of its hard-working people, a picture that is remarkably close to the image produced by the UBC.164

Jōul in Estonia, Joulu in Finland, Jul in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Yule on the British Isles. [...] Today, these peoples share a common mentality expressed in rationality, stubbornness and diligence. They rank the highest in the world in Internet connections and in mobile phone penetration, lowest in the world in corruption.165

Visionary statements of this type recurrently suggest the idea of the Baltic Sea area and certain parts of it respectively to be united in some sort of innate or even genetically inbred moral exclusiveness, if not supremacy. A less popular connotation in this regard is offered by modern history: precedent ideas about the existence of a morally and ethnically superior breed of man inhabiting the area were produced in the context of Scientific Racism under the German Nazi Regime. The proto Nazi race theorist Hans F. K. Günther identified the Aryan race to be constituted by two major ethnical strands: the Nordic and the Eastern Baltic one. The Nordic-Baltic race was perceived as the natural leader and the essentially Moral Man.166

Even though this comparison might appear overdrawn if referred to in this context it nevertheless helps to characterise the argumentative strategies politicians and other region-building actors have tried to apply in this regard. The idea of moral supremacy albeit on very different grounds has also a strong tradition in the Nordic context.167 Even though these visions were sometimes carried too far and became “counterproductive to efficient practical co-operation” they nevertheless helped to create a feeling of common identity around the Baltic Sea.168

V. The Argument of Challenges – United in Diversity

Another argumentative tool that was implemented in the Baltic Sea region-building discourse was the accentuation of challenges. While many associations and initiatives in the early post Cold War wave of regionalism availed themselves of the above-mentioned history tool, others strictly abstained from the attempt to link present ambitions to any sort of alleged historical predecessor, or to avail themselves of identity-related arguments. These region-building projects rather appealed to the “other side of the coin”, the differences, challenges and problems that the region was and is facing in present days, and promoted Baltic Sea Regionalism as a useful forum to overcome obviously existing differences as well as to find constructive solutions for common problems such as the lack of infrastructure, illegal migration, drugs- and arms trafficking, environmental degradation etc.. Instead of reviving historical concepts, they chose to emphasise the fact that the BSR has never been a homogenous entity and that,

165 Ibid.
166 See also FISCHER Eugen/GÜNTHER Hans F.K.: Deutsche Köpfe nordischer Rasse. Munich 1927.
167 For more details, see ØSTERGÅRD Uffe: The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity from Composite States to Nation-States. Copenhagen 1997.
throughout history, the Baltic Sea States have mostly regarded themselves as parts of other regional constructs such as the Nordic sphere or Continental Europe. A gaze back into history shows that indeed the powers surrounding the Baltic Sea have “more often been brought together in conflict than in cooperation.”\textsuperscript{169}

The CBSS is one of the outstanding examples in this regard. In contrast to all the enthusiastic visions promoted by other regional associations and initiatives, this organisation rather committed itself to the functional challenges that emerged after the political changes of 1989/1990.

The recent dramatic changes in Europe herald a new era of European relations where the confrontation and division of the past is replaced by partnership and cooperation. An enhanced and strengthened Baltic cooperation is a natural and logical consequence of these events.\textsuperscript{170}

The CBSS never tried to build on a value-laden rhetoric but rather aimed at pointing out the differences to emphasise the respective need for cooperation. In one of her public statements, Gabriele Kötschau, then CBSS Secretariat Director, took up the issue of Baltic togetherness and the challenge and problem of “branding the region”.

Why should we ‘brand’ this region that has much in common, but has even more differences? What is the Baltic Sea Region known for? [...] What do we have in common? One has to talk of something intangible, the ‘Baltic brand’ as a combination of attributes, something that is both tangible – by geography and intangible – through memory and emotional attachment to an ideal of the Baltic Sea. [...] We as nations are so different – so how to convince us to act as one region with one brand identity? Exactly for this reason! We are rich on diversity and it is exactly for this reason that we must come together. Why should we look homogenous? We are not! The link between perception and reality – that is the art of selling, even if the Baltic Sea Region has a lot to sell, the buyers must believe in it – and we ourselves, convinced of our region, should be encouraged to do so.\textsuperscript{171}

VASAB 2010 (Visions and Strategies about the Baltic 2010) provides yet another albeit less clear-cut case in point. In most of its recent declarations and action plans the organisation is not reluctant to talk openly about the problems that the region is facing because of its political, cultural and structural disparity.

The BSR is maybe the least homogenous region in Europe. This creates a demand for internal cohesion and is a source of particular market potentials. [...] The BSR spans arctic to temperate climate zones. Its 103 million inhabitants live in 11 different countries or parts thereof, in which as many major languages are spoken.\textsuperscript{172}

However, in its founding declarations, VASAB 2010 was less outspoken. It also appealed to the history tool by clearly emphasizing the historical background of its strategic ambitions and defined the re-integration of the region as its “top objective”.

\textsuperscript{171} KÖTSCHAU Gabriele: Branding the Region. What, by the way, is “Uusimaa”? Strömsborg Direct. In: Baltinfo. CBSS Newsletter, November-December 2006, p. 12.
The BSR, in the millennium until the early 20th century, developed a rich network in many areas of society. Trade was widespread; the Baltic Sea provided an important link in the transport system. The Viking Age, the Hanseatic Epoch and other transnational networks succeeded one another. The spread of Christianity, during the 10th century, played an important role in cultural co-operation. Regional development occurred along the shores of the Baltic Sea (with corresponding urban networks), expanding from there to the hinterland. After World War II, Europe was split into two parts. Most contacts across this curtain were cut off. Since the recent end of this period of separation re-integration is a top issue. Yet another example in the above-mentioned context is the Northern Dimension Initiative (NDI), launched by Finland in 1997. The Finnish initiators completely refrained from any sort of ideology-related rhetoric and simply counted on the argument of European responsibility. Paavo Lipponen, then Finnish Prime Minister and founding father of the NDI, put it as follows:

With the accession of Finland and Sweden, the European Union now extends from the Mediterranean to just a few kilometres from the Barents Sea. The Union has thus acquired a natural ‘northern dimension.’ We need a policy for this dimension too.

The fact that Finland aimed at bringing some of its foremost geopolitical interests onto the EU working agenda was probably the basic reasoning behind this strategic choice. The initiators did not employ any region-based argumentation; they rather chose to point at the problems and challenges this region was facing, underlining the inherent responsibility of the EU not to close the eyes in front of its mission. Joenniemi and Lehti actually identified this aspect as part of the reason why the EU ND never gained much public support or even cognition in the region.

No narrative has been coined in the context of the NDI that would aim at reconfiguring the past and linking into earlier historical experiences. There is nothing like the Hanse of the Baltic Sea related discourse or the elevation of the Pomor period when imagining a Baltic Region. Since there is no obviously identity-related rhetoric present in the discourse on the NDI, people do not feel that the matter is one of considerable urgency and relevance in relation to who ‘we’ are in the post Cold War period.

The utilitarian and functional approach applied in the EU ND context did obviously refrain from joining the regional discourse about inclusive Baltic togetherness. In recent years, the question whether this actually favoured the effectiveness of the policy or not was part of a wider academic debate about the overall success or failure of the policy.

176 For more details, see chapter “Evaluation: The EU ND Reconsidered”, p.148-.
F. Mental Geography – The Constitution of the BSR as a Spatial Concept

The notion of a region generally implies the existence of a spatial unit, which is at least to some extent self-contained and thereby evidently recognisable and delimitable as an entity. In fact, after the end of the Cold War, part of the European North has developed into some sort of regional unit: the BSR. Numerous regional initiatives, associations and networks carrying the Baltic label give us a “proof” that in fact, there must be some sort of regional entity in Northern Europe that is gathering around the Baltic Sea. Still, ascribing a cohesive image to an area as ample and diverse as the BSR seems to be a bold venture. Jasper von Altenbockum chose a quite provocative way to put it:

There is nothing, which doesn’t exist at [sic!] the Baltic. A politician would however struggle if asked: is there a Baltic? Because he would have to say: Oh yes, there are Baltic programs, Baltic concepts, Baltic sub-regions, Baltic councils and Baltic conferences. [As] said: there is nothing, which doesn’t exist at the Baltic Sea. Something for everyone and nothing for all.177

In fact, is there any supportive evidence for ‘Baltic togetherness’ besides the mere existence of ‘Baltic’ associations? The BSR is a uniquely diverse geographical area, on the political as well as on the economic, cultural and ideological level. What actually accounts for comprehensive Balticness besides the plain fact of physical vicinity? These are questions raised in the context of “mental geography”.178 In contrast to physical geography, mental geography is widely determined by normative factors, such as identity, values and cultural connotations.

Identity markers always involve a choice (what we wish to belong to?), because the social world is defined not just by physical constraints but also in spiritual and normative categories.179

After the end of the Cold War, the spatial framework in Northern Europe has considerably altered and diversified, a development that Jukarainen labelled the “growth of spatial complexity”.180 Today, the region features a variety of virtually constructed sub-spaces, such as the ‘Nordic’ or the ‘Baltic sphere’. The following chapters deal with the consistencies of the ‘Baltic Sea Region’ as a spatial concept, questioning and analysing the various sub-spaces that have emerged in the course of the recent international developments.

I. Is ‘Nordic’ Plus ‘Baltic’ Equal to Inclusive ‘Balticness’?

The demise of the unnatural Cold War division and the national independence of the three Baltic States paved the way for different forms of regional cohesion in the BSR, and thus, for the development of an inclusive ‘Balticness’. Formerly isolated sub-spaces

178 See chapter “The Discursive Construction of Regions”, p. 170-.