

Transformation Space Baltic Sea Region

An Introduction

The Baltic Sea region is a space of profound change. Multiple transformation processes intersect in it, shaped by social and cultural shifts that unfold at varying speeds across distinct areas. Technical innovations, structural adaptations and social change go hand in hand. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the Baltic Sea region as a multifaceted transformation space requires an interdisciplinary approach. The maritime natural and cultural landscapes with a rural character are increasingly threatened by climate change. Environmental factors shape the transformation of Baltic Sea societies just as much as the shared legacy of historical experiences of war, crises, and division, which is continuously reframed by recent and ongoing crises, such as the annexation of Crimea, increased migration, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. The concept of transformation in this volume is associated with a fundamental and long-lasting change in structures, functions and relationships in social, technical and ecological systems.¹ Despite the planning and modelling of future developments, transformation processes in the Baltic Sea region have not been linear, but can be perceived as erratic and fragmented challenges for actors and societal structures.

Transformations are characterised by both internal and external logics. From an external perspective, they are often understood as ruptures in social or systemic development, in which one system replaces another. Karl Polanyi, for example, describes the ›Great Transformation‹ towards an industrial society—marked by the rise of a market economy and democracy—as such a rupture.² Similarly, the shift from socialism to post-socialism can be interpreted through this dual lens, as internal processes of adjustment coexist with external perceptions of radical systemic change. The transformation of the

1 Bohn, Carolin/Fuchs, Doris/Kerkhoff, Antonius/Müller, Christian: (Wie) Kann eine Transformation zur Nachhaltigkeit gelingen?, in: id.: Gegenwart und Zukunft sozial-ökologischer Transformation, Baden-Baden 2019, pp. 7–24; Patterson, J. et al.: Exploring the governance and politics of transformations towards sustainability, in: Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions 24 (2017), pp. 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2016.09.001>.

2 Polanyi, Karl: The Great Transformation: the political and economic origins of our time, New York 1944.

German Democratic Republic (GDR) society exemplifies this perspective and is frequently analysed as a profound rupture in social and political structures.³

From an internal perspective, however, transformation processes are experienced and described as evolutionary, cyclical, erratic, discordant or even broken. Particularly within the social sciences, and especially in research on sustainability transformations, approaches have emerged that also account for continuous and incremental processes of change, placing less emphasis on disruptive moments that often only become visible retrospectively. These approaches are aimed at analysing long-term institutional and structural change. Against the background of eco-systemic and planetary limits,⁴ social change is conceptualised as only one dimension of broader eco-systemic dynamics. These dynamics are addressed through complementary perspectives drawn from transition research, social-ecological and sustainability research, social innovation research, and resilience research.⁵

This volume aims to explore current socio-ecological transformation processes in the Baltic Sea region in the context of the ongoing objective of sustainable development of the region and its societies. Although the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine increasingly dominate attention and political agendas, questions of sustainable development under the specific conditions of the Baltic Sea region remain decisive for the region's transformation—especially in the context of growing securitisation. The contributions take into account the region's cultural diversity and the extent to which cultural, regional, and local influences shape transformation processes. Conversely, it also investigates how, in turn, these processes impact cultural and regional identities. The economic, social, and geopolitical transformations experienced by post-socialist societies in the 1990s are an important foundation, but have been intersecting with sustainability transformation as a new ›master challenge‹ since the 2000s. Research results will contribute to our understanding of the region's recent past, present and future.

Taking into account the non-linear and uneven nature of the various changes in the Baltic Sea region, the concept of fragmentation of transforma-

3 Schwartz, Michael: Transformationsgesellschaft. DDR-Geschichte im vereinigten Deutschland, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 69 (2021), No. 2, pp. 346–360.

4 Bornemann, Basil: Environmental Governance in the Anthropocene: Challenges, Approaches and Critical Perspectives, in: Chandler, David/Müller, Franziska/Rothe, Delf (eds.): International Relations in the Anthropocene: New Agendas, New Agencies and New Approaches, Cham 2021, pp. 311–329.

5 Wittmayer, Julia/Hölscher, Katharina: Transformationsforschung. Definitionen, Ansätze, Methoden, Dessau-Roßlau 2017, p. 15.

tion processes provided the starting point for the present interdisciplinary investigations, in order to describe, understand and adequately analyse the meandering course of transformations. Here, fragments of the transformation process are seen as distinct yet interconnected parts of a larger whole, shaped by disruptions arising from differences in implementation and by the different perspectives, contexts, traditions, and locations of the actors and structures involved. The individual fragments of the transformation process remain distinct and can be analysed separately, even though they form an integrated whole. An understanding of fragmentation thus sheds light on the erratic paths these processes can take. Some of the available studies show that external pressure or crises situations, behavioural shifts and successful implementation strategies can channel the transformation process and purposefully bring together the fragments by harmonising different perspectives and innovation approaches. This dynamic creates a dialectical relationship between fragmentation and harmonisation, which reflects the complex interplay of cultural, social, economic, and political structures and institutions.

In this volume, we use the concept of *transformation spaces* to relate, first, to the historically conditioned and profound transformations of societies in the region and its diverse spatial constellations from local to transnational. It is then applied to distinguish the societal domains that are affected in different ways by this fundamental transformation. While these two dimensions may, but do not necessarily have to, be interdependent, it is essential for our purposes to consider them together. This is because transformations of political, economic, and social systems set the framework within which change in rural areas, the health sector, the military sphere, and human–nature relations unfolds—changes that are strongly shaped by societal conditions at both the national and transnational levels. These conditions are, at all times, informed by the experiences and expectations of societies and their actors. Consequently, shared heritage constitutes both an object of transformation research in its own right and a condition shaping other *transformation spaces*.

Transformation Space Baltic Sea Region

Contemporary transformations in the post-Cold War era, following the division of the Baltic Sea region by the Iron Curtain, are part of centuries-long experiences of change that have shaped the region into a historical transformation space formed by both anticipated and unexpected developments. Hereby, the Baltic Sea region is a construct that differs in scope, nature and

sense of belonging depending on one's perspective.⁶ Therefore, one can speak of different Baltic Sea regions depending on the temporal, spatial and social order.⁷ The central point of reference for most of these conceptualisations is the sea. Networks, cultural exchange and regional unity are determined by the sea between the littoral countries. When discussing the multiple configurations of the Baltic Sea region, we recognise the diversity of ways in which it has been conceptualised, shaped by distinct selections of historical events, influential actors, and institutional frameworks. These configurations are not fixed; rather, they reflect shifting narratives, scenarios, and models that emphasise particular dimensions. For example, the Hanseatic trade network represents an early economic formation, while Swedish and Russian hegemonies illustrate nationally and geopolitically dominated viewpoints. In contrast, the Cold War divide and the post-1991 Baltic Sea region, represented for example in the Council of the Baltic Sea States, reflect multinational or even global dynamics. Together, these configurations underscore the region's complex identity.

From a historical perspective, these different configurations of the Baltic Sea region appear in their chronological order as one transformation space with an evolutionary character. However, this linearity is not the case. None of the historical turns had been a logical and necessary consequence. Rather, each mark a distinctive transformation space in which for instance economic structures, social standards, technical innovations and political institutions developed. In analogy to the assumption of different Baltic Sea regions, we propose to distinguish transformation spaces which are fragments that can be temporally delimited in their overarching impact on society, particularly through a historical perspective. At the same time, however, these transformation spaces are also distinguishable in terms of content by the object of transformation. Transformation processes thus have a temporal, spatial and content-related component, which in turn can vary in duration, size and innovation due to the cultural and social conditions of change. Due to the simultaneity of transformation processes, the (fluid) spaces in which these processes take place can overlap or be interconnected.

6 For a discussion of regional constructs, see Ermann, Ulrich/Priebs, Axel: *Die Region—ein Phantom?*, in: Ermann, Ulrich/Höfner, Malte/Hastnaker, Sabine/Preininger, Ernst Michael/Simic, Danko (eds.): *Die Region—Eine Begriffserkundung*, Bielefeld 2021, pp. 13–25.

7 Drost, Alexander: *Ostseeräume. Umbruch zwischen kultureller Einheit und politischer Krise in einer europäischen Seeregion um 1800*, in: Loeser, Martin (ed.): *»Verwandlung der Welt«? Die Musikkultur des Ostseeraums in der Sattelzeit*, Berlin 2016, pp. 21–33.

For the Baltic Sea region and the establishment of a regional identity, Christianisation marked such a transformation space that was formed in the process of cultural unification of the medieval Baltic Sea region, which was already closely intertwined through Vikings and the connections between the Holy Roman Empire and the Nordic domains.⁸ At the same time, and closely connected to this, was the economic transformation of the region. In the context of the Hanseatic League, trade relations assumed a constitutive role in corporatist developments, informing processes of appropriating the Baltic Sea region and fostering a perception of the region as interconnected through trading outposts. Neither of these transformations spaces is congruent, nor do they have the same duration. However, both processes were largely dependent on each other, and their history is therefore often told in conjunction where they overlap. The decline of the Hanseatic League in the 17th century marks another transformation space of economic and governmental change but has to be separated from the Christianisation narrative. Consumption patterns and global trade with the Americas and Asia on the one hand, and territorialisation of stately power interfered with the Hanseatic structures. Additionally, the Reformation, as a cultural, social and political transformation, caused an ecclesiastical reorganisation in the Baltic Sea region. This reorganisation required the strengthening of monarchical structures,⁹ new social structures in the form of manorialism¹⁰ and a retrospectively perceived cultural space ›Baltic Sea‹ as ›*mare lutheranum*‹.¹¹

The subsequent formation of imperial structures, on the one hand, and their military enforcement, on the other, show the innovations in military and diplomatic matters, thus refuting the long-held assumption of North-Eastern Europe's backwardness in the early modern period.¹² However, the distinct fragments of these transformation spaces can usually not be identified by disruptive events. The Baltic Sea region is a space of ›peaceful‹ non-disruptive transformation. Especially the Nordic socio-political transformations can be

8 North, Michael: Geschichte der Ostsee. Handel und Kulturen, München 2011; Selart, Anti (ed.): Baltic Crusades and Societal Innovation in Medieval Livonia, 1200–1350, Leiden 2022.

9 Klinge, Matti: Die Ostseewelt, Helsinki 2010.

10 North: Geschichte der Ostsee, pp. 121ff.

11 Assel, Heinrich/Steiger, Johann Anselm/Walter, Axel E. (eds.): Reformatio Baltica. Kulturwirkungen der Reformation in den Metropolen des Ostseeraums, Berlin/Boston 2018.

12 Frost, Robert I.: The Northern Wars: War, State and Society in Northeastern Europe, 1558–1721, Harlow, UK 2000.

described as adaptive rather than revolutionary.¹³ For Scandinavia, including Finland, a classification of the »*Sattelzeit*«¹⁴ in the global perspectives on transformation through enlightenment means that the ›political cultures‹¹⁵ of the Baltic Sea region experienced less of a crisis than continuous change.

The Baltic Sea region has long been temporally and spatially divided in terms of political development since the end of the 18th century. The transformation space of nation state building is a fragmented one comprising the states in the west and north of the Baltic Sea region as one fragment and those in the east as another. Nation building in the north-west is characterised by a lack of political or national patriotism but cultural patriotism in the form of (pan-)Scandinavism that continues to this day.¹⁶ The international significance of the ›Nordic model‹ plays an important role as well: strong welfare states in which, not least, transformations of the gender order, postulated as an ideal since the Enlightenment, have been tested and partially realised. The eastern fragment of the transformation space can be distinguished by belated developments and different power-political structures. As expressed by the search for and discovery of a common language, literature, and history, it had not yet developed into a form of subversive political patriotism and thus, delayed brief phases of nation-state formation until the 20th century. Alongside the nationalisation processes, the incomplete agrarian reforms of the 19th century and the change in land use also had a long-term impact on the structures of rural areas in the Baltic Sea region well into the 20th and 21st centuries.

Disruptive change, however, was a major feature of the ›Transformation Space Baltic Sea region‹ of the 20th century. For the Baltic states, Finland and Poland, the end of the First World War and the revolution in Russia marked the beginning of a state transformation characterised by the development of independent state institutions and democratic societies. At the same time, the international system was strengthened by the emergence of

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- 13 Ihalainen, Pasi/Sennefelt, Karin/Bregnsbo, Michael/Winton, Patrick (eds.): Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution. Nordic Political Cultures, 1740–1820, Farnham, UK 2011.
 - 14 Koselleck, Reinhart: Einleitung, in: Brunner, Otto/Conze, Werner/Koselleck, Reinhart (eds.): Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland. Band 1, Stuttgart 1972, pp. XIII–XXIII.
 - 15 Munck, Thomas: Preface, in: Ihalainen, Pasi/Sennefelt, Karin/Bregnsbo, Michael/Winton, Patrick (eds.): Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution. Nordic Political Cultures, 1740–1820, Farnham, UK 2011, pp. XVII–XX.
 - 16 Glenthøj, Rasmus/Nordhagen Ottosen, Morten: Experiences of War and Nationality in Denmark and Norway, 1807–1815, Basingstoke 2014.

multilateral institutions such as the League of Nations, which, for example, shaped the post-war peace order, including the Free City status of Gdańsk. The transformation space of nation building in the east disintegrated into a historical fragment with the Second World War and only reappeared as an important reference point in the nation building process after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The Second World War, however, marks the emergence of new transformation spaces, focused on national, international and transnational reorganisation, the reconstruction of economies and societies under different auspices, with distinct and ideologised social and legal structures. Out of these transformations, the Baltic Sea region emerged as a deeply divided space. The Soviet-backed transformation into socialist or communist societies in the Eastern Bloc was in direct opposition to the liberal-democratic transformation of Western societies in the Baltic Sea region along US lines. Likewise, the economic transformation in the sense of a planned economy in the East contrasted with the market economy of the West. Both transformations were characterised by an ideologisation, the corset of which could only be abandoned with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc as another disruptive event. This was the point of departure for the fragmented transformation processes that have been ongoing since the 1990s.

Policy transfers after the fall of the Iron Curtain were initially framed by narratives of peace and prosperity. Yet, viewed three decades later, they appear considerably more complex than the assumed linearity had implied. This can be seen, for example, in the continuing powerful debates on different readings of the transformation process that has taken place in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea region since the 1990s.¹⁷ While the unexpectedly heterogeneous ›East‹ found itself and perceives itself in a second-class position despite unique efforts in the adaptation and transformation of political and economic systems,¹⁸ the liberal and capitalist West's expectations of the ›East‹ and its ›harmonious and supposedly smooth‹¹⁹ integration into the economic and political system of liberal capitalism were disappointed. Rather, the economic and political transformation of post-socialist societies and the entire Baltic

17 Nußberger, Angelika/Aust, Martin/Heinemann-Grüder, Andreas/Schmid, Ulrich: Osteuropa zwischen Mauerfall und Ukrainekrieg. Besichtigung einer Epoche, Frankfurt a.M. 2022, pp. 14–21.

18 Kalmar, Ivan: *White But Not Quite*. Central Europe's illiberal revolt, Bristol 2022, p. 45; Oschmann, Dirk: *Der Osten: eine westdeutsche Erfindung*, Berlin 2023, pp. 56f.; Morina, Christina: *Tausend Aufbrüche*. Die Deutschen und ihre Demokratie seit den 1980er Jahren, München 2023, pp. 21–23, pp. 239–242.

19 Nußberger/Aust/Heinemann-Grüder/Schmid: *Osteuropa*, p. 15.

Sea region is characterised by ruptures. These became apparent during the 2008 financial crisis and in the treatment of migrants in 2015, but were particularly evident in responses to and assessments of Russia's aggression against Ukraine since 2014 and the ensuing full-scale war since 2022. This seemed to mark an epochal turning point,²⁰ which further intensified the increased evaluation of transformation societies and their results after 25 or 30 years and against the background of new nationalist tendencies in the wake of the migration crisis,²¹ pandemic,²² and Brexit,²³ thus highlighting the fractures in the integration and transformation processes. Despite a macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea region (2009/13) and *Fridays for future* as a transnational movement with global impact since 2018, the sustainability transformation has also not been able to develop an unbroken perceptible continuity. It has been slowed down, shifted and fragmented by crises and the associated transformations that have become necessary socially, economically, and politically.

Transformation Spaces in the Baltic Sea Region

This volume centres on the socio-ecological transformation of the Baltic Sea region, framing it as the master challenge for the region's future development. Four key areas have been identified in which transformation processes affect society as a whole: security architecture and securitisation, infrastructures, sustainability, and heritage. The authors examine these areas within the interplay of fragmentation and harmonisation. They apply a set of cross-cutting research criteria to operationalise the analysis of fragmented transformation processes in the Baltic Sea region. On this basis, they identify and describe the transformation spaces that emerge from them.

While security architecture constitutes a distinct transformation space in its own right—one that has received heightened attention over the past decade as Russia shifted from a cooperative to a confrontational policy—securitisa-

20 *ibid.*

21 Brug, Wouter van der/Harteveld, Eelco: The conditional effects of the refugee crisis on immigration attitudes and nationalism, in: *European Union Politics* 22 (2021), No. 2, pp. 227–247.

22 Lewandowsky, Marcel/Leonhardt, Christoph/Blätte, Andreas: Germany: The Alternative for Germany in the COVID-19 Pandemic, in: Ringe, Nils/Rennó, Lucio (eds.): *Populists and the Pandemic. How Populists Around the World Responded to COVID-19*, London 2022, pp. 237–249.

23 Brubaker, Roger: Why populism?, in: *Theory and Society* 46 (2017), No. 5, pp. 357–385.

tion represents a related but broader phenomenon. Emerging from the same geopolitical shift, securitisation extends beyond the military sphere and affects other transformation spaces, including energy transitions and infrastructures, legal frameworks, and even the cultural heritage shaped by old and emerging hegemonies within the region. Legacies, however, also affect the transformation of security architecture. In their in-depth study of hard security measures, Andris Banka and Margit Bussmann identify a cooperative deterrence-based process of harmonisation in the transformation of regional military structures. This process includes NATO's enlargement and Germany's emergence in a new role as a military power in the Baltic Sea region. With Germany's historical legacy as an aggressor widely regarded as overcome and the expansion of NATO to encompass all democratic littoral states, Banka and Bussmann nevertheless identify remaining elements of fragmentation in the security architecture, namely in military infrastructure and mobility.

Infrastructures constitute another central field of analysis in this volume. They provide the material and organisational foundations for social order, economic development, and socio-political stability. Infrastructures themselves have undergone profound transformations. They must adapt to sustainability goals, respond to securitisation dynamics, and ensure the provision of essential public services across the entire country, also in rural areas.

The interplay between security concerns, sustainable development and technological change becomes most evident in the field of energy, and particularly in the energy transition. Michael Kalis and Marie Becker stress the potential of the Baltic Sea region for a sustainable energy transition which became also evident in the joint efforts and response to the energy crisis caused by the Russian war in Ukraine. In the heightened awareness for energy security Kalis and Becker see an opportunity for overcoming currently different national transition policies which form quite different transformation spaces within the entire region. Nuclear power, LNG, hydrogen—the Baltic Sea region so far has seen a multi-speed and a multi-pathway development of energy supply. Hydrogen hereby proposes a chance for another harmonisation of renewable energy policies, as Kalis points out in his second chapter in this volume. Adapting the concept of energy trilemma, he analyses the national and transnational hydrogen policies and regional hydrogen economy, which in the context of securitisation and decarbonisation, form a Nordic–Baltic Hydrogen Corridor. Nevertheless, while both studies demonstrate how regional responses to external and internal threats—linked both to energy security and to the protection of critical infrastructures—can produce harmonising effects, Kalis also shows, how different perceptions about stable energy supply in

many respects continues to be dominated by national decision-making and regulatory frameworks, despite the presence of the EU and the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Transformations in the health infrastructures of the Baltic Sea states reveal a comparable degree of fragmentation. Innovation acts as a key driver of systemic change. Steffen Fleßa and Melissa Nawroth therefore examine the adoption of innovations in healthcare services across the region and analyse the transformation spaces that emerge, which remain predominantly national in scope. From digitalisation to vaccines: viewed from a comparative regional perspective, global innovations in healthcare follow markedly different timelines and pathways in terms of adoption and systemic adaptation. Fleßa and Nawroth demonstrate that these differences cannot be explained by quantitative indicators alone. Rather, divergent transformation trajectories are shaped by systemic, cultural and local factors. Training traditions, institutional responsibilities, financing structures, and public discourses reflect distinct national cultures of adaptive capacity within health systems. Thus, in the fields of digital health, pre-clinical emergency care, and COVID-19 vaccination alike, renewal processes remain fragmented despite shared experiences of cross-border crises.

A similarly fragmented picture emerges in the field of public service provision in rural areas. The Baltic Sea region is characterised by its cross-border rural structures, which give rise—below the national level—to highly diverse responses to the dual challenge of limited demand and the nationwide maintenance of service provision. Even defining ›rural areas‹ proves difficult, although for comparative statistical purposes the NUTS 3 classification (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) has become established as a framework for identifying sparsely populated regions. The comparative analysis of public structures in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, and Germany, and the mobility of policies between these countries, by Clemens Lisdat, Frauke Richter-Wilde, Daniel Schiller, and Christine Tamásy demonstrates that fragmentation in renewal processes is rooted primarily in differing degrees of administrative decentralisation, the financial autonomy of local authorities, and the associated distribution of responsibilities.

In the context of transformation aims and achievements, one might expect EU-wide programmes to exert a harmonising influence on the renewal of public service systems in rural areas, particularly in light of the substantial financial resources allocated to rural development and EU cohesion policy. The leading programme in this regard is LEADER (*Liaison Entre Actions de*

Développement de l'Économie Rurale). In their analysis of the programme's transformation, Vassilis Kitsos and Christine Tamásy operationalise criteria such as area size, population, and density to show how the policy-defined spaces vary across Baltic Sea states. Their attempt to identify coherence effects below the EU level, at the macro-regional or regional scale, reveals only limited harmonisation despite the programme's considerable flexibility.

Europe has committed itself to a sustainable and environmentally responsible transformation of its democratic systems and structures. This commitment extends to policies on rural development, the energy transition, and the expansion of security infrastructures. As a master challenge—articulated, for example, in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and implemented through initiatives such as the Blue Bioeconomy Roadmap—sustainable transformation constitutes a genuinely transnational transformation space. It becomes visible in numerous cross-border connectors for renewable energy transmission, in joint efforts to protect fish stocks in the Baltic Sea, in the promotion of sustainable building materials, and in the rewetting of peatlands across the region. Sustainability thus emerges as a cross-cutting and influential factor across all transformation spaces introduced in this volume. It demonstrates that transformative processes and initiatives depend fundamentally on broad societal engagement. Their success requires not only public support but also the active transfer of conceptual knowledge into practical action.

Part of this transfer is the adaptation of the concept of *Ocean Literacy* into its Baltic Sea-specific form, *Baltic Sea Literacy*, as elaborated and operationalised by Rebecca Demmler and Susanne Kleemann. In their chapter, they examine both structural and individual reservoirs of knowledge and agency in relation to the sustainable management of the Baltic Sea and its natural resources. Their analysis situates individual awareness of marine risks alongside the expansion of sustainability-driven regulatory frameworks designed to protect the sea. This relationship forms part of the broader process of sustainable transformation. Demmler and Kleemann advocate a more collaborative approach that bridges top-down regulation and bottom-up engagement. By applying the concept and investigating individual threat perceptions—particularly regarding marine pollution—and personal engagement with the sea, Baltic Sea Literacy has the potential to strengthen environmental awareness and promote responsible behaviour. It thus constitutes an important instrument for fostering societal participation in region-wide efforts toward the sustainable transformation of the maritime environment and the advancement of blue governance.

Another cross-cutting and transnational transformation space with considerable impact on the processes addressed in this volume emerges from shared cultural heritage. As a re-actualisation of the past in the present, historical legacies shape processes of meaning-making and thereby influence culturally embedded identities of individuals and societies. In this way, legacies contribute to the constitution of transformation spaces. Experiences gained in times of crisis may be reactivated in subsequent crises and can provide valuable interpretative and practical resources. At the same time, however, legacies may generate inertia, hinder change through rigid structures, or reproduce negative experiences and political misuse.

In their study, Isabelle Dolezalek and Charlotte Wenke show how the shifting interpretations of the Hiddensee gold treasure give rise to a transformation space of shared cultural heritage spanning the Baltic Sea region. Their analysis highlights the powerful role of cultural factors in shaping transformation processes. Drawing on an interactive model based on continuous exchange with the public, they trace the changing meanings attributed to the treasure through political, social, and cultural narratives. These reinterpretations have been closely tied to political systems and ideologies, as well as to experiences of precarity and crisis. In both mediated projections and direct exhibition practices, the historical value of the artefact is juxtaposed with its material worth. By foregrounding the transformation of its cultural meaning, the authors contribute to the preservation of this heritage through critical reinterpretation rather than static conservation.

Those who have not yet grasped the depth and conflictual nature of contemporary geopolitical, security, and democratic debates will encounter in Solveig Wang's contribution the enduring force of historical experience and its transformation within postcolonial societies connected to the Baltic Sea region. Focusing on the statues of Volodymyr the Great in Kyiv and Hans Egede in Nuuk, Wang conceptualises fragmentation through the ambivalence of monuments as simultaneous symbols of authority and sites of resistance. By extending the spatial imagination of the Baltic Sea region both historically and in the present, the chapter situates debates about monument removal within broader societal polarisation. Here, authoritative narratives are so fundamentally contested that they themselves become catalysts of conflict.

A distinctive feature of these studies of transformation processes in the Baltic Sea region—and of the underlying concept of transformation spaces emerging in specific contexts shaped by particular actors, perspectives, innovations, and legacies—is the interdisciplinary exchange that enables their visualisation. Although such collaboration has been demanding and not

uniformly successful, it has revealed a long-term cartographic transformation process stretching from 18th-century land surveys to 21st-century digital mapping. In their chapter, Sebastian van der Linden, Bernd Bobertz, Peter Stoll and Jörg Hartleib examine the harmonisation of methods, data, and techniques that today allow maps to be produced, interpreted, and understood across different national contexts within the Baltic Sea region. This harmonised cartographic foundation provides the basis for a platform capable of making fragmented transformation spaces visible and comparable.

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