

REZENSIONEN

Bernd Henningsen, Tobias Etzold, Krister Hanne (eds.): The Baltic Sea Region: A Comprehensive Guide / History, Politics, Culture and Economy of a European Role Model, Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag 2017, 364 pp., ISBN: 978-3-8305-1748-1.

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) has been the focus of increasing political and academic interest in the last few decades. The collapse of the communist states in 1989 and 1991 and their new-found western orientation led to multiple new institutions being formed, projects being funded and a focus on “region-building” across the Baltic Sea. Politicians have held up the BSR as a model European region, largely because of the positive functional cooperation among the European Union (EU) member states over the past decade and a half. The multi-author volume under review is the final product of an Erasmus Mundus project – “BalticStudyNet” – that aimed to “globally promote the BSR as an area of top-quality, innovative higher-education” (p. 7). Interestingly, the authors of the book hardly touch on research and education in the BSR. Rather, this volume aims to spread knowledge about the region to a broad audience. While the dry, functional cover, binding and layout of the book, as well as its lack of illustrations (with the exception of a colourful fold-out map of the region) and academic style of writing mean that it is unlikely to reach a general audience, the book is still a welcome and valuable addition to the burgeoning multi-disciplinary body of literature on the region.

The editors assembled a team of distinguished authors to review different aspects of the BSR. The volume as a whole would have benefited from stronger editing, as there is some repetition among the chapters. The historical development of the Council of Baltic Sea States comes up a number of times, as well as potted histories of the Hanseatic League and theoretical concepts of regions and regionalism. However, this only becomes noticeable for those reading the book from cover to cover. Most readers are likely to dip into relevant chapters – politics, economics or culture, for example – and will not notice the replication.

Krister Hanne’s introduction outlines the development of the BSR as a “model region”. Some of the author’s assertions are rather controversial, to say the least. For example, on page 10 Hanne makes the much-repeated, but unproven, assertion that “generous support was given to Poland and the Baltic states to ease their transition from planned economy and communist rule to market economy and liberal democracy.” However, no concrete data or figures are provided to back up this claim. Also, what is meant by “generous”? Compared to the open-handedness of the US’s post-second world war Marshall plan or the EU’s continuing support to farmers all across western Europe, the almost grudging, largely project-based support that the Baltic states and Poland received from the EU, and bilaterally from western BSR states in the 1990s, and which was largely aimed at modernizing the bureaucracy and legal system rather than promoting economic development, hardly seems “generous”.

Jonathan L’Hommedieu has the unenviable task of telling the history of the BSR in just seventy pages. The author successfully fits his historical narrative into the allotted pages by, first, focusing on the eastern littoral – the three Baltic states and Finland – and largely ignoring Poland and the Nordic states. This is a pity, as a cohesive brief history of the

broader BSR region, tying in developments in Denmark, Sweden and Poland with those in the Baltic states and Finland, yet remains to be written. Recent concise histories of the Baltic States by Andres Kasekamp (2010), Andrejs Plakans (2011) and Aldis Purs (2012) focused exclusively on the three Baltic states. A broader perspective would have better suited this volume. Second, *L'Hommedieu* focuses on “great man” history, with an emphasis on wars, politicians and major events and little social history of peasants and the like. Indeed, the limitations of space and the author’s wish to balance the modern and older eras means that some important periods – such as the inter-war period – are lightly treated in just a few pages.

The historical chapter ends with the Cold War, leaving the authors of the following “politics” chapter to give a perfunctory history of events from the Cold War onwards before moving on to a comparative overview of political developments in the region. This overview takes in the eleven states that fit the broadest *political* definition of the BSR (including Norway and Iceland which do not actually border the Baltic Sea). The authors, Joakim Ekman and Mai-Brith Schartau, initially compare levels of democracy, press freedom, corruption, gender equality and socio-economic development in the region. This successfully describes existing differences between the post-communist states and the others. It is a pity, however, that the authors provide snapshots of the situation between 2014 and 2016 without addressing the long-term dynamics since 1991. We all know that considerable political differences exist between the old and new democracies. We also know that the gap between the two groups has narrowed over the last quarter of the century. But has the political convergence slowed down? How has the region been impacted by the global democratic recession that began around 2005? These questions remain unaddressed and thus also unanswered. The following section provides snapshots of governments and political parties in the BSR. Part four sketches in the impact of the EU on the region. The section on the post-communist states confusingly addresses national minority issues, which in truth have very little to do with the EU. This is a pity, because EU membership has had an enormous impact on the political systems of the post-communist states: parties and elites have Europeanized; bureaucracies have incorporated Brussels into domestic decision-making; and legislatures have assumed an ever-greater role in handling EU legislation. Surely, this is far more relevant than a discussion of majority-minority relations? This chapter concludes with a straightforward discussion of BSR cooperation. A tougher editorial team might have cut this part out, because the following chapter – “structures and modes of regional cooperation” – covers these same themes in rather more detail. This chapter also lacks regional balance, describing the Baltic Sea dimension of Nordic cooperation, but failing to ask how, for example, the Baltic states view BSR cooperation. After all, the Baltic states could also choose to enhance their cooperation with the Visegrad 4 or the Central European region more generally. The Baltic choice to focus on the BSR is not as obvious or straightforward as the authors appear to believe.

Alari Purju’s chapter on the economy focuses on macro-data such as trends in trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) and migration. The author lays bare the extent of the BSR’s economic integration, particularly among the EU member states, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and, in particular, the enlargement of the EU in 2004. However, there is little discussion of the effect of these trends. How has the free movement of labour impacted the competitiveness of the Baltic states and Poland, with young, educated people moving

to Germany, the Nordic countries and other EU member states, leaving Latvia, Lithuania and Poland with labour supply problems? And how has this mass-movement of economic migrants impacted the rise of national populist movements in these states? These and other “micro” issues remain unanswered.

Finally, Berndt Henningsen’s thoughtful chapter on “culture” explores the extent to which the aforementioned processes of political and economic integration, as well as multiple region-building institutions and projects, have promoted a common BSR regional identity or culture. At the outset he states that “a convincing political and even cultural concept for the region is missing” (p. 267) and then goes on to point out the cultural diversity of the region (curiously even referring to different “hygiene habits” [p. 273] without elaborating on what these might be). He does concede that the natural environment (the Baltic Sea and the shared climate) are a common cultural element, although the “longing for the countryside” element is rather over-stated, bearing in mind the rapid rural depopulation and urbanization processes that accelerate with every year. Henningsen then rushes through twelve other potential common sources of a Baltic culture before concluding that some of these could well contribute to a “we-feeling”, but that a common culture does not exist. This discussion would have benefited from survey data. How do the people in the BSR identify themselves? Is there a sense of belonging to a common region? In the Baltic states, one part of the population has long yearned to be seen as part of Europe’s “north” rather than its “east”. But do the populations of Germany and the Nordic states share these aspirations?

In conclusion, this volume is not quite the “comprehensive guide” that it purports to be. It is, however, a well-written introduction to the BSR that will be useful to students and others seeking core information about the region. The very fact that this volume brings together the various BSR states into a common humanitarian and social science analysis makes it an important contribution to the scholarly dimension of the region-building project that it seeks to analyse.

Daunis Auers, Rīga

Andreas Kappelmayer: Johann Casimir von Pfalz-Zweibrücken-Kleeburg (1589–1652). Standeswahrung und Fremdheitserfahrung im Schweden Gustavs II. Adolf und Christinas, Münster: Aschendorff 2017, 704 S., ISBN: 978-3-402-13234-0.

Mit seiner Studie zu Johann Casimir von Pfalz-Zweibrücken-Kleeburg, dem Begründer des schwedischen Königshauses Pfalz-Zweibrücken, hat Andreas Kappelmayer eine bereits von ihrem Umfang her beeindruckende Monografie vorgelegt. Die überarbeitete Fassung einer 2016 in Tübingen verteidigten Dissertation ist ein gewichtiges Werk von mehr als 700 Druckseiten, wobei allein das Quellen- und Literaturverzeichnis 80 Seiten ausmacht, ergänzt durch Karten, genealogische Tafeln, historisches Bildmaterial sowie ein detailliertes Orts- und Personenregister.

Als historische Biografie steht dieses *magnum opus* unter dem Generalverdacht, dem das Textgenre in den letzten Jahrzehnten kaum zu entkommen vermochte: Biografien historischer Persönlichkeiten seien ein Relikt einer überkommenen geschichtswissenschaftlichen Tradition, die anstatt einer kritischen und problemorientierten Arbeitsweise zu einer simplen Nacherzählung von Lebensschicksalen neigt. Allzu oft sei das Resultat wenig mehr als