to the region (Fig. 1).

Palmowski suggests a Baltic Europe comprising two domains. The first domain (a), (Fig. 1 D) includes countries and administrative units directly adjacent to the Baltic Sea. The second domain (b) embraces countries and administrative units, which do not directly touch the Baltic Sea but are historically and culturally related and remain in its catchment area.

The examples given above indicating the attempts to specify the borders of Baltic Europe are not consistent and are a matter of convention. For statistic reasons these remain to be political and administrative borders. Buchhofer's Baltic Europe (1997) is a good example of delimitation on the grounds of regional population statistics.

A clear-cut delimitation of the Baltic Region at the present state of transformation and the development of spatial and functional structures of diversified territorial range is not possible. According to Kołodziejski and Parteka (1994), "The Baltic Region *in statu nascendi* is part of the Europe's natural, social, economic and political environment around the Baltic Sea where:

The structure of the natural environmental space is defined by the Baltic catchment area and the physically and geographically neighbouring regions;

The social and economic spatial structure shape the development process generated by using the assets of the coastal location and sea resources;

They form functional and spatial systems of a local, regional, national and European range and a diversified level of development depending on the impact on the natural space and the type of social and economic activity generated by the sea;

The political structure stems from both history and contemporary political and system transformations, and its borders are specified by state borders of countries lying around the Baltic Sea or only their Baltic regions".

Further course of the analysis adopts the VASAB delimitation similarly as the majority of studies on integration. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that many macroeconomic studies embrace the Nordic countries en block, including Iceland as part of Baltic Europe, this approach gives rise to justified doubts (Table 1, 2).

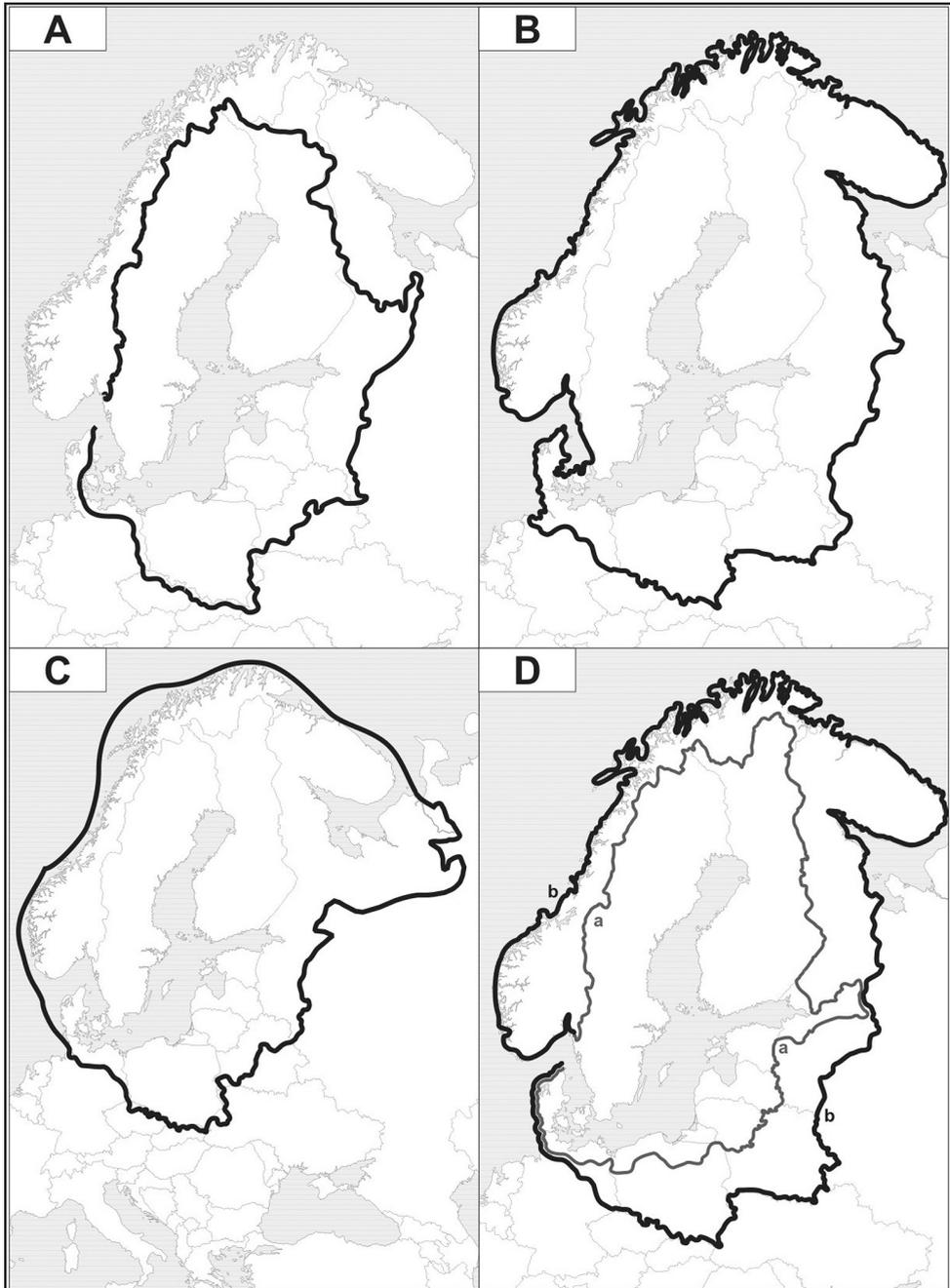


Fig. 1. Delimitations of Baltic Europe A – according to Baltic catchment area, B – according to VASAB, C, C – according to Baltic Sea Region Programme (BSRP) 2007–2013, D – according to Palmowski (2000)

Source: Own study.

Fundamentals of social and economic characteristics of Baltic Europe

Population related issues and economic development indicators of the forming region best illustrate the social and economic aspects of the region. Irrespective of the adopted Baltic Europe borders, the region remains strongly diversified in terms of structure. This results from natural conditions, the history of social and economic development, and contemporary social, economic and cultural conditions. The region covers densely populated countries such as Germany and Poland as well as countries with a population smaller by an order of magnitude (Table 1)⁵. Its location and thus the intensity and spatial development functions also clearly differ. Although the aging process of societies progresses in all European countries, the differences in Baltic Europe are clearer. In Poland, the percent of the population of 65 and over is 16% whereas in Finland it exceeds 20%. Nordic education solutions, not only for children and youth but also for lifelong learning, are often referred to as a model solution. The volatility of the labour market in growing global competition forces employees to continually update their competencies. This phenomenon is more widely spread in Nordic countries than in the remaining countries of Baltic Europe.

Table 1. Basic socio-economic indicators by the States of Baltic Sea Region (excluding Russia)

	Total population (1st January 2016) [thous.]	Population density (2015) [persons/km ²]	Proportion of population aged 65 years and more (2016) [%]	Proportion of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training (2015) [%]	Employment rate, age group 20–64 (2015) [%]	GDP per capita (2015) [PPPS]	Patent applications to the EPO per million inhabitants (2014)
Denmark	5707.3	132.4	18.8	31.3	76.5	36400	245.12
Estonia	1315.9	30.3	19.0	12.4	76.5	21700	18.42
Finland	5487.3	18.0	20.5	25.4	72.9	31700	341.72
Germany	82175.7	228.6	21.1	8.1	78.0	35800	256.97
Iceland	332.5	3.3	13.9	28.1	86.5	37800	97.74
Latvia	1969.0	31.8	19.6	5.7	72.5	18900	42.12
Lithuania	2888.6	46.4	19.0	5.8	73.3	21900	16.61
Norway	5214.0	17.1	16.4	20.1	79.1	43400	95.73
Poland	37967.2	124.1	16.0	3.5	67.8	20200	16.02
Sweden	9851.0	24.1	19.8	29.4	80.5	36100	350.41

Source: Autor's own study based on Eurostat databases.

⁵ The data given in Table 1 are for reference purposes. The varied ways of collecting data in particular countries means they are not fully comparable. Detailed notes on collection methods and comparability are deleted for the sake of clarity. Specific references can be found in source Tables accessible at the Eurostat website (<http://ec.europa.eu>).

The economic development of countries enjoying a stable market economy differs significantly from that in countries that underwent political and economic transformation in the BSR. They are reflected, among other, by the considerable spread in the employment rate and GDP per capita, and are particularly vivid in the field of innovation. The number of patent applications to the European Patent Office from Sweden proportionally to the population count in 2014 was over 20 times higher than from Lithuania or Poland (Table 1).

The basic economic growth indicators show that the gap is gradually diminishing. In the years 2011–2017, the GDP growth in countries subject to political and economic transformation was generally higher than in countries featuring stable market economy (Table 2). This situation results, among others, from a relevant

Table 2. Economic growth and its selected components by the States of Baltic Sea Region in the years of 2011–2017

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016E	2017E	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016E	2017E
	Real GDP growth, % y/y							Real investment growth, % y/y						
Baltic Sea Region	2.2	0.9	0.7	1.6	1.9	1.7	1.6	7.1	2.5	0.9	2.6	-0.3	2.4	2.6
Denmark	1.2	-0.1	-0.2	1.3	1.2	1.0	1.5	0.3	3.9	1.1	3.4	1.2	1.0	2.4
Estonia	7.6	5.2	1.6	2.9	1.1	1.7	2.6	34.4	6.7	3.2	-3.1	-4.4	0.8	4.2
Finland	2.6	-1.4	-0.8	-0.7	0.5	1.0	0.8	4.1	-1.9	-4.9	-2.6	-1.1	2.4	1.9
Germany	2.0	0.4	0.3	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.4	7.2	-0.4	-1.3	3.5	2.2	2.4	2.1
Iceland	2.0	1.2	4.4	2.0	4.0	3.5	3.3	11.6	5.3	2.2	16.0	18.6	12.0	9.0
Latvia	6.2	4.0	3.0	2.4	2.7	2.2	2.8	24.1	14.4	-6.0	0.5	2.7	2.0	5.0
Lithuania	6.0	3.8	3.5	3.0	1.6	2.6	3.0	20.1	-1.8	8.3	5.4	10.3	0.0	6.0
Norway	1.0	2.7	1.0	2.2	1.6	0.7	1.5	7.4	7.6	6.3	0.0	-4.0	-1.2	1.4
Poland	3.8	1.6	1.3	3.3	3.6	2.8	3.5	8.8	-1.8	-1.1	10.0	5.8	4.4	4.5
Russia	3.2	3.5	1.3	0.7	-3.7	-1.0	1.1	21.0	3.9	-7.3	-8.0	-18.7	-3.0	2.0
Sweden	2.7	-0.3	1.2	2.3	4.1	3.3	1.7	5.7	-0.2	0.6	7.5	7.3	6.3	3.2
	Real export growth, % y/y							Gross general government debt, % of GDP						
Baltic Sea Region	5.3	2.0	0.8	2.7	3.0	1.1	2.8	42.4	43.0	43.7	44.9	45.0	44.8	44.4
Denmark	7.3	0.6	0.9	3.1	-1.0	0.5	2.6	46.4	45.2	44.6	44.6	45.6	47.4	47.7
Estonia	24.2	6.2	4.7	1.8	-1.1	2.2	3.8	5.9	9.5	9.9	10.4	10.1	9.7	9.2
Finland	2.0	1.2	1.1	-0.9	0.6	-0.4	1.3	48.5	52.9	55.4	59.3	62.4	64.3	66.2
Germany	8.3	2.8	1.6	4.0	5.4	3.1	3.0	78.4	79.7	77.4	74.9	71.0	68.2	65.9
Iceland	3.4	3.6	6.7	3.1	8.2	6.1	4.8	95.1	92.6	84.8	82.5	67.6	56.1	52.6
Latvia	12.0	9.8	1.1	3.1	1.4	2.0	4.0	37.6	36.9	35.9	38.5	34.8	34.8	34.7
Lithuania	14.9	12.2	9.6	3.0	1.2	2.0	3.5	37.3	39.8	38.8	42.5	42.5	42.1	41.4
Norway	-0.8	1.4	-1.7	2.2	2.3	-0.9	1.0	28.9	30.0	30.3	27.9	27.9	27.9	27.9
Poland	7.9	4.6	6.1	6.4	6.8	6.2	6.6	54.4	54.0	55.9	50.4	51.3	52.0	52.9
Russia	0.3	1.4	4.6	0.6	3.6	-10.0	7.0	10.9	11.8	13.1	16.3	17.7	18.4	19.4
Sweden	6.1	1.0	-0.8	3.5	5.9	2.5	3.2	36.9	37.2	39.8	44.9	44.1	42.6	41.9

E – estimation

Source: Ketels & Pedresen (2016, pp. 44–45).

high investment and export rate. Unfortunately, the economic growth of the entire region and its individual countries is partially financed by the growing public debt. The policy of some countries (Germany, countries of political transformation) manage to refrain from increasing the debt; however, this is not a general tendency.

In view of the significant structural differences, we may ask whether Baltic Europe can be treated as a region irrespective of the wide definition of the term. A positive response is possible provided the region is treated in functional and not only structural terms. Even the basic and clear-cut definition of Baltic Europe as the catchment area of the Baltic Sea refers to functional categories. The history of cooperation of countries and sub-regions located around the Baltic, as well as its contemporary shape and the intensive processes taking place, seem to substantiate this approach to understanding Europe.

Baltic integration – from idea to reality

The first relations of this type in the post-war history of the Baltic Region concerned the marine environment, an area relatively less touched by political rift that inhibited the development of multilateral relations. Joint work towards the protection of waters and live Baltic Sea resources of all countries in the region (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, GFR, GDR, Poland and the USSR) started with the signing of The Gdańsk Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources in the Baltic Sea and the Belts (Gdańsk Convention) in 1973, and in Helsinki in 1974, and 1992 – two conventions on protection of the natural marine environment of the Baltic Sea (Two Helsinki Conventions)⁶. These were pioneer actions, which are seen as model solutions for other European regions (Łukaszuk 2006). In 1991, the existing geopolitical system disintegrated and consequently resulted in major transformations, and the same new conditions appeared to break away from the artificial isolation of Baltic neighbours. The change of the geopolitical situation generated new opportunities and options for dynamic economic and cultural cooperation in this part of Europe. The need to stimulate the development of existing relations was noted, initiated and revived in various forms. New ideas sprang up in the multinational territories around the Baltic Sea, a surge to seek new original solutions, deferring from earlier measures developed, that were to define the future of the region (Zaleski 1993). The process of developing the Baltic region started, providing grounds for the development of a regional network of economic and social relations.

The nineteen nineties of the twentieth century experienced an ‘explosion’ of various initiatives and forms of co-operation. Their precise number is not known. Because of the multiplicity and number of links, the phenomenon is described as the ‘Baltic co-operation phenomenon’⁷. We could identify four key areas and forms of co-operation: political, economic, environmental and cultural.

⁶ The Conventions provided a cooperation plane for protection of the marine environment of countries of two contrary ideological, political, and economic orientations, which was a unique solution worldwide.

⁷ Baltic cooperation is more widely covered in the work of Palmowski (2000).

The political collaboration of Baltic countries includes such fundamental institutional structures as: the *Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference*, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Conference of Prime Ministers, the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), and the Nordic Council.

Co-operation in protecting the natural environment includes legal provisions and resultant executive structures as well as organisations including non-governmental organisations. The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) is a flag measure. Consecutive years showed growing activity of all Baltic countries. Many joint integrating projects were launched.

The European Union plays an important part in initiating endeavours. Following the accession of Sweden and Finland to the European Union in 1995 (Germany is a member since 1957, Denmark since 1973), and the expansion of EU covering Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 2004 as well as after concluding with Russia agreements on partnership and co-operation, the Baltic became an internal sea of the European Union.

The importance of the relations between Baltic Europe and the European Union grew after the accession of Sweden and Finland in 1995. The Northern Dimension initiative of the European Union, suggested in 1997 by Finland, was to improve political coordination of the European Union in northern Europe, mitigate economic development gaps particularly between EU countries and Russia and the Eastern bloc countries. After the accession of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to the European Union, the Northern Dimension serves as a co-operation platform for the EU and the Russian Federation.

The adoption in 2009 of the *EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region* (EUSBSR) marked the beginning of a new EU approach to regionalisation and ruling. This was not only an analytical tool and normative postulate but also the practical application of multi-tier ruling. The document was founded on four pillars: environmentally sustainable region, a region of prosperity, an accessible, attractive and safe region. Its essence is multilevel co-operation on the national, regional and local levels with the participation of the world of science, research centres, academics, regional structures institutions managing operational programmes as well as the private sector. The strategy facilitates wide-ranging contacts with macro-region partners, initiates new projects and promotes projects in progress on the international forum. EUSBSR has been named the first macro-regional internal EU strategy. It is a model solution providing the basis for three consecutive macro-regional EU strategies, including one for a maritime macro-region⁸.

EUSBSR gave a new dimension to the development concept of the region and induced political stakeholders to adapt their actions to successive spatial, institutional and normative frameworks (Słomczyńska 2014). The strategy is an example of tight co-operation of Baltic Europe and closeness with European policies. It is a successful attempt to stabilise the geopolitical situation in the region in terms of

⁸ On approval of EUSBSR by the European Council in 2009, consecutive macro-regional strategies were developed: The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in 2011, The EU Strategy for the Adriatic Sea and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) in 2014, and The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in 2016.

the security of the area closest to Scandinavian countries. Regional co-operation is both an example of partnership and interdependence and the development of zones of influence. It also binds superpowers in regional co-operation (Grosse 2010).

EUSBSR uses the existing co-operation institutions and reduces costs of integration and cohesion. The macro-region borders are open and the area covers both the territory of Member States and those outside the European Union.

To the end of 2016, the strategy stimulated the development of new networks and contributed to better efficiency of the existing networks (e.g. BALTFISH, SUBMARINER forums). The consolidation of multilevel management in the region created a common framework for dialogue for entities operating in BSR. Close co-operation and better coordination on all levels, nationally and between EU States and non-EU countries, as well as between regional organisations produced a synergy effect.

Baltic Europe as a research subject

Baltic integration covers a wide range of issues. The review of Polish and foreign literature reveals several research subjects (Table 3). Regional synthetic studies on general Baltic problems, including the more specific issues focused on Scandinavian problems, are the core of the Polish scientific achievements on Baltic integration. The number and volume of studies support the opinion and the broad perspective of the analysed issues, the comprehensive approach manifested the causal relations between various factors in the geographical environment and their significance for interstate and cross regional interactions essential in integration processes. The work by Zaleski and Wojewódka (1997) introduced, in scientific circles, a visionary, for the political reality of the times, concept of Baltic Europe. Newig and Theede (1985) with a team of experts from all countries in the region showed the role and the function of the sea in the process of establishing cultural and economic relations around the Baltic Sea.

Profound changes, which touched Baltic Europe at the end of the nineteen eighties and the beginning of nineteen nineties of the twentieth century induced the need for a new assessment and directions of further research. Baltic Europe appeared as an area of animated international and interregional co-operation in new geopolitical conditions – open to neighbours on both sides of the Baltic. Important issues studied at the time included the delimitation of the region, eco-development, and the position of the Polish Baltic region in Europe. In 1996, the Polish Geographical Society held a nationwide congress in Słupsk entitled *Poland in Baltic Europe*. The same motto accompanied the VIII Maritime Assembly in Sopot in 1992 and the *Polish Baltic thought* provided grounds for the XIII Maritime Assembly in 1997. *Baltic Europe – a region of co-operation and integration* was the theme of the XIX Maritime Assembly in 2003 in Gdańsk and Copenhagen, and the main theme of the XXV Maritime Assembly in Szczecin in 2009 was *Baltic Europe: past – present – new challenges*. Maritime Assemblies gathered numerous scientists and practitioners providing an opportunity to exchange views and thoughts. Their achievements were recorded in special publications issued after every Assembly.

Table 3. Polish studies on Baltic integration in the years 1968–2016

Subject areas	Main directions and selected works
Scandinavian and Baltic wide aspects – regional synthetic approach- comprehensive analysis of the natural environment and/or social and economic aspects, the process and perspectives of Baltic integration	General geographic characteristics of the region Łomniewski et al. 1975, Zaleski & Wojewódka 1977 Baltic region potential and development trends Jałowiecki (ed.) 1992, Zaleski 1993a, b, Ćwikliński & Owsiniński 1994, Ciesielski 1995, Kukliński (ed.) 1995, 1997, Owsiniński & Stępnik (eds) 1997, Kisiel-Łowczyc 2000, Palmowski 2000, Pacuk (ed.) 2001, Wendt (ed.) 2001, Palmowski & Pacuk (eds) 2004, Palmowski (ed.) 2006, Parteka 2010 Further integration perspectives Parteka et al. 1992, Parteka 2005
The development of Scandinavian countries and the nature of their relations with Poland	Cieślak et al. 1971, Makać 1972, Niemotko 1972, Frątczak 1974, Klepacki 1976, Sulimierski 1977, Jaworski 1978, 1991, Krawczyk 1978, Wiejacz 1978, Popiński 1984, 1989, Łukaszuk 1989, Grzywaczewski 1990, Doliwa-Klepacki 1996, Kik 1997, Uznański 1998
The state of the Baltic Sea natural environment	Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings 1980–2017
Legal aspects of Baltic co-operation , including environmental protection	Baltic cooperation legal environment Gelberg 1976, 1981, Góralczyk 1978, Gilas 1996, Łukaszuk 1997 Environmental protection legal environment Jenisch 1991, Łukaszuk 1991, Krzyżanowski 1993, Brodecki 1997, 1998, Rossy-Kilian 2006, Runiewicz-Jasińska 2012, Śmigierska-Belczak 2014
Transit location of Poland and the development of ferry shipping on the Baltic Sea	Sójka 1968, Wojewódka 1979, Chlebionek 1985, Drzemczewski 1986, Tubielewicz 1995, Pacuk 1997, Mańkowska 2010, 2011, Urbanyi-Popiołek 2013, 2014, 2015, Wiśniewski 2016
The developments of ports and maritime trade among Baltic Europe Countries	Tubielewicz 1970, 1995, Krzyżanowski 1973, Sójka 1973, Zaleski 1974, 1980, Wojewódka 1989, 1992, Grzywaczewski 1990, Andruszkiewicz 1993
Development of tourism	Toczyski et al. 2007, Studzieniecki 2009, Grzybowski 2011, Palmowski 2011, Kizielewicz 2012, Skrzyszewska 2012
Co-operation with the Kaliningrad Oblast, Russian Federation	Cooperation environment, progress and perspectives Kulesza 2003, Palmowski et al. (eds) 2003, Zukowski (ed.) 2004, Palmowski (ed.) 2007, Fiodorov et al. 2011, Palmowski 2013 Consequences of introducing small border traffic Dudzińska & Dyer 2013, Anisiewicz & Palmowski 2014, Domaniewski & Studzińska 2016
Spatial planning	Toczyski (ed.) 1998, 1999, Zaucha 2007, 2014a, b
Historical and cultural integration environment	Goliński (ed.) 1993, Majewski (ed.) 2002, Horyzonty Balticum 2015.

*The listing is of expert type prepared by its authors.

Source: Pacuk et al. (2018, p. 52).

Researcher from other countries also noted the new perspectives for Baltic Europe (Joenniemi 1991; Kukk et al. 1992; Veggeland 1992; Peschel 1993; Manniche et al. 1999).

The series *The NEBI Yearbook* (North European and Baltic Sea Integration) issued in the years 1998–2003 is a compendium on Baltic integration. These publications prepared by several dozens of exceptional authors (including Polish geographers) were devoted to economic integration, spatial planning and the environment,

cross-border and economic cooperation, political integration as well as peaceful co-operation and regional safety of Baltic Europe countries.

The surge of studies, which appeared after 1989, was related to geopolitical changes, which opened options for wider cooperation. The publications of this period refer to Nordic integration, which has a long and rich history, and which stimulated the development of a new model of transnational relations in Baltic Europe.

HELCOM published a series entitled *Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings*. In the years 1980–2017, 150 volumes were published covering varied themes, among others: biodiversity, the impact of pollution on the marine environment, shipping, oil spills, marine protected areas, spatial planning at sea and environmental monitoring. Special appreciation is due for the issue of the *Baltic Sea Atlas* (Majewski & Laurer eds. 1994). It widely presents the diversified natural environment and maritime economy. The acute need to counteract efficiently the degradation of the Baltic Sea ecosystem resulted in a number of studies focusing on regulatory measures for the protection of the marine environment.

Animated studies about maritime economy appeared initially in the nineteen seventies and later in the nineteen nineties of the twentieth century. Research regarding ports and ferry connections in the European network of transport corridors is the closest to the concept of Baltic integration. The study subject of Baltic tourism developed relatively late. The role of passenger ships is appreciated, as the Baltic Sea is one of the most attractive water basins for this type of tourism.

The EU expansion of 2004 implied growing interest in studying the development of the Russian exclave – the Kaliningrad Oblast – and forms of cooperation of this Russian territory with regions and countries around the Baltic Sea. German researchers also showed interest in Kaliningrad Oblast for historical reasons (Müller-Hermann 1994).

Spatial planning linked the theoretical and empirical scientific work with Baltic integration practice. This function lies primarily in the programme *Vision and Strategies around the Baltic* (VASAB) launched in 1992. Polish researchers who deal with not only traditional spatial planning but also focus on marine spatial planning made a considerable technical contribution in the field. In the case of the Baltic Sea – a water basin suffering strong anthropopression – these issues are of both cognitive and practical significance.

The region is more than just a structure. It is a phenomenon related to citizen awareness (Passi 1995). In this sense, regions are structures and the Baltic Region is at the stage of developing. This is a political, economic and cultural project (Gerner & Karlsson 2002). Identity is a feature that develops gradually with time. This process involves continuous choices and emphasis on what unites with some and differs from others. Identity develops with partition and borders (Barth 1969). One of the key factors conditioning a common identity is territorial affiliation. The development of territorial systems is easier when we can refer to a common heritage, experience and values. It provides grounds for people to identify themselves with the region. Scientific discussions were also part of Polish research, which delivered historical arguments in the discussion on the present and desired shape of Baltic Europe.

Conclusions

Baltic Europe, i.e. the sea and inland hinterland form a unique macro-regional unit. Here the interrelation of coastal countries and their linkage with the fate of the common water basin leaves a stronger footprint. The concept of Baltic integration followed agreements on marine protection and live Baltic Sea resources, and showed accelerated development as late as in the nineteen nineties. The growing dynamic development of networks today covers politics, economy, culture and environmental protection. Integration processes continue to spread covering more areas of life. After the enlargement of EU on May 1 2004, Baltic Europe entered a new development phase. The Baltic became an internal EU sea. The EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region contributed to closer co-operation of countries lying around the Baltic Sea. Nonetheless, particular sub-regions of Baltic Europe differ in terms of development.

The Baltic cooperation model initially focused on environmental issues, sustainable development and a growing number of internationally cooperating entities, which led to the economic development of the region and the introduction of democratic transformations.

The measures and joint Baltic initiatives in the European Union in the second decade of the twenty first century help to mitigate the disproportions.

This region thanks to the effect of scale, well-developed institutional cooperation, numerous studies and analysis provides good testing grounds for studying dominating mechanisms of integration (Zaucha 2007).

The number of Baltic study centres is limited. Research is dispersed, most probably due to diversified approaches and the interest of researchers of coastal academic centres. The studies up-to-date most often refer to merely a margin of the wide spectrum of problems related to Baltic Europe integration. The establishment of a single Baltic Scientific Centre cooperating with all Baltic partners, which would annually or regularly publish overall reports reflecting comprehensively the current state of Baltic Europe, according to the author, would ensure full coverage of all processes taking place in the developing macro region. Polish researchers should also take part in the project.

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