1. Regions are human creations of natural units

Europe is bounded by seas on three sides; the Arctic basin to the north, the Atlantic to the west and the Mediterranean and Black Sea to the south. Only in the east is Europe attached to the mainland of Asia, although even there the Caspian Sea marks some of the boundary between Europe and Asia. One particular feature that distinguishes Europe from other land masses in general is the interplay between land and sea in the form of inlets from the ocean, moderating the direct contact between the vast stretches of ocean and the vast stretches of continental land mass. The Baltic is one of these inlets. It is our contention that the Baltic drainage area should be seen as a region.

“Region” is a concept that is employed when classifying and delineating territory with respect to spatial extension and organisational purpose. Thus regions are human creations for the purpose of analysis, synthesis and planning. The extent and character of a region will depend upon the purpose for which it is created. The number of possible regions is infinite. One might put it that the concept of region is to the social sciences what ecology is to the biological sciences. In defining regions, two classes of criteria are employed: the physical factors of geography, climate or natural resources; and the social phenomena of culture, economics or government. For a region must not only have a geographical framework. It must also possess sufficient cohesion among its occupants and homogeneity in conditions to allow it to deal with common concerns and to differentiate itself from other regions.

According to various kinds of criteria the Baltic area may be regarded as a region. Physically, it does have internal cohesion in terms of its common drainage area. Although we did not regard the Baltic area as a cultural, political or economic region during the period 1939-1989, a need to do so arose once the Cold War had come to an end. One of the most urgent problems that has not found a satisfactory solution is environmental pollution. Contaminated rivers in one part of the area affect the entire seaboard. Equally serious are the effects of wind-born pollutants. A large part of the Baltic region was contaminated by the radioactive downfall deriving from the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Our demarcation, derived from physical geography, cuts right across traditional historic, cultural, religious and political borders that we have grown accustomed to. Culturally and politically it is not immediately obvious that the drainage area constitutes a region. Historically, however, it makes good sense. The waterways provided by the rivers flowing into the Baltic, and the lakes linked to these rivers, have always been important means of communication.

The Baltic region embraces or touches upon the following states ordered clockwise around the sea: Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany. The Baltic region also touches upon Norway, Belarus, the Ukraine, the Czech Republic and
Slovakia. The three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are situated entirely within the region thus defined. Practically all of Sweden, Finland and Poland are situated within the Baltic drainage area. A greater part of Denmark also belongs to the region. However, only the northern coastal strip of Germany and the Oder-Neisse/Odra-Nysa-valley come into the Baltic drainage area. Russia is represented by the drainage area belonging to the Neva, Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega, as well as by the Kaliningrad enclave.

The skeleton of Europe is formed by a series of mountain ranges which are found in the southern part of the continent. The one exception is the Scandinavian range separating Norway from Sweden. A second topographical category worth noting is formed by the regions of hills and modestly high mountains spreading through central Europe to the north of the main ranges. The plains and lowlands which border upon the southern shores of the Baltic are a third category of terrain. From the North Sea coast of the Netherlands through northern Germany and Poland, and southern Scandinavia, to the Baltic states, Belarus, the Ukraine and Russia proper runs a continuous belt of lowland plains. It is not uniform. Various sections have their distinctive features. Most of this zone is highly fertile, but there are also broad tracts of infertile moors and marshes.

North of the great plains, approximately from the 55th parallel, begins the taiga zone, consisting of coniferous forests that cover most of northern Russia, Estonia, Finland and Sweden. It stretches north to the Arctic circle. It is a thinly-populated zone. The soils are of rather poor quality. This fact, in combination with climatic factors, makes the conditions for traditional agriculture harsh. In modern times, however, the great coniferous forests have been an immense economic asset to Sweden and Finland. Timber and paper pulp have been highly important export products and have contributed to the economic growth of these two countries. North of the taiga the tundra zone provides for even more severe living conditions.

**2. Mountains in the south and the northwest**

The mountain ranges form the watersheds of Europe. Several major rivers of central Europe flow northwards. The two most important ones entering the Baltic are the Oder/Odra and the Vistula. From the Scandinavian ranges a number of comparatively short, turbulent and unnavigable rivers flow to the southeast through the Swedish forests to the Gulf and Sea of Bothnia. Eleven larger rivers enter these waters on the Swedish side, one of them constituting the border between Finland and Sweden, and three larger rivers on the Finnish side in addition to a number of smaller streams. The Daugava and the Nemunas enter the Baltic through Latvia and Lithuania. At the head of the Gulf of Finland the Neva runs from lake Ladoga through St-Petersburg into the Baltic.

Regarded as a whole, the landscape of the Baltic region is quite flat. The two mountain ranges of the region are situated on the fringe – the Scandinavian range to the northwest and the Carpathians with the adjoining Sudeten mountains in

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Figure 35. Mountains in northwest Sweden. Photo: Andrzej Szmal

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the extreme south. The flatness of the landscape is particularly obvious in the great plains to the south and east of the Baltic. Although much of the Swedish and Finnish landscape consists of broken land, a general impression is that the landscape is rather level. This makes the Baltic environment region very different to the Mediterranean landscape. The Mediterranean is a deep sea, almost entirely surrounded by impressive mountain ranges. One thing the Mediterranean and the Baltic have in common is the existence of many islands. The Mediterranean islands, however, are the result of the ongoing dramatic geological reshaping of that region. Many of them are volcanic. This does not apply to the Baltic islands.

Geologically speaking, the rock bottom of the Baltic region is considerably older and more stable than the Mediterranean region. However, in recent geological times, that is to say for the main part of the past 100,000 years, most of the Baltic region was covered by a 1,000 metre thick layer of inland ice. In the region there is virtually no seismic activity of a volcanic or tectonic nature. However, a considerable elevation of the land has taken place during the past 10,000 years. It is quite noticeable within the span of a human lifetime. One consequence of the land elevation is that many of the waterways that were used by the Vikings are now silted up.

The existence of a great many small islands and correspondingly the existence of numerous lakes in Finland, Sweden and northern Russia is due to the rising of the land, once it was relieved of the weight of the inland ice. The very flatness of the Baltic region itself is due to the planing effects of successive glaciations.

The Sudeten and Carpathian mountains separate Poland from Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. Whereas the Sudetens are moderately high, the Carpathian range boasts the highest peaks within the Baltic region. People living in mountain regions tend to conserve traditional ways of life to a larger extent than those living on the plains.

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Map 15. The deglaciation of the Baltic Sea Region. As the ice sheet melted (15,000 B.C.), water collected in the Baltic basin forming a vast lake (the Baltic Ice Lake). Due to the melting of the enormous masses of landlocked ice, the ocean level gradually rose, thus connecting the Atlantic with the Baltic lake, making it into an arm of the ocean and turning it saline (the Yoldia Sea, 10,000 B.C.). A further consequence of the melting of the ice was that land that hitherto had been covered and suppressed by the ice sheet slowly began to rise once the pressure exerted by the weight of the ice was gone. As land gradually rose this sea again was cut off from the Atlantic and turned into a fresh water lake (the Ancylus Lake, 9,400 B.C.). As we know, the inland ice has retreated completely from the European mainland, with the exception of some comparatively insignificant glaciers in the far north. The sea was once more connected to the Atlantic (the Litorina Sea, 8,000 B.C.). Ill.: Karin Hallgren
Mountain regions usually presuppose harsher living conditions than plains. Climate, of course, is one factor. Altitude measured in metres corresponds to higher latitude measured in tens of kilometres as far as temperatures are concerned. Mountain regions are wet. Clouds condense into rain over the mountains. The little soil there is on the slopes risks being eroded. Mountainous regions consist primarily of unproductive land, either because it is barren or because it is difficult of access. Fertile valleys exist of course, but even in the valleys there is a need to terrace the ground so as to withstand soil erosion. Terracing allows for small-scale agriculture. Usually it is labour-intensive. Moreover, valleys in mountainous regions can be far apart by way of practicable routes, even when they may be quite close as the crow flies. History has repeatedly shown that mountain regions are difficult to conquer and pacify. Guerrilla movements, that challenge foreign occupation, have their bases in the mountains. Mountain regions thus serve as places of refuge for ethnic minorities. They show a wide spectrum of ethnic diversity. All these factors combined thus form mountainous regions into a mosaic of small worlds.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the Saami have managed to maintain their traditional reindeer husbandry in the northerly regions of the Scandinavian mountains. The Saami have exploited a particular niche that is well adapted to the specific topographic and climatic conditions of northern Scandinavia.

The Sudeten mountains represent a border region in central Europe. For centuries Germans, Czechs and Poles could get by without serious clashes until the ethnic map of central Europe was changed as a result of World War II. The branch of the Carpathians known as the Tatra mountains separates Poland from Slovakia. In this part of the world Poles, Slovaks and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) encountered one another. Today, the people living in the Polish parts of the Tatra mountains are regarded as mainstream Poles. However, they are seen as representing traditional ways. They are thought of as provincial in relation to the Poles of the great plains.

3. The great plains

Man may travel by sea and make his living from the sea, yet, he makes his home on land. That is where he is born, and that is where he wishes to be buried. No wonder, then, that land and sea have acquired different meanings, not only to individual human beings but also to states and nations. Whereas the open sea is recognised as international water, not belonging to any specific nation or state, land masses, with the sole exception of the Antarctic, are divided among states. One criterion by which a state is internationally recognised is that it controls the territory to which it lays claim.

We need to consider the meaning of different types of land upon which people live. Conditions on continental mainlands differ from those on islands. Peninsulas may be viewed as an intermediate category. Economic factors, communications, means of subsistence, all come into play in shaping the collective representations that make the mentality of islanders different to the mentality of mainlanders.

East of the Baltic, land extends continuously through the Russian plains and the taiga of Siberia, touching upon the deserts and mountains of central Asia, all the way to the Pacific Ocean. To understand Russia’s importance in the Baltic region we must look beyond the drainage area itself. The whole weight of the Russian population, economy, military power and culture affects the Baltic region through the focus of St Petersburg. People from every corner of Russia walk the streets of St Petersburg. In this respect, St-Petersburg is very much a mainland city, having an immense hinterland.
Do the southern shores of the Baltic reflect the facets of the considerably smaller but more densely populated land mass that we know as central Europe? The Vistula and the Oder/Odra lead right into the heartland of central Europe. Yet, we cannot say that cities like Gdańsk and Szczecin, or Rostock and Kiel, reflect the entire European hinterland in the way that St Petersburg mirrors Russia.

The southern shores of the Baltic are divided into two heavily populated states, Germany and Poland. Present-day Germany’s relationship to its Baltic coast differs considerably from the situation some sixty years ago when the Baltic coast represented Germany’s front garden. Today, Germany’s Baltic region might rather be characterised as its back yard. The Baltic coast no longer plays the vital economic role it once used to play. Its recreational importance has declined. Today’s Germany faces Western Europe. The Federal Republic of Germany has rejected the ambitions of the Third Reich and other predecessors, of expanding to the east.

The inclusion of the territory of the former German Democratic Republic, East Germany, into the Federal Republic has suddenly more than doubled the Baltic coast of the Federal Republic. However, this coast, and the territory of former East Germany as a whole, is an addition that involved problems of a run-down economy, mass unemployment, polluted cities and serious damage to the environment. Although conditions have improved considerably in the former East German Länder since October 1990, when they merged with the Federal Republic, sharp differences in living conditions, general standards and public infrastructure still exist. These problems have not supported the German establishment’s sense of membership in a Baltic community of nations.

Poland, on the other hand, is a country that actively faces the Baltic. Practically the entire country is situated within the drainage area. When Poland was reconstructed as a sovereign state after the Great War of 1914-1918, one of the problems that had to be solved was its access to the Baltic. The German claim to the notorious corridor that separated German East Prussia from the rest of the Reich in 1919-1939 was the pretext for Hitler’s invasion of Poland in September 1939.

Northern Germany and northern Poland are embedded in the great plains of northern Europe. One problem of plains is water collecting into marshes and swamps. The province of Mazury in northeastern Poland is a landscape of many lakes and marshlands. Further east, in Belarus and Russia, the armies of Napoleon and Hitler got bogged down when the autumn rains set in. An immense undertaking for centuries was to drain the plains by constructing systems of ditches and channels, that eventually became canals as people improved them.

Territorial minorities of the plains tend to become assimilated into majority populations as one group gets the upper hand. Due to the inherent homogeneity of the land, and for reasons of economic rationality, plains tend to be dominated by one particular mode of agricultural production during one specific period of time, thus rendering it difficult for minorities to maintain their specific economic independence. Economic independence is usually a necessary condition for ethnic independence.

Without resorting to geomorphic determinism one may ponder, as Fernand Braudel (1972) does, on geographical environments (mountains, plains, coasts, islands) as settings for societies and communities. And one may pursue this reflection further and wonder about how different ways of life in these respects may link up with belief systems, collective representations and mentalities. Indeed, it was one of Braudel’s notions that mentalities, ways of life and natural environments were interlinked. These mentalities, in turn, could imply that people individually or through concerted effort went about reshaping natural environments through terracing mountain sides, damming up rivers, draining marshlands and cutting down forests.
A landscape of plains, intersected by navigable rivers and canals, does not encourage geographical mobility out of the region. On the contrary, it is reasonable to assume that plains promote intermixing within the region. In densely populated regions, villages and towns are never far apart. Interacting with neighbouring villages is easier to undertake on the plain than in mountainous regions where the sheer efforts of travel, not to mention the time consumed in doing so, are so much greater.

4. Coasts, peninsulas and lakes

The Baltic has an immense seaboard. This is due to the great number of inlets from the sea, the great number of lakes that are connected to the sea by navigable rivers, and the great number of islands in the sea. Coastal zones in general are biologically highly productive. This applies both to life in the water as well as to life on shore. The Baltic is no exception. The coast, rivers and lakes provide a means of subsistence for man. Sea food has always been an essential element of the commoner's diet.

Soils in the vicinity of lakes and coasts are considerably more fertile than elsewhere in the region. This is due to the fact that a lot of the coastal zone has been a sea bottom in recent geological times and thus rich in deposited sediments. In addition, the coasts and rivers have served as the most essential requisites for communication. Moreover, the climate is usually less severe in the coastal tracts.

For these reasons, populations tend to be attracted to the coastal zone. This is true of the situation several thousands of years before now. It is also true today. However, it should be noted that the location of the coastline has altered a lot due to the elevation of the land. Ancient population concentrations are still significant for the density of populations today in the different zones and tracts of the region. Cities of the Baltic region did not really start to grow until industrialisation, when the population of many of them increased dramatically. All the major cities of the region are still situated on the coast, on lakes or rivers. Many of them were founded some 800 to 1,000 years ago.

There are several important lakes in the region. Lakes Ladoga and the Onega in Russia are Europe's largest. They are inland seas. Other important lakes in the region are Peipus in Estonia, Saima in Finland, and Vänern and Vättern in Sweden. These major lakes are all connected to the sea by rivers and canals and played an important role in the early history of settlement of the area.

The Baltic sea is separated from the Atlantic by two interlocking peninsulas. If the Baltic might be compared with the cavity of the mouth, the Scandinavian peninsula could be represented as the teeth of the upper jaw, and the peninsula of Jylland as the teeth of the lower jaw. Peninsulas represent a particular kind of land, surrounded on three sides by the sea. This means that the vital force of the sea carries its weight far into the land of the penin-
The presence of the sea is definitely felt on Jylland, for instance in the unique landscape of the Lim fiord, a stretch of water that connects the Kattegatt with the Atlantic.

Jylland is a direct continuation northwards of the main land mass of the European continent. Motorways lead directly from Jylland down to central Germany. One can imagine that Jylland could easily have become German. That scenario never developed because, as Fernand Braudel puts it, peninsulas tend to become independent of the main land mass, almost in the way that islands represent worlds of their own. In the case of Jylland, the early roots of the Danish realm are found in ancient Hedeby, a town no longer in existence, but once situated on the east coast of Jylland.

The Fenno-Scandinavian peninsula is joined to the Eurasian mainland. Yet for all practical purposes Sweden and Norway are an island in relation to continental Europe, and Finland is an island in relation to Sweden, something which was highly apparent during the Cold War, when Finland’s border to the Soviet Union was sealed.

5. The sea

The Baltic is a sea that comprises of distinctly separate parts. The main basin of the Baltic is situated between the 54th and the 60th parallel, and between the 16th and 24th degree eastern longitude. It is a shallow sea of low salinity. North of the main basin is the smaller basin known as the Bothnian Sea where the salinity is even lower. Still further north is the basin of the Gulf of Bothnia. East of the main basin we find the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Riga.

The Kattegatt, between Denmark and Sweden, will be regarded in this context as part of the Baltic. It differs from the rest of the Baltic, however, in being considerably more saline. The Kattegatt has the salinity of the North Sea and the Atlantic itself. Thus, from a strictly physical point of view, it would be more appropriate to regard the Kattegatt as an arm of the North Sea than as the mouth of the Baltic. From a cultural, historical and political point of view, however, the Kattegatt can readily be seen as the entrance to the Baltic.

The Danish sounds represent yet another kind of environment. Between the Baltic proper and the Kattegatt there are three straits running in a north-south direction; Öresund, between the southernmost part of Sweden and the island of Sjaelland, Store Baelt between Sjaelland and the island of Fyn, and Lille Baelt between Fyn and the Jylland peninsula. One can see across these straits and it is easy to make out the opposite shore. A bridge between Jylland and Fyn was built many years ago. A bridge across Store Baelt was opened in 1997 and a combined bridge and tunnel across Öresund, linking Malmö with København, was opened in 2000. All three constructions include both road and rail connections.

Hardly anywhere else in Europe do we find the transition between sea and land as gradual as it is in some parts of the Baltic. The Danish isles and sounds represent one particular...
instance of this interplay between land and sea. The archipelagos of Finland and Sweden, though differing greatly from the Danish isles as to their geological structure, present another instance of the gradual transition of sea into land and land into sea. These archipelagos make very specific living conditions. The coasts along the Gulf of Gdańsk and the Kaliningrad enclave display yet another form of gradual transition between land and sea, here in the form of sand-reefs and long-shore bars. In some sections of the Baltic coast the transition between land and sea is more direct.

Like other seas, the Baltic has many varying aspects. Occasionally on summer mornings you will find the whole surface quite calm. Not a wave, hardly even a ripple will be seen. Other times, quite frequently in the early autumn, the sea can be ridden by violent storms that whip up towering waves which threaten any voyage. It was in one of these storms (September 28, 1994) that the MV Estonia was lost with a death toll of 912 persons. Only 139 survivors were rescued. This loss of the Estonia was the worst maritime catastrophe in peacetime since the Titanic. The vast expanse of frozen sea that may be seen during cold winters represents yet another face of the Baltic. Normally, most of the inlets and bays along the coast are frozen in winter, from Poland and Kaliningrad north along the eastern shore right round the Gulf of Bothnia down along the western fringe to Skåne in the far south of Sweden. During exceptionally cold winters the entire Gulf and Sea of Bothnia are covered by ice down to 60th parallel. The Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Riga too can be covered by ice. The Kattegatt does not freeze. Nor do the Danish sounds, although there are historical records of the latter. The main basin of the Baltic never freezes.

The Baltic is a northerly sea. In one important respect it is quite unique. It is the largest sea of brackish water on the planet. The brackishness is due to the fact that the narrow and shallow outlets into the North Sea through the Danish sounds only rarely permit any large quantities of heavier saline Atlantic water to flow into the Baltic. At the other end, the sea is continually fed by a great many fresh water rivers. Another factor of some importance is that the main stretch of the Baltic is in a north-south direction. Moreover, it is a shallow sea.

Several important consequences follow from these facts. First of all, tidal movements in the Baltic are quite insignificant, which, of course, is beneficial to shipping. Secondly, the brackish and rather cold water has made the Baltic into a sea that only hosts a restricted variety of species. Those that have adapted have, until quite recently at least, flourished. The Baltic has abounded with some species of Atlantic as well as typical fresh-water fish and seals. All this has made the Baltic into a very special and rich sea for human exploitation.

The sea routes of the Baltic have enabled trading contacts from the south to the north, from the west to the east, and vice versa. One ancient route was from the north German coast via the Danish isles along the south coast of Sweden. Then it continued via the sheltered ways
of passage inside the islands of Sweden's eastern coast up to the latitude of Åland. From there it crossed an open stretch of water into the Finnish archipelago, along the sheltered southern coast of Finland, right up to the head of the Gulf of Finland and then, via the Neva, it entered the great lake of Ladoga. As naval technology developed, ships no longer needed to follow the coast but could cross the open waters. The island of Gotland, situated right at the very centre of the Baltic, grew immensely important and wealthy during the Mediaeval ages. Today Gotland has lost its economic importance as a trading centre. Today, it is a popular tourist resort.

6. The major islands of the Baltic

There are tens of thousands of islands in the Baltic, ranging from small skerries of some thousand square metres to the largest island, Danish Sjaelland, which has an area of 7,027 square kilometres. Apart from the multitude of skerries and small islands in the Finnish and Swedish archipelagos there are some larger islands that need to be mentioned.

 Generally speaking, islands provide an environment that is rather different for human societies than the mainland. Fernand Braudel has pointed out that island communities are as a rule rather more conservative than mainland societies, withstanding change and novelties. In a sense, island communities are complete in themselves. Thus, islands resemble the valleys of mountain regions. On the whole, the major islands of the Baltic confirm Braudel's hypothesis. Some of the main islands are, or were at any rate, ethnically distinct communities.

People on islands, whether large or small, tend to keep to their own kind. Spouses are sought on the island rather than on the mainland. In itself, the sea does not prevent contact. On the contrary, the sea has always been a means of communication to islanders. The presence of the sea in their lives promotes development and novelties in ship-building. It is the spatial restriction of the island itself that becomes part of their mentality. They know instinctively that the territory of their island cannot expand. Islands in general represent a small world.

During the times of the Hanseatic league, the islands of the Baltic were extremely important trading points. With industrialisation, railways and modern land transport, the economic importance of the islands has declined, although their strategic importance has remained. In modern times these islands, like many others around the world, have suffered from the emigration of young people to better job
opportunities found on the mainland. This population drain has skewed the demographic distribution. A larger proportion of elderly persons will be found on the islands than in major cities. In the case of Åland, migration movements have been to Finnish mainland cities, such as Turku and Helsinki, as well as to Stockholm. The fact that island communities, however well they are serviced by communications with the mainland, tend to be worlds of their own, is one reason why island societies have always been favoured objects of study among social anthropologists.

There is no rule without exceptions. In this case the exceptions are the central Danish islands of Sjaelland, Fyn, Lolland, Falster and Møn, together with a large number of smaller islands. These islands are not isolated worlds but the very centre of the Danish state, commanding as they do the entrance to the Baltic. Sjaelland itself has well over two million inhabitants, which is approximately 40% of the total Danish population. Situated on Sjaelland is the dynamic and progressive city of København, dynamic and progressive at least as far as lifestyles are concerned. København and Sjaelland are not on the periphery. In the Scandinavian, and indeed in the Baltic context as a whole, they very much represent the centre.

The islands

Map 16. The islands. The Estonian islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa once had a dominant Swedish-speaking population, originating from settlers in 13th and 14th centuries. A good many of these Swedes were forced to resettle in the Ukraine by Catherine II in 1779. A Swedish-speaking minority existed, however, all the time until the Soviet occupation of Estonia.

The islands constituting Åland have a Swedish speaking population. They enjoy a certain amount of local autonomy. In 1921 the League of Nations decided that Åland was to be ruled by Finland, not by Sweden, despite the will of the Ålanders in a referendum.

The people of Rügen and Fehmarn, the largest German islands in the Baltic, are not ethnically distinct from the mainland population of northern Germany. Rügen, however, does have a history of Danish as well as Swedish rule.

The island of Gotland is Swedish territory today. Gotlanders themselves are viewed as Swedes. Historically, culturally and linguistically Gotland is special. The landscape is not typical of mainland Sweden but rather of western Estonia. The countryside abounds with Mediaeval memories. Nowhere else in Sweden are so many churches found per unit of land as on Gotland. The island has been ruled by Danes and by the Hansa. Visby, the main town, was an important station en route from Lübeck to Russia. During Mediaeval times Gotland enjoyed a semi-independent relationship to Sweden. It still has an atmosphere that makes it distinctly different from mainland Sweden.

The island of Bornholm is located in the southern Baltic. In the Danish context Bornholm is something of a small world in itself. The island is what remains under Danish rule of Denmark’s former eastern provinces. The Bornholm dialect is easier for a Swede to understand than the Danish spoken in København. For a brief period during the 17th century the island was under Swedish rule. There are, however, no traces of Swedish influence from those times. During the previous century Swedish farmhands were recruited to the properties on Bornholm. Ill.: Karin Hallgren
7. Living conditions – climate

The Baltic region’s latitude places it firmly within the world’s northern temperate zone. There are, however, significant variations in local climate that relate to the natural north-south differences. The further north one moves in the northern hemisphere, the colder it gets. This is due to the fact that the maximum altitude of the sun decreases as one moves towards the Pole. Lower solar altitude implies lower intensity of solar radiation.

However, in the Baltic region there is an east-west dimension to the climate as well, relating to contrasts between land and sea. In general, surfaces of land masses are heated more rapidly by solar radiation than the surfaces of oceans. In summer there is a surplus of radiation coming in from the sun in relation to the losses of heat at night when the sun has set. Continental land masses thus experience hot summers. The reverse applies to the winter climate. The losses of heat to the atmosphere are greater than the gains from incoming solar radiation. Continental land masses thus experience cold winters.

The surface of the sea does warm up during the summer. However, due to the fact that water is not an efficient absorber of heat, and due to the constant play of winds and currents, heated surface water mixes with colder water from deeper layers. During the winter months, winds and currents prevent the surface of oceans from freezing. Thus, maritime climate is characterised by temperate summers and winters.

These climatic factors greatly affect living conditions in the Baltic region as a whole. The western fringe enjoys a maritime climate which is tempered by warm water carried into the north Atlantic by the Gulf Stream. The climate of the eastern Baltic region is typical of the continental type.

By way of summary, we may distinguish three general climatic zones within the region. North of a line intersecting mid-Sweden, continuing through the gulf of Finland and right into Russia we have a climate which is subarctic. Winters are long and severe and summers are short and not especially hot. The further east one moves, the more pronounced is the continental type of climate. To the south and east of this line we have a humid continental climate giving rise to hot summers and cold winters. To the southwest of this line we have the maritime climate of western Europe characterised by moderately warm summers and not particularly cold winters.
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