A Baltic University Publication
Cultural diversity is a keyword for characterising the Baltic Sea Region. Culture is a loose concept and includes a variety of human activities, including religion and life-styles. From a political point of view, the status of languages and the right to use one’s own idiom is a measure of tolerance to cultural diversity. Some twenty-five languages with official status or considerable state protection are spoken in the region. To this number one could add several minority languages with lower status plus many tongues of recent immigrants from other European and non-European countries. The region lacks a natural lingua franca, but English is constantly gaining ground as a common means of communication in business, science, and other fields. There is, indeed, a fear in many countries that English will take over important domains from the national languages, but on the other hand one can now note an ongoing revitalisation of languages which had lost ground during the last century. In this age of so-called globalisation, there are actually many developments that reflect the vitality of local cultures and languages. One good example is the Barents Region (Nordkalotten) in the north with ambitions to use regional languages: the Kven language in northernmost Norway; Meänkieli, i.e. Tornedalian Finnish, in the border areas between northern Sweden and northern Finland; and several Saami languages. There is a growing literature in these languages.

Nowadays, representatives of governments and inter-governmental bodies declare that diversity is the richness of Europe. The European Council and the European Union strongly support the ideas that minority cultures and languages should be protected and supported. Hence, much has happened in the last three or four decades both on the grassroots level and on the highest political levels. One should add the many international conventions in support of minorities and the strong development in the sphere of human rights, especially since the mid-1990s. Human rights law normally supports individuals, not groups, but indirectly this field of international law also tends to strengthen cultural and language minorities.

Most countries display diversity within their borders, and many countries are bilingual or multilingual. Some have large population groups who do not belong to the titular nation. In Estonia and Latvia the conditions and rights of the Russian-speaking minorities were burning questions during the first decade of regained statehood after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. Both countries have large Russian populations, and many Russians felt alienated within the state and with the new rulers, but after the turn of the millennium it is clear that the integration of Russian minorities in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania for that matter, is improving. Germany and the Scandinavian countries have become increasingly multi-ethnic. First labour migrants, mainly form central and south European countries, and thereafter refugees from non-European countries have altered the composition of population, and the natives have had to face new cultural encounters. As was envisaged during the 1990s this can lead to deep scars in society if newcomers and their children are not integrated. Western and South European countries are performing a delicate balancing act. One the one hand, their ambition is to
Map 32. Peoples of the Baltic. The number of individuals in each group varies greatly from a few hundred to many millions. Their name marks the approximate centre of the region or country in which they live. Many people appear both as a majority culture in one country and as a minority elsewhere. Ill.: Karin Fallgren

- majority cultures
- territorial and other minorities with a long history in the region
- recent immigration group

show a human face to those newcomers who have the right, according to international law, to seek asylum abroad. On the other hand they are safeguarding social stability by not letting everybody in who wants to seek a brighter future in this rich part of the world. The political turbulence surrounding the Schengen Protocol, reflects this ambivalence. The picture is even more complicated since many European countries now have a weak demographic structure with low reproduction rates. In the long run, many European states are dependent on newcomers who can make an addition to the shrinking labour force.

If we want to derive advantage from the region’s cultural diversity we have to learn more about our neighbours, their culture and traditions. This chapter treats the phenomenon of cultural diversity mainly by focussing on the relation between majorities and minorities.