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Neighbours in the North

The Nordic Council of Ministers and their cooperation with
North-Western Russia

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Abstract

In this thesis I analyse why the Nordic Council of Ministers cooperate with North-Western Russia, by using theories of New Regionalism. The study is based on literature-study of official publications and qualitative interviews with employees at the NCM information office in St Petersburg, Russia. I analyse how they describe the aims of the cooperation, and how they expect it to influence the Nordic cooperation in general. According to the interviewees, the core aims for the cooperation is to create networks across the borders, to represent the Nordic region, and to promote values, solutions and products as Nordic. I analyse how the cooperation also can be seen as a way to promote the Nordic region globally, as role-models when it comes to building peaceful neighbour relations and the ability to talk to Russia. This can be seen in the light of increasing regional competition by globalisation and Europeanisation. It can also be seen as a way to legitimize the continued existence of the NCM as a regional organisation: by strengthening the regional identity of the Nordic region, promoting cooperation of other actors on different levels in New regionalist manner, and connecting this to the idea of Nordic.

Key words: Nordic cooperation, North-Western Russia, neighbourhood, New Regionalism, regional cooperation, regional identity

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Problem and research question	3
1.2	Structure of the thesis	3
2	Methodological considerations	4
2.1	Case study	4
2.1.1	Case: NCM office in St Petersburg	4
2.2	Literature	4
2.3	Qualitative interview	5
2.3.1	Interviewees	6
2.4	Intertextuality of texts and interviews	7
2.5	Analysis	7
3	Theoretical framework: New regionalism	9
3.1	New Regionalist Approach	9
3.2	From old to new regionalism	10
3.3	Defining region and neighbourhood	10
3.3.1	Inclusion, exclusion and neighbourhood	11
3.3.2	Russia as Europe's neighbour	12
4	Nordic cooperation and its current challenges	15
4.1	Is there a Nordic identity?	15
4.1.1	Distinguishing the Nordic	15
4.1.2	North in contrast to East/West distinctions	16
4.2	Is there a need for Nordic cooperation?	16
4.2.1	From security community to a-security community?	17
4.3	Branding: What does the Nordic region has to offer?	18
4.3.1	Nordic values as a brand	18
5	Cooperation with North-Western Russia	20
5.1	Background: Russia and the Nordic region	12
5.2	The aims of the cooperation according to the NCM employees	20
5.2.1	<i>Representing</i> the Nordic region	20
5.2.2	<i>Promoting</i> the Nordic – norm entrepreneurship	21
5.2.3	<i>Connecting</i> the Nordic region – network building	22
5.3	Strengthening Nordic identity by neighbourhood cooperation	23
6	Conclusions: New regionalism, old region?	26
6.1	Concluding remarks	27
7	References	28

1 Introduction

Even though globalisation makes the distances between people and lines of states less important in many respects, geography seems to matter in other respects. The last decades have seen increasing concentration on regions, neighbourhood and the concentration of common resources in regional cooperation. Northern Europe is a very illustrative example of recent increase of regionalism: a number of regional projects, programmes, councils and initiatives exist today, covering different parts of the region.

Not all of the initiatives are exactly new. The *Nordic cooperation* within the *Nordic Council* and *Nordic Council of Ministers* (hereby, NCM), was founded already in the 1950s. It institutionalises cooperation between the parliaments and governments of Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, and the autonomous areas of Greenland, Faroe islands and Aland on most policy areas, except from foreign policy and defence (NCM 2005(1):4-5).

Since most of the Nordic countries are members of the European Union and the initial goals for Nordic cooperation, such as free movement and open trade, are already reached, some argue that Nordic cooperation has become irrelevant. The type of regionalism it represents: state-governed and concentrated to a pre-defined area, is also often seen as an old type of cooperation which no longer has the same attraction, in comparison to new and more flexible forms of regionalism. However it still continues to exist, be active and does not seem to be in danger of closing down at the moment. Neither has the number of its members changed. However, the priorities and character of Nordic cooperation have somewhat changed direction in the last decades. After the initial decades of overcoming border-problems between the Nordic states and increased cooperation between its members, the focus now seems to have turned outwards towards the world.

Even though foreign policy is not part of the Nordic cooperation, it now has its international strategy with focus on the neighbouring regions, and today a key priority area is North-Western (hereby NW) Russia (NCM 2005:9). The cooperation is coordinated by the General Secretariat of NCM, and by Nordic information offices that exist in NW Russia and the Baltic states. These opened in the Baltic states and NW Russia already in the 1990's, at the time mainly to promote Nordic language and cultural exchange. Today, the areas covered by the cooperation is much larger than only the cultural sector, as approximately 20% of the Nordic cooperation's budget goes to cooperation with Eastern neighbours (*ibid*)¹.

¹ The NCM budget for 2008 was around 115 million euros (Norden 2008)

1.1 Problem and research question

I am interested in how a regional organisation as the NCM motivates that it should be active internationally – moving from promoting internal cooperation (between the Nordic countries) to external (towards NW Russia). More specifically, I have made a small case study of the NCM information office in St Petersburg and their activities through qualitative interviews with its employees, with focus on how they interpret the role of the cooperation, and how it is expected to benefit Nordic cooperation and the Nordic region.

With this as a basis, I try to draw conclusions on what kind of cooperation it is today in comparison to the traditional form of NCM, and in what ways these changes represent an attempt to answer current challenges to Nordic cooperation, and finally how this change of character can be analysed through theories about New Regionalism.

My research questions are thus the following:

- *Why does the Nordic Council of Ministers cooperate with North-Western Russia?*
- *How does the actors representing NCM in Russia expect the cooperation to benefit the Nordic regional cooperation?*
- *In what way does this reflect a change of the type of regionalism NCM represents?*

1.2 Structure of the thesis

In the following Chapter, I will discuss my methodological choices and the material used for the thesis. In Chapter 3, I discuss the theories of New regionalism, and furthermore I discuss regional identity and neighbourhood in terms of overlapping geographical identities; inclusion and exclusion. In Chapter 4, I go into the Nordic cooperation and how it has changed character and identity during its existence. I discuss three current challenges that it faces in the context of globalisation and new regional streams. In Chapter 5, I analyse the cooperation with NW Russia: first by categorizing the results of the interviews and answers from the respondents into three different aims with the cooperation, and later by analysing how the cooperation can be seen in parallel to Nordic cooperation in general. Finally, in Chapter 6 I sum up the conclusions.

2 Methodological considerations

2.1 Case study

Case studies are not a method, but a research strategy that includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and is basically to sort out what is the particular about the case studied (Johannessen & Tufte 2003:56). The aim with the thesis is thus theory-consuming, as it aims to explain the cooperation through the usage of existing theories about regional cooperation.

2.1.1 Case: the NCM information office in St Petersburg

Basically, as the name suggests, NCM is a political forum for the Nordic ministers to cooperate on different areas. However, I have not chosen to look at the political structures or decisions behind the decisions, but rather at the projects themselves, the practical work of the organization, and specifically of its information office in St Petersburg. This is of course a narrowing of focus. However, it may also be discussed if I by this can say anything about the entire NCM cooperation with NW Russia by looking at the information office, since from the mentioned 20 % of the budget that goes to Eastern neighbours, only a few percents go through the information office itself, and its own projects. The main budget goes to large-scale investment projects through Nordic financial institutions such as NEFCO and NIB, mainly in the field of environment (Hanhijärvi 2008). I argue that even though these investments may have other motivates and different reasoning behind, they are also part of the same strategy towards cooperation with NW Russia.

2.2 Literature

My literature (written material) is mainly from two categories. The first is empirical material, the second one theoretical.

The written empirical material is mainly from NCM's own information publications, reports and their webpage, and has been used as a source of information complementing the interviews. For a general presentation of NCM, I used the publication *Cooperation for strength* (NCM 2005(1)) which is the one promoted on the NCM webpage as information material. For cooperation with NW Russia, I refer to the *Russia Programme 2006-08* (NCM 2005(2)), which was

the one all of my interviewees recommended me to read. The programme is based on the guidelines (NCM 2004), and written at the general secretariat, not by the information office itself.

For my theoretical framework, I concentrate on the theory of New Regionalism, as represented and defined by primarily Schultz et al (2001). However, I have tried to also include other authors and perspectives to complement the image.

2.3 Qualitative interview

In order to get an image of how the neighbour-relation is viewed, and how it motivates different actions, I have conducted several qualitative interviews with employees at the information office in St Petersburg.

As mentioned before, I chose the qualitative research interview in order to achieve insight in how Nordic regional cooperation and concepts connected to it are interpreted and put into context of the actual projects and programmes of the NCM information office in St Petersburg. Qualitative interviews have sometimes been criticised for not being reliable, since they are not easily quantified and “objective” (Kvale 1997:204). However, since my point with the thesis is to trace discourses, motivations and how these are reflected in the activities, I still found the method suitable as a complement to only written official publications.

The questions are not shaped by identical schemes, but rather I followed an “interview-guide” with particular themes I wanted to touch upon, but adapted the specific questions slightly to the fields that the person is working with, and they were also adapted according to how the interview proceeded. Hence, they might be classified as *semi-structured* (Kvale 1997:72)

I have chosen a high level of openness toward the respondents (compare Kvale 1997:74). I have informed them of the basic motive with the research, and why I have chosen them as respondents. Basically, I have informed them that I am writing a thesis about the Nordic cooperation with North-Western Russia. I did not see any real problem with this, since the questions have not aimed at uncovering some underlying secret or truth. During a few weeks, I spent quite a lot of time at the information office, in order to get introduced to the work and the people. Generally, there was a very positive response from the interviewees and the office in general, which was of great help for me.

The interviews were conducted in the following manner. First, I have given the respondent a short briefing about the context: what I know already about the NCM, that I am interested in their activities in North-Western Russia, and how I have so far found information. Secondly, I have posed a very general question, where I let them describe their responsibilities and role at the organisation. Thirdly, I have tried to pose more specific questions about their activities: what kind of projects do they work with, why do they think that these projects are in focus, how are these projects motivated to the Nordic actors/how can it gain the Nordic side, and finally, how are they perceived by the Russian actors involved. I

also asked about how they experience that the Nordic region (as a region, rather than a couple of separate countries) is viewed by the Russian actors that they work with. Finally, I have also tried to bring in a more general perspective: what do they experience as the general aim with the cooperation. At the end, I also posed an open question, where the respondent has had the opportunity to ask own questions to me or elaborate on a particular topic brought up earlier.

2.3.1 Interviewees

I have approached the interviewees by e-mail or personal contact, after having found their names during the process of research. Generally, I chose the respondents from their positions and responsibility areas in the organisation, and what they represent officially. However, I also had in mind the aspect of different perspectives. For instance, except from the Director and a trainee, who come from the Nordic countries (presently Finland) all the employees of the St Petersburg information office are Russian. The office has 15 employees, and of these I have interviewed four: the Director Minna Hanhijärvi, vice Director Elena Golubeva, Irina Nazarova, project coordinator for economic life development, and Maria Sagitova, project coordinator on social & health, gender equality & prevention of human trafficking. This choice was based on the idea of covering different areas of their activities.

The connection between the general secretariat in Copenhagen and the St Petersburg information office is not always obvious, since the office runs itself quite independently and hires its own employees, in accordance with the budget and general guidelines they are given. Of this reason, and also in order to get a introductory general view of the NCM perspective of the cooperation, I interviewed Ane Kofod Pedersen, counsellor at the general secretariat in Copenhagen and responsible for the general cooperation with NW Russia.

The interviews are held individually, with one exception: the Director and the vice-Director were interviewed together, since this was their wish. They motivated this with their different perspectives, since the Director was Finnish, had at the time only worked there for 1,5 years, and the vice Director was Russian and has worked there from the opening of the office. All were held in English, except from Kofod Pedersen, which was held in Swedish/Danish and whose quotes have been translated by me. I tried to stay aware of the possible problems involved with language differences, and also possible cultural differences in understanding certain concepts. I believe that it was of great help to get to know the employees a bit personally at first, by spending time at the information office, and in combination with the semi-structured character of the interviews which gave them time and space to discuss the questions according to their own priorities, to avoid the biggest dangers involved with this. Of course it could also be questioned whether the Nordic and Russian employees have the same way of looking at the cooperation and the role of the organisation. As mentioned above, the connection and communication between Copenhagen and St Petersburg is also not always that apparent, however I argue that a further elaboration into the

difficulties and/or particularities this may pose would be the topic of another thesis.

2.4 Intertextuality of texts and interviews

The respondents are employees at a secretariat/information office for a political organisation. Thus they are hired to realize, in first hand, the political agreements made on inter-governmental level, in second hand, the general guidelines laid out each year by the General Secretariat. Thus, they have a mission from someone: and even though they have some liberty to shape their own projects, I argue that how to conduct their work is highly dependant on *fitting in to the general discourse*, by motivating the projects using words and interpretations of words that are used in the general agenda of the organisation.

As a complement to the interviews, I view the official publications from NCM as more direct representations of the official discourse and concepts used by NCM: they are less influenced by individual interpretations and perspectives.

Arguing in this manner, I focus on the texts (in this case, the interviews) *intertextuality*, meaning how they relate and correspond to other texts within the same discourse, such as official publications and guidelines, but also with those outside the discourse, such as the way in which Russian cooperation partners look at the same projects (Alvesson – Sköldberg 1994:235-236). The intertextuality perspective means that I will not focus on exactly who says what and try to distinguish the responses from each other, but treat them all as part of one discourse. This does not mean that I think there is a clear consensus over how every concept should be interpreted. When there are contradictory statements or interpretations of a concept, I will of course note this, as I believe that this is equally important for the complete image of the discourse.

2.5 Analysis

In first hand, both the interviews and the texts about NCM are used as a source of empirical material: information about the cooperation and about NCM in general. However, in order to draw conclusions from them, I have categorised the answers according to themes and returning topics, with inspiration from discourse analysis. With this I mean that I both focus on the direct language used: themes and concepts that are stated literally, and also try to find *stories*; both the ones that are followed and those who are contradictory, not only the direct language used (Widerberg 2002:156). I definitely do not claim to use the full potential of discourse analysis, and it might even be questionable if you can use the method in this "cherry-picking" manner. However, Widerberg (2002) shows how discourse

analysis can be used as a tool to analyse texts, including interviews, both on its own and together with other methods.

3 Theoretical framework: New regionalism

3.1 New Regionalist Approach

New Regionalist Approach (NRA) is a rather eclectic theoretical perspective, which has its roots in New International Political Economy, in contrast to rationalist explanations of regionalism, and with a strong focus on the social constructivist character of regions (Schultz et al. 201:14).

Constructivism as a theoretical perspective concentrates on how language is used to construct new entities, identities and realities. According to this perspective, there are no pre-given, fixed and stable entities, such as states, regions, norms or institutions, but these are constantly being constructed and deconstructed in accordance with the context and the individuals involved. Connecting this perspective to the regions and geographical divisions that they represent, could at first sight be complicated, since geography refers to something fixed and stable. However, geography and geopolitics can be treated as part of the construction. By referring to geographical positions and relations, identities can be constructed and given importance in certain situations.

When studying the construction of regions and regional cooperation, this is where the constructivist focus lies: how is it connected to the construction of identities? How are borders drawn, what defines a region, and what is perceived as the advantage of creating regional identities? NRA theory accepts the fact that geography is fixed, but that the definition of how to define divisions of geography is social constructions. Theories about post-modernity has brought up the recent trend of regional constructions as an example of how the modernist/realist understanding of territorialism, with clearly demarcated spaces, nation-states with power spread from the centre of the entity until it reaches its clearly marked out borders, is no longer as relevant (e.g. Ruggie 1993). These theories argue that post-modern society instead is characterized by fluent lines, overlapping identities and a constant construction and de-construction of entities. Ruggie means that although regional constructions partly take over the role of states, they do not intend to become states themselves, but rather responsibilities and identities are spread amongst different spatial constructions.

3.2 From old to new regionalism

“Old regionalism” refers to regionalism before the 1980’s, particularly the wave in the 1950s and 1960s, including the formation of both EU and the Nordic Council. In that time, cooperation among states in the same region was seen as *an important strategy for achieving security, peace, development and welfare* (Schultz et al. 2001:3); created by governments, and focused on the correlation between free trade and peace between the involved countries (security communities), in line with the Cold War bipolar structure (Schultz et al. 2001:4). However, these ideas lost their popularity in the late 1960s *because the grandiose projects actually had limited impact or simply never materialized* (Schultz et al. 2001:3).

Today, globalisation tendencies might to an even greater extent have questioned the importance of geography. However, NRA theory argues that there is a *new wave of regionalism* going on since the late 1980’s, starting with the end of the bipolar world structure of the Cold War period.

As states are faced with globalisation, a global political economy and its challenges, there is a new ”urge to merge” (Schultz et al. 2001:1) on geographical level. Regionalism becomes a way to pool resources in order to stay competitive as a region and handle global challenges (Schultz et al. 2001:4). Thus, the new regionalism could be identified as *extroverted rather than introverted* (Schultz et al. 2001:4). This regionalism is more complex, multidimensional, and less concentrated on fixed entities and realist ideas of security than old regionalism. It involves state and market as well as other *society actors* (Schultz et al. 2001:4). As argued above, this regionalist projects have to accept that they are merely a part of a web of overlapping identities for each of the states involved.

Thus, New regionalism is not directly against the national interest and nationalism, *but is often better explained as an instrument to supplement, enhance or protect the role of the state and the power of the government in an interdependent world*” (ibid).

The main questions NRA poses are exactly what are these areas, who are the main actors, how do they contribute and what are their relative strengths (Schultz et al. 2001:17).

3.3 Defining region and neighbourhood

The word *Region* is somewhat complicated, since it can refer either to a part of a state, such as North Sweden or North-Western Russia, or several countries together – as the Nordic region, and their neighbour states – or even parts of

different countries, such as Øresund or Haparanda-Tornio regions. It may also be a formal region defined by a state or organisation, or its borders can be more fuzzy and differ according to the context in which it is referred to, like is the case with Northern Europe. In this example however, the Nordic region is defined by the actual members of the NCM. The definition of it has not changed since Finland joined in 1956.

The second region in this case is North-Western Russia: also defined as the parts of Russia neighbouring the Nordic region. Even though it includes a concrete number of Russian regions, one might argue that this region is less concrete than the previous, since it is basically up to NCM themselves to define who they want to cooperate with and who they define as their neighbours. Before NW Russia, the focus was on the Baltic states, today it is also Poland, Germany, and Belarus.²

For NRA, old regionalism was characterised by regions created and defined by states, mainly based on either free-trade regimes or security alliances, and had a formal structure with an organisation representing it (Hettne 2000:xix), while new regionalism goes beyond that. They are a *multidimensional form of integration which includes economic political social and cultural aspects* (Hettne 2000:xix). Furthermore, the regions are not clearly defined and given, neither are they necessarily formal organisations (Hettne 2000:xviii): in the process of global transformation, they are *constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed* (Schultz et al. 2001:14). Since the region is a bottom-up process, involving actors in different layers of society, the region is neither a formal organisation (*ibid*). However, identifying and distinguishing the region, and showing the necessity of it, becomes an important mission for the promoters of the region and those hoping to gain from its continued existence.

3.4 Inclusion, exclusion and neighbourhood

Although the main aim of this thesis is not to discuss the identity of the Nordic region, I find some introduction of the importance of identity when it comes to geographical divisions relevant here. According to constructivist theory, the meaning of something is usually defined from its opposite, *what it is not*, its Other. The importance of the Other has been recognized in identity creation. Some authors, such as Bauman (1997), has even connected this to the idea of modernity with its aim to create order, distinguish what is normal and what is not, and who is the stranger (Bauman 1997:21). What is outside thus defines what is inside, and the unit cannot exist without it. Finding and defining the stranger is thus of highest importance for any identity. However, he also means that in the post-modern era, we do not stop trying to find and define the stranger, but he

² It should be noted here that except from the Eastern neighbour dimension, there is also a Western dimension with focus on the West-Nordic area and their neighbours USA and Canada. There is also cultural exchange programmes with the Balkans. However, the latter cooperation forms are of very different character and will thus not be explored here.

becomes unstable, in constant change and impossible to define properly (Bauman 1997:24).

While some things are relatively easy to part from its surroundings, others are more complicated. Usually it becomes more complicated when it comes to human identities than to concrete objects. The present borders of the state Sweden are clearly marked on the map, so we know what Sweden is right now, but on the other hand, that may not say anything about what is Sweden in 100 years from now. Neither does it say anything particular about what Sweden stands for in a particular context, for instance in UN or EU, or even less does it say anything about what it means to be Swedish. In a similar way, a region can be defined by a formal organisation as the NCM, or by geographical terms including the number of states that are members: but to describe the region there is a need for other, more qualitative terms that describes and defines its regional identity.

Just as state borders are defined by what lies within and what lies outside them, other identities are defined by what they are not. Geographical qualities often gets to define the other, as is the case with any border drawing such as states or a region.

3.5 Background: Russia and the Nordic region

Russia has for a long time been, and still is today, an important neighbour to the Nordic region. Geographically, Russia is the world's biggest country, with parts in both Europe and Asia, while the Nordic countries are small sized and scarcely populated. Russia is a former superpower both as an Empire and as the Soviet Union – a history which has affected the Nordic states and their own histories. Today, the longest border to Russia in the European Union is to the Nordic region (Finland and Norway).

While hard security threats and hostility characterised East-West relations during the Cold War, in recent years an increasing focus on soft security threats has put light on common problems of the region. For instance, environmental threats, social problems, diseases, illegal immigration and other cross-border problems have often been put up as examples of why there is a need for regional cooperation (Moroff 2002). This has also been recognized from the Russian part, however mostly with less enthusiasm than from the Western side (Light 2006) since they are often perceived as being run by the West on their own terms (Haukkala 2001)

However, even though the North's common security problems are increasingly underlined, many argue that this role disappears into today's world more important divisions and security complexes, as for instance Europe and CIS. And even though a great amount of cooperation strategies involving Russia has been laid out both from EU and other regional organizations, perhaps particularly in the Baltic Sea Region, Russia has neither exactly approached Europe during the Putin government attitude-wise, as it is arguably going in a more centralized and un-democratic direction and also definitely has sharpened its own national "hard"

security and talk of a strong, independent Russia (Light 2006). Many have argued that the Othering-practices between Russia and Europe is constantly present and even growing, as they both see themselves as ultimately different from each other, although neighbours (Haukkala 2001; Browning 2003)

Another important thing to note is that while many countries have provided Russia with different kinds of development aid, most countries have withdrawn their aid³, motivated by Russia's economy's present growth and stability, and also by Russia's reluctance to be treated as objects of development aid, particularly when it comes to aid from "West" (Light 2006). However, in many cases regional cooperation can be seen as a continuation of the same programmes. Amongst the number of regional organisations involving Russia, NCM is one.

3.5.1 Russia as Europe's neighbour

For the case of the relation between the Nordic region and Russia, the neighbourhood-relation has an important place. Neighbours often has a particular role in identity-construction: as it refers to the area just outside the borders that define the own, they often become the first hand representatives of the *Other*: what you are not. On the other hand, in some situations, their geographical proximity may mean that they are treated with particular care, just by the fact that they are close neighbours. As is the case with for instance the European Union, geographical proximity may mean for some countries future membership in the Union: that is, inclusion (for instance, Norway, Croatia). For others it means constant representing the *Other*, that will never – or at least not in the nearest future - be included (such as Russia). A country like Turkey is perhaps the definition of these contradictory identities combined. Hence, the neighbour relationship can be very contradictory.

There has been quite a lot written about the relationship between Europe and theirs neighbours in the East: many of them refer to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2004), who argues that the East has represented the unknown and exotic, in order to contrast the rational and well known West. Neumann (1999) continues in the same line, but his example is Russia and Eastern Europe, that he argues has been Europe's other both in the perception of the Europeans themselves, and of the Russians, who have seen themselves as an alternative Europe.

For the case of the Nordic region, there might be several immediate Others. The reference to the North in its name shows that it is contrasting from the South: however, the definition has often been seen as contrast also to East/West distinctions. However, traditionally, its neighbouring areas have come to represent it to a great extent: including both other parts of Europe, and the former East bloc. This distinction to a great extent is based on Cold War-divisions and the interpretation of the Nordic region as something other than both these solutions, keeping out from Cold War conflicts (e.g. Browning 2007:32). Today, this situation has changed to a great extent, and the Nordic region is today recognized

³ For instance, Sweden will phase out their development aid during 2008, and instead continue cooperation with Russia in regional neighbourhood programmes (www.sida.se)

as mainly a part of Europe. However, as will be shown later in this thesis, distinguishing the Nordic region and its identity is seen as a task for the Nordic cooperation – and then the concept of neighbourhood relations has high relevance.

4 Nordic cooperation and its current challenges

In this chapter, I will briefly present the Nordic cooperation today, and discuss what are the challenges it faces because of globalisation and new regionalist currents.

4.1 Is there a Nordic identity?

A first present challenge for the Nordic cooperation that can be identified is to motivate that there actually is a Nordic regional identity. As noted in Chapter 3.3.1, identity usually means something that distinguishes it from other identities. However, this does not necessarily mean that there cannot be other, overlapping identities existing in parallel.

For the inhabitants of the Nordic region, different regional processes are taking place at the same time and claiming their identities: a combination of Europeanisation, globalisation and an increased identification with the local, makes Nordic identity perhaps not the prioritized one.

4.1.1 Distinguishing the Nordic

Nordic in the name of NCM refers to its geographical position in the North. In order to distinguish the region from other “Norths”, the usage of the Scandinavian word *Norden* has by this often been promoted by NCM even in English as a name both for the region in general, but more specifically for the Nordic cooperation. The fact that no English word exists for the region says something about one perceived role of NCM: to identify and promote the Nordic region as a region: not the individual countries, but what common traits amongst them that makes them as a group particular in contrast to other parts of the world.

According to the NCM webpage, the political roots of the Nordic cooperation go as far back as the Kalmar union of the 14th Century, including Norway, Denmark and Sweden. They also mention how the *Scandinavist* ideological movement of the 19th Century emphasized the cultural similarities of the Scandinavian nations. For Finland, who does not belong to the Scandinavian group, however historical and geographical bonds to Sweden seems to be the main argument for inclusion. *Nordicity* is the Finland-inclusive equivalent to Scandinavism, including also Finnish language and culture.

(http://www.norden.org/web/1-1-fakta/sk/1-1-4-nordens_hist.asp?lang=1) and NCM sees itself as the institutionalisation of this long tradition of cooperation.

4.1.2 North in contrast to East/West distinctions

In the Cold War period, the Nordic states were placed in between the two blocs, as a peripheral region yet with big geopolitical importance. Remaining to some extent neutral and militarily unaligned, they could in a way represent a “middle way” between the Soviet Union and the West. According to Ingebritsen (2006) and others, the idea of neutrality and as a bridge became a crucial part of their identity.

What happened with the collapse of the East bloc was however that Northern Europe turned into an arena for an exceptional amount of regional cooperation, crossing the former East/West borders (Browning & Joenniemi 2004:233). Identifying with the North was seen by many as a region with a potential to creating a region *beyond* the old realist, state- and alliance-formed East/West divisions, by bringing in the concept of North as something shared by both sides (Aalto 2003:3).

The definition of ”North” has in these regionalist initiatives come to have a very inclusive character: sometimes it refers to the Baltic Sea Region and/or Barents region, sometimes it involves larger parts of the former East such as Belarus and Ukraine, and sometimes even Great Britain, US, Canada and Ukraine, are included (Aalto et al. 2003:8). Generally, the region’s definition seems to vary depending on the relevant area⁴.

This might challenge the definition and identity of the Nordic region, as it might be in risk of disappearing into the multitude of regional cooperations referring to North. However, the reaction of NCM has not been to try to in any way stop the development of new regionalisms. Instead, it today participates actively in particularly Baltic Sea and Barents cooperations (NCM 2006) – while preserving and attempting to strengthen the identity of the Nordic region. Initial attempts in the 1990’s of the Baltic states to become full members of the Nordic cooperation were dismissed, and since then any enlargement or inclusion has not been on the agenda (Aalto et al 2003).

4.2 Is there a need for Nordic cooperation?

A second challenge is to motivate continued Nordic cooperation. Even though it initially was thought as merely a political arena to promote free movement over the Nordic borders and simplify trade: these missions are to a great extent already completed, and today Nordic cooperation has developed into a vast amount of

⁴ For an overview see: <http://www.balticsea.net/>

cooperation fields⁵. As already mentioned, security politics, defence and foreign policy are not included, (www.norden.org), even though a future Nordic defence cooperation is presently being discussed (<http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=147&a=752531>).

In general NCM texts, three basic arguments are given for why the Nordic cooperation is needed:

1. **“Essentialist”** reasons: e.g. *centuries of shared history, shared cultural traditions, shared geography, similar living conditions and similar societies* (NCM 2005(1):2)
2. **Political/societal** common interests: e.g. *Their political collaboration is based on common values* (NCM 2005(1):2).
3. **To strengthen the position** of The Nordic region internationally (competitiveness): e.g. *the will to achieve results that contribute to the dynamism of the Region and make it more effective and competitive* (NCM 2005(1):2).

While the two first are reasons for cooperation, the last argument has more the character of an aim. However, also the two first can be seen as aims, as they are recognized as similarities to be preserved.

4.2.1 From security community to a-security community?

Traditionally, the Nordic cooperation has often been viewed as an answer to external threats during the Cold War, and its cooperation as the creation of a security community, as formulated by Karl Deutsch already in 1957. *In Deutsch’s formulation, a security community exists whenever the relevant actors have become so integrated that they share a sense of community, such that a mutual assurance exists that disputes will be settled without resort to war* (Browning & Joenniemi 2004:235). And in accordance with the idea of a security community, the Nordic region has stayed out of war for a long time⁶.

However, as noted already, the Nordic cooperation has never covered the area of security politics: neither internally, nor externally. Browning & Joenniemi thus argue that the Nordic cooperation should not be interpreted as a security community, and its legitimacy does not lie in the identification of an external threat. In opposite to for instance EU, which was founded on the idea of *transcending the region’s previous war-torn past* (Browning 2004:240), Nordic cooperation is built on the story of a region where cooperation is “natural” and has always taken place only in different forms. Thus it has become *a region beyond*

⁵ The cooperation covers the following areas: agriculture and forestry, children and youth affairs, consumer affairs, culture, economy, energy, environment, fisheries, foodstuffs, freedom of movement, gender equality, globalisation, industry/trade, language, legislation, regional policy, research, social security and health care, sustainable development and working life.

⁶ although recent years have slightly altered the idea of the Nordic region as staying out of war: particularly for the NATO-members of the region; and also new accounts of what Nordic neutrality during e.g. WWII meant have challenged the positive story of Nordic neutrality.

security, an a-security community premised on extra-ordinary policies (Browning & Joenniemi 2004:241).

They argue that the strength of the Nordic cooperation lies exactly here: in its ability to build and institutionalise networks and communication channels on different levels of society, by encompassing *a Nordic ‘we-ness’ into their national identities* (Browning ad Joenniemi 2004:241). This makes Nordicity relevant still today, and distinguishes it from other regional definitions.

Applying NRA theory to this, it would be possible to see it as a development from a traditional type of regionalism, towards a more flexible, “new” type of regionalism; while keeping the old structures.

4.3 Branding: What does the Nordic region has to offer?

A third challenge for the Nordic cooperation is to show that the Nordic region has something to offer in the global competition, both economically, and when it comes to political voice. *Branding* has thus become important for the Nordic cooperation: what is the region’s strength and what can it offer to the world?

4.3.1 Nordic values as a brand

According to Ingebritsen (2006) and Browning (2007), the idea of shared norms and values has during the 20th Century been important for Nordic regional identity, both internally (self-perception) and externally (global “brand”).

Browning (2007) discusses the idea of a *Nordic exceptionalism* as a brand for the Nordic region: the idea of *a Nordic way of doing things* (Browning 2007:27) . This perceived exceptionalism is particularly connected to the egalitarian approach to economic and social affairs, but also on how to handle global relations, by neutrality and solidarity (Browning 2007:32-36) In the same time, the Nordic model was seen as *something that can be copied and implemented everywhere* (Browning 2007:27), making the Nordic countries global role-models and norm entrepreneurs.

Ingebritsen (2006) has a very positive image of the Nordic countries’ as norm entrepreneurs, and brings up the example of how the “military weak, economically dependent” Nordic states by avoiding security politics and security talk, instead focus on influencing people with norms and societal solutions, what she calls *norm entrepreneurship* and *normative power*. She even names them *moral superpowers* (Ingebritsen 2006:2), referring to the way in which this strategy has given them legitimacy in global politics and the image of being able to *punch above their own weight* (Ingebritsen 2006:43) both on its own and in international organisations. Others, like Bailes (2007) argues that the idea of the Nordic states as norm entrepreneurs mainly stems from the fact that they did not

want to get involved in any real power-game, since they knew they were too small and vulnerable, and thus they restricted themselves to the less risky norm entrepreneurship. Browning argues that both the economic and societal solutions, and the approach to global relations, that make up the Nordic exceptionalism were based on the global context of the Cold War and the challenges it posed, and now can be seen as *Past its Sell-by Date* (Browning 2007:36).

However, in fact, it could be argued that the story of the Nordic countries as global role-models is still highly visible in the texts of NCM – only, it has slightly changed characteristics. For instance, values are brought up as example of what the Nordic region can compete with globally: *Nordic values as a “cutting edge” in the international competition* (<http://www.norden.org/globalisering/sk/global.asp?lang=6>).

5 Cooperation with North-Western Russia

In this Chapter, I present the NCM cooperation with NW Russia, as described and interpreted by the NCM employees. I focus on what they present as the major aims of the cooperation, and try to categorize them. Furthermore, I discuss how the cooperation can be seen in parallel to Nordic cooperation in general. However, first a brief introduction of the relation between Russia and the Nordic region.

5.1 The aims of the cooperation according to the NCM employees

5.1.1 *Representing* the Nordic region

According to the NCM Russia Programme 2006-08, the roles of the information offices in NW Russia are the following (NCM 2005(2)):

1. *be the local contact point for the Nordic ministerial councils, their committees and working groups and is therefore capable, for example, of identifying appropriate Russian partners and facilitating co-operation*
2. *build networks with the national authorities, NGOs and other national and international stakeholders in the Russian regions*
3. *be the local observer for the Nordic Council of Ministers, identifying trends and opportunities for joint Nordic-Russian co-operation*
4. *be an exponent of everything ‘Nordic’, working to increase awareness of co-operation in the cultural sphere*
5. *have a significant level of competence which is useful to ministries wishing to refine co-operation with Russian regions*
6. *take care of practical casework, quality assurance, etc., for activities such as ex-change programmes, in a more efficient way than would otherwise be possible.*

The information offices usually work as the “face” of NCM in Russia, since it is the visible contact point and most projects are coordinated by its employees. It can be characterized as a mixture between foreign representation and cooperation centre – meaning it should function as a meeting place for Russian and Nordic actors.

An obvious difference from diplomatic representations is that they represent *The Nordic region as a region* instead of bilateral contacts with different countries (Hanhijärvi and Golubeva 2008). Several respondents point out how the countries offer more together than separately: *for the Russian side, it is much more interesting for them if they can cooperate with the Nordic countries together instead of one country each. So we believe we are offering more in this way.* (Hanhijärvi 2008) On the other hand, it is also pointed out in the context of influencing the Russian agenda, that *we are here together, and together we are stronger* (Hanhijärvi 2008). Hence, one of the major tasks according to the employees is to represent The Nordic region as a region. It is underlined that the office does not generally promote just one of the Nordic countries: that is the role of the Nordic consulates, cultural institutes and trade councils, if there is not something particular at the moment that makes it relevant to highlight one country – and then it is usually the countries least known in St Petersburg (Denmark, Iceland) (Golubeva 2008).

According to the respondents, the general tendency seems to be that it is easier to convince the business sector that The Nordic region is one market, and individuals and NGOs to see the similarities of the Nordic countries, while politicians usually see the countries separately and are mainly interested in Finland, the closest neighbour (Nazarova, Hanhijärvi, Golubeva 2008). However, this is described as changing, something which is described as a success for NCM: *Politicians view the countries separately. But we have started to see that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs now are talking about the Nordic countries as a group, one region. (Golubeva 2008)*

5.1.2 Promoting the Nordic – norm entrepreneurship

Although not stated in the Russia programme as a main task of the office, many of the respondents underline the importance of NCM as *norm entrepreneurs* in NW Russia. They refer to the guidelines (NCM 2004), where three key priority areas are emphasized: democratic societal development, open pluralistic relations across borders and a regulated market economy. (NCM 2004). The largest financial contributions to Russia have also been in the following areas: environment/sustainable development, reforms in the health sector, working for gender equality and against human trafficking (NCM 2006:37-42). This take place on many different levels: both trying to influence the political level and organising projects and exchange for individuals.

According to Hanhijärvi, the aim of the information office has from the start been to promote the Nordic region in general, and Nordic values in particular (Hanhijärvi 2008).

The most common arguments apparent in the interviews are the following:

- **Identifying common Nordic values and solutions are important for the perception of The Nordic region as a region:** e.g. organisational structure, attitudes towards children, family policy etc, (Golubeva,

Sagitova 2008) and *democratic values and equality in general* (Kofod Pedersen 2007).

- **NCM wants to help Nordic companies:** e.g. *Today there is money, but not so much to buy in Russia in this field* (Golubeva 2008, referring to waste management technology).
- **NW Russia's problems are Nordic problems (soft security threats):** e.g. human trafficking, environment youth, corruption (Sagitova, Nazarova 2008).

However, it seems to be important for them to underline that it is only to the extent there is an interest for it. When asked if they see themselves as norm entrepreneurs, several respondents immediately point out the differences between Western advisors in Russia in the 90's *when Western advisors came with technical assistance and development aid and expected the Russians to do exactly like them, because they were not expected to know anything* (Kofod Pedersen 2007). Obviously many have experience from when such an attitude has caused problems and scepticism amongst Russian actors, and been highly unsuccessful. Over all, even though it is clear that Nordic values, products and solutions are to be promoted, the language focuses on *mutual cooperation, reciprocity* and that both parts gain.

We are not interested in spreading Nordic values to anyone who is not interested (Kofod Pedersen 2007).

We are not here to say that this is the best part of the world, that our values are better than any others or something like this. (Hanhijärvi 2008)

Several respondents point out that the greatest interest for the projects are actually from the Russian side, and give examples of that to an increasing amount the Russian side is also taking part economically (Hanhijärvi, Golubeva and Nazarova 2008).

5.1.3 *Connecting the Nordic region – network building*

One of the main activities of the NCM office is to organise exchange between different actors in NW Russia and The Nordic region, such as small and medium-size enterprises, journalists and local politicians. Generally, as already mentioned, network-building is a keyword.

“Network” seems to have two general meanings in this context:

- In the Nordic countries: **Organizations and individuals who can promote Nordic solutions, values and products** to their Russian equivalents.
- In NW Russia: **Channels to important actors in NW Russia**, who can help the projects to run smoothly (e.g. local government, police etc.)

The first group is for instance those Nordic organisations and individuals who take part in the exchange programmes: either going to NW Russia to tell about The Nordic region, or receiving Russian participants, and hopefully also keeping contacts with them later on. It is also the Nordic organisations who take part in organising social or cultural projects in NW Russia.

Concerning the latter, many international organisations in Russia have experienced more complicated relations in recent years⁷, which some also refer to.

I would say that it is important to keep good contact with authorities. (--) So it is good to know who to contact, where you should go and so on. (--) I think during the years we have been here we have got a very good understanding of how this functions and who is who, so we can help people and organisations in the Nordic countries.

(Hanhijärvi 2008)

Returning to the role as foreign representation, many respondents describe the role of the information office as a centre for knowledge about the Russian actors, markets and people, that Nordic actors should be able to contact directly or get information about through them. It could thus be seen as a way to *connect* The Nordic region.

5.2 Strengthening Nordic identity by neighbourhood cooperation

You know, the interest for Russia is growing everywhere, and we are neighbours actually, so here it is even more interesting to know about each other. We are so close to each other and it is natural that we cooperate (Nazarova 2008).

In summary, the results from the interviews show that the cooperation with NW Russia, as represented by the information office in St Petersburg, to a great extent is actually directed towards branding and promoting the Nordic region itself. By having offices representing the Nordic region, and by promoting solutions and values that are presented as Nordic, the Nordic identity is defined and formulated to the Russian audience. By creating networks and channels into NW Russia, this promotion is simplified.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the Nordic identity is also strengthened by the entire concept of cooperating with NW Russia: as argued earlier, one of the Nordic region's old identities was as mediators between East and West, with the ability to overlook security questions and have friendly neighbour relations. Even though the distinctions are not as present today, and most parts of the East bloc

⁷ For instance, the British Council in St Petersburg was shut down in December 2007, accused of foreign intervention into national Russian affairs (<http://www.sptimes.ru/story/24760>)

has today “returned to Europe”, Russia is still to a great extent identified as Europe’s Other. Strengthening the Nordic ties to NW Russia, and even showing that they have direct connections to decision-makers there, can be seen as a way to build on this old role as bridges and mediators. Also, in the context of Nordic cooperation with NW Russia, all the respondents mention neighbourhood and geographical proximity as important reasons for focusing on NW Russia. All of NCMs cooperation with Russia goes to its North-Western regions: the ones that actually are direct neighbours with a Nordic country. This is also shown in the placing of information offices in St Petersburg and Kaliningrad, and contact points in Archangelsk, Murmansk and Petrozavodsk. This is the case, even though Russia, despite formal regional authority, is generally identified as strongly centralised and reluctant to regional divisions (e.g. Haukkala 2001).

It was decided that NW Russia was the area of interest for Norden. This does not mean that we neglect Moscow: you can't neglect Moscow in Russia! I think you know very well if you are interested in international relations, that Moscow is almost a "country within a country": all the important decisions are made there.
(Hanhijärvi 2008)

They suggest not only that it makes projects easier, but that it also means that the problems are often more similar in NW Russia and The Nordic region than any other region in Europe: arguments reminding of the arguments for Nordic cooperation itself: more historical and cultural contacts and connections (Golubeva 2008) and also, size-wise, they are more similar: the example is given that St Petersburg is almost as big as one of the Nordic countries (Hanhijärvi 2008).

The focus is on promoting cooperation types that characterize New Regionalism: bottom-up, multi-layered, in different spheres – and beyond issues such as cooperation on state-to-state level, economic agreements, or security questions. Furthermore, there is a clear reluctance towards explaining the cooperation in terms of security or politics in both the interviews and official texts. The only time security is mentioned here, is when it comes to social projects and common soft security problems that transcend borders. However, even though cooperation to fight these challenges is in focus, I argue that they fall more in under the norm entrepreneur-role: Nordic solutions to problems are promoted. One example is concerning trafficking, which is a problem which obviously has a different character on the Nordic (as receiving countries) and Russian side (as origin and transfer country): still the cooperation’s character is mainly to invite Nordic researchers and NGO-workers to share their opinions about how trafficking should be stopped (Sagitova 2008).

This could also be interpreted as part of the promotion of friendly neighbourhood relations, beyond security: Nordic cooperation should not, and does not deal with security:

Saying that it has to do with security politics would definitely be to exaggerate the influence we are hoping to make (...). By creating a clear form for cooperation, one

could say that we contribute to stability in the region, but it is far from being the main tool for that. Security is not something we work with on the Nordic level.

(Kofod-Pedersen 2007)

By in this way “transferring” the type of neighbourhood relation present in the Nordic cooperation to NW Russia, the Nordic region’s can be branded as role-models when it comes to conducting friendly neighbour relations beyond security questions and state-to-state “high politics”.

6 Conclusions: New regionalism, old region?

In the introduction, I posed the following questions:

- *Why does the Nordic Council of Ministers cooperate with North-Western Russia?*
- *How does the actors representing NCM in Russia expect the cooperation to benefit the Nordic regional cooperation?*
- *In what way does this reflect a change of the type of regionalism NCM represents?*

In a globalising world, as parts of the integrating Europe, and in a region where different regional initiatives have been multiplying since the end of the Cold War, there is a need to re-define the Nordic cooperation in order to not “disappear” in the multiplicity of regions.

As argued in Chapter 4, the Nordic cooperation is to a great extent an “old” form of regionalism and has many of the characteristics of traditional regionalism: it is governed and formulated through top-down, inter-governmental processes, defined by a political organisation and restricted to a specified area defined by states. It was created at a time when the common security situation united the members of the region, and free trade agreements were seen as a way to create interdependence and strengthen the security community. However, today it also has developed into having many characteristics of new regionalism, by institutionalising communication channels on grass-root level, de-securitized relations, focus on common projects instead of common threats.

To legitimize Nordic cooperation today, and thus also NCM as an organisation, there is a need to strengthen the regional identity: both externally, by branding the region, and internally, by promoting regional cooperation of different actors on all levels of society in new regionalist manner. The cooperation with NW Russia can be seen as a continuation of these processes, and a shift from focus to the internal to the external.

Furthermore, the cooperation can be seen as a way to brand the region globally as role-models when it comes to building peaceful neighbour relations in general, and the ability to talk to and cooperate with actors in NW Russia without having to involve Moscow and state-level Russia’s complicated security concerns and high politics. This can also be seen as a way to brand the region, by actually continuing on the traditional brands of the Nordic region during the Cold War, as neutral mediators in East-West relations. Also, by promoting Nordic values and

solutions in NW Russia, they reclaim their old identity as global role-models, and their values as something to compete with on the global scale.

To conclude, NCM cooperates with NW Russia in order to re-define and strengthen Nordic cooperation, distinguish the Nordic region, and thus strengthen the competitiveness of the Nordic region. This can be seen as a way to adapt to current challenges to Nordic regionalism and NCM's legitimacy as a regional organisation.

6.1 Concluding remarks

It should be noted that this thesis did not have the intention to estimate the effectiveness of this Nordic strategy, and if the challenges described in Chapter 4 are actually met by the cooperation with NW Russia. Neither did it intend to say if it is normatively good or not. Hence, the conclusions should not be interpreted in this way.

As already mentioned, the narrow focus that the case study implies poses questions on what general conclusions actually can be drawn from this. As argued earlier, I chose to study the information office in St Petersburg and interview the employees, together with the reading of official programmes and information sheets about the cooperation, rather than look at the political decisions and reasoning behind it. This would of course be an interesting object for further study. It would also be interesting for instance to compare how each of the Nordic countries relate to Russia, and the common Nordic strategy towards it. Also, it could be compared and contrasted to the European Union's neighbourhood policy towards Russia.

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