

Important activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers during the recent years (2000-2005) for the Nordic Border Regions (version of 15 September 2005)

by
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1. Short review

Since the 70ies, the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) has dealt with its 9 inner border regions at first and elaborated exemplary legal principles for cross-border cooperation (2). Own financial support given by the NCM to the today 8 border regions (see map 2) and INTERREG funds contributed to the improvement of cross-border cooperation in Scandinavia. The pragmatic policy pursued by the NCM and its multiple evaluation of implemented measures was very important in this regard (7). This support, a means of self-help, was facilitated and controlled by the „Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (NERP)“ and has been continued after 2000. In the framework of the NCM's regional policy and with the assistance of a political representative for cross-border cooperation, there has been a particular focus on removing border barriers between the Scandinavian countries during the recent years (Schlüter process). – www.norden.org

2. Extension of activities in favour of cross-border cooperation to the Baltic States

Since the early 90ies, the Nordic Council of Ministers has intensively dealt with the accession countries in the Baltic area. Since 1991, offices have been set up in the Capitals Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius as well as in St. Petersburg (in 1995) for the cooperation with Northwest Russia. Since Mai 2001, the cross-border regional policy of the Scandinavian countries with the accession countries in the Baltic area and with Northwest Russia belongs to the permanent tasks of the Nordic Council of Ministers (1).

After lengthy discussion, the Nordic Council of Ministers developed in spring 2002 a new project entitled “Regional Cross-border Cooperation in and with the Accession Countries” (see map 1) (5).

More info on: www.norden.org

The most important aims of this project are:

- Encouragement of the EU enlargement in the Baltic area and the cross-border cooperation with Northwest Russia;
- Encouragement of cross-border cooperation in cross-border regions (Euroregions) in the Baltic accession countries and consolidation of cross-border cooperation with the Nordic Countries; the seat of the project

coordinator, who closely cooperates with the secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers in Copenhagen, is established in Vilnius;

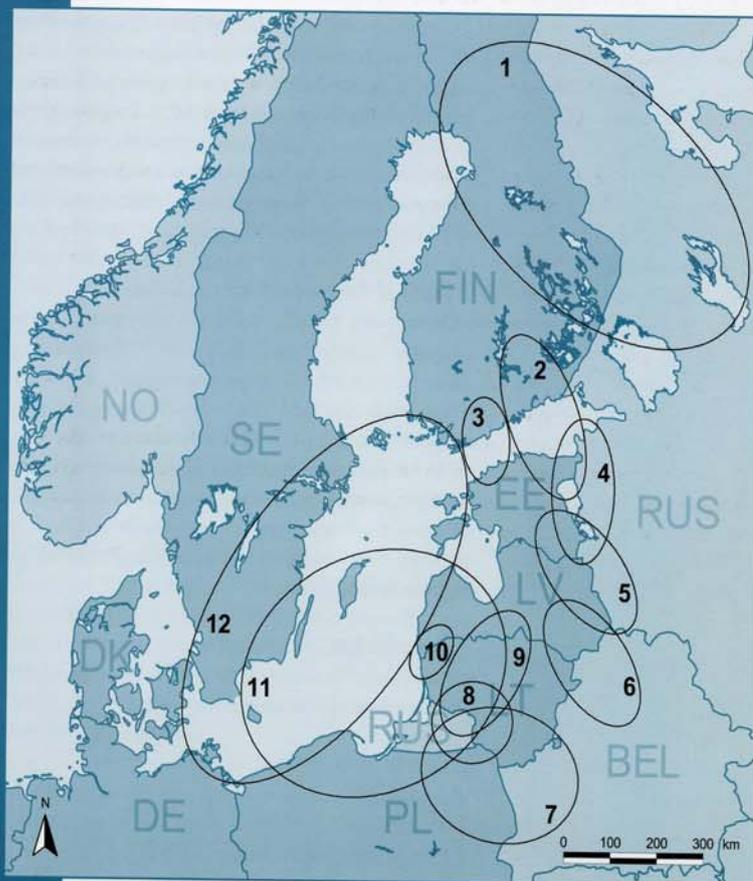
- During the first project work, twelve cross-border regions/euroregions (map 1) were identified and attracted for a network cooperation involving the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as Northwest Russia;
- Main activities of the years 2002 - 2004:
 - o Exchange of information about the euroregions;
 - o Realisation of training seminars;
 - o Establishment of a network of border regions in the accession countries and with the old border regions of the Nordic countries;
 - o Evaluation of a brochure about the 12 border regions in 2004 by Sarunas Radvilavicius, project coordinator, with the assistance of „NORDREGIO“ (5). – www.nmr.lt

A network with Nordic support for border regions in the Baltic Sea region was announced by the NCM and the Council of the Baltic States for September 2005. This euregional network (BEN) will have a total budget of € 1,4 billion and will obtain INTERREG III funds in the framework of the EU Baltic Sea region – www.benproject.org - see: AEER's Newsletter of July 2005,-www.aebr.net – AEER will be involved in BEN activities.

Map 1: Baltic Border Regions 2004

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European Union
National boundary

Cross-border Cooperation in the Baltic Countries and North-West Russia

Source: Cross-border Cooperation in the Baltic Countries
And North-West Russia, Copenhagen 2004, P. 3.

3. Important activities of the NCM during the recent years

3.1 Programmes of the NCM 2005 – 2010

In autumn 2004, the Nordic Council of Ministers developed a new programme for the period 2005 - 2010. The programme was adopted at the end of 2004 and was published in spring 2005 – www.norden.org -. Among others, future activities in the framework of regional policy are particularly addressed in this programme. These activities contain support for the 8 Nordic border regions (see map 2) and, in particular, for a strengthened exchange of experience. The Nordic research institute NORDREGIO is the coordinator. At the same time, the „Nordic Cooperation Programme with regard to Regional Policy 2005 -2008“ was elaborated and adopted in November 2004 (9). This programme highlights the:

- new geopolitical situation of the North;
- activity programme 2005 – 2008 focusing on:
 - o cross-border cooperation,
 - o exchange of experience and research programme,
- economic and administrative consequences.

3.2 The „GOLIN“ project

A further activity to be stressed is the research project „Good Solutions for the Nordic Cross-Border Cooperation („GOLIN“). For some years, four Nordic border regions (Öresundskomitee, ARKO, Gränskomitee Östfold-Bohuslän-Dalsland und Haparanda-Tornio) have been implementing a project that focuses in particular on exchange of experience and elaboration of problem solutions for a cross-border labour market.

On 1st and 2nd March 2005, the experiences for a „Joint Cross-Border Labour Market in the North“ were summed up in a seminar. Problem solutions and activity proposals were presented and it was elaborated how experiences of the GOLIN project could be used in the other Nordic border regions.

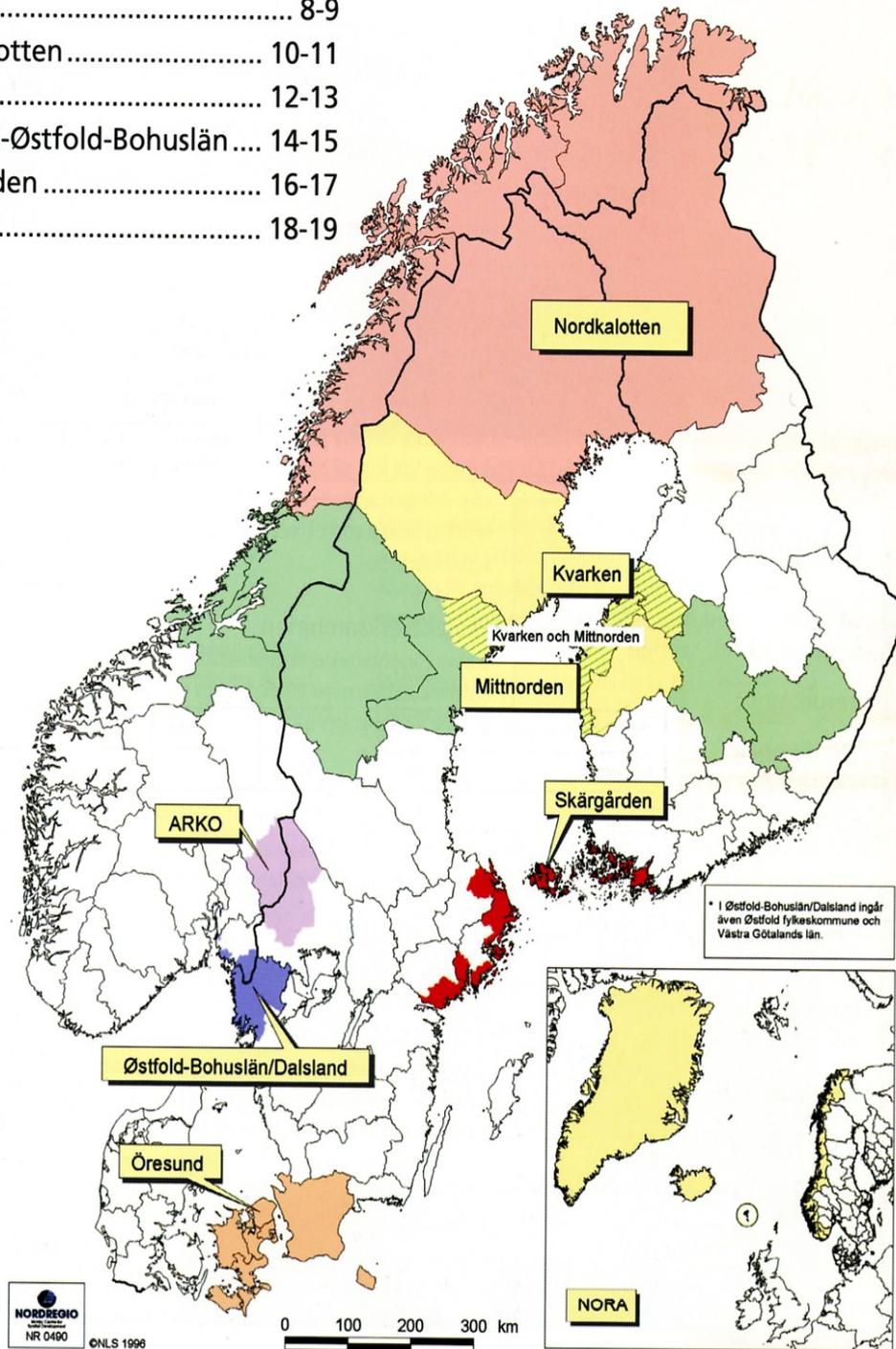
The final report (6): „Cross-border Regional Optimal Solutions in Scandinavia“ can be downloaded from www.norden.org – Publications.

3.3 Evaluation study NERP

And there is a third project of the Nordic Council of Ministers that is worth mentioning. On behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), the „Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research“ carried out an evaluation study in close cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers, the governments (NERP) and the border regions in summer 2004. It was completed in September 2004 and was published in 2005 (7) - www.norden.org -.

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Source: Gränsregionalt samarbete i Norden, Köpenhamn 2002, S. 3.

By order of the Nordic Council of Ministers, six questions have to be executed:

1. In how far have the eight Nordic border regions contributed to removing border barriers?
2. Is it appropriate to use INTERREG as well as NMR funds for cross-border cooperation at the same time?
3. Are the current border regions “naturally” bordered? Should they be enlarged/minimised?
4. Examination of the cooperation organisation in the border regions. Is the cooperation accurately coordinated?
5. Are priorities of the Nordic Council and of the Nordic Council of Ministers reflected in the activity plans of the border regions?
6. Do the Nordic border regions contribute to a Nordic benefit/a Nordic added value?

General statements of the evaluation study: The cross-border cooperation has proved its worth albeit being differently handled in the individual border regions. There are two types of border regions: densely populated and sparsely populated ones. A pragmatic „Nordic way“ of cooperation has emerged. Cross-border project cooperation is intensively carried out. .

The study provided five suggestions for improving cross-border cooperation:

- 1.) The Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (NERP) has to change its policy for cross-border regions:
 - by means of clear objective targets for the border regions;
 - by better coordinating regional policy and the policy of the border regions;
 - by a better coordination within the NCM!
- 2.) The term „Nordic Benefit“ has to be operationalised by NERP and by the border regions even stronger!
- 3.) The annual reports of the border regions have to be improved and they should be made comparable. NERP has to provide the border regions with clear operational guidelines and aims!
- 4.) The border regions have a comprehensive potential of experiences, which should be stored in a database that should be made accessible to all involved actors.
- 5.) The removal of “formal“ and administrative border barriers (Schlüter process) is being promoted. But this is not sufficient. Physical and communicative border barriers have to be assessed in order to reduce transport barriers, to improve accessibility and to overcome language barriers. The Nordic Council of Ministers should start a debate on principles and perspectives.

So much for the short summary of the evaluation study of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2004/2005 and the cross-border cooperation in the “Nordic border regions”.

4. Prospects for the coming years

Since 2004, the NCM have advisory status with AEBR, attend the Executive Committee meetings and are provided by the Secretariat General with all services and information. AEBR have learned a lot from the cross-border experiences in Scandinavia and passed experiences on to the AEBR members. AEBR are always impressed by the pragmatic procedure of the NCM and recommend the NCM's political and administrative proceedings to the other border regions in Europe. Up to now, cooperation between AEBR and NCM has been well. The AEBR are regularly invited to meetings with the border regions and other events and obtain information about results of cross-border cooperation in the North on a regular basis.

5. Important publications of the NCM with regard to regional policy

Over the past years, the Nordic Council of Ministers issued the following publications on cross-border cooperation in the North: - www.norden.org -

2000:

(1) Nordisk regionalpolitisk samarbeidsprogramm 2001 – 2005.

2003:

(2) Gränsregionalt samarbete i Norden.

2004:

(3) Over graenser – Encouraging cross-border planning cooperation in the Nordic border regions.

(4) Grensehindre for Naeringslivet i Norden – Report of the Nordic Innovation Centre by order of the Nordic Ministers for Economy in the NCM.

(5) Cross-border Cooperation in the Baltics Countries and Northwest Russia – www.nmr.lt/admin/files/get.php?id=474 -.

2005:

(6) Cross-border Regional Optimal Solutions in Scandinavia – Examples and recommendations to enhancing a cross-border labour market – final report of the GOLIN project.

Gränsregionale Optimale Lösningar i Norden – Final report for the project G.O.L.I.N. 2003-2005.

(7) Nordisk grensregionalt samarbeid. Gamle utfordringer og nye muligheter – Evaluierungsbericht des Norsk institutt for by- og regionalforskning.

(8) Nordisk Pendlingskarta – Main report.

(9) Nordisk regionalpolitisk samarbeidsprogramm 2005 – 2008.

(10) The ESPON Programme, Report no. 3 to The Nordic Council of Minister, NERP.

All reports as of the year 2004 are available on: www.norden.org