An alleged Baltic Sea non-war community would lack an important feature, which is, moral insularity building on mutual “expectations for peaceful change.” The EU accession of the Baltic States institutionally marked the fact that a Nordic non-war community was merely perceived as an option or tool to prepare full integration in the wider European (and Northern Atlantic) community. Never explicitly rejecting this option, on the long run, they strived for “more central” channels to secure their interests and progressively enhance their geopolitical position. Looking back, there has never been a Baltic liability to prefer going for a Northern European alternative and to join the club of reluctant, eurosceptical and exceptionalist member states as just where Sweden could be counted in. Equally, the Nordic system never really opened itself for this kind of extension. The Nordic States, and most of all Sweden and Finland, tried to take over a guiding role in the process of Baltic post-Soviet reorientation. However, these efforts were not aiming at a broader reorientation of Nordicness towards a more comprehensive concept of “Northern Europe”. Nordicness has remained exclusive, a fact that could not least be told from the rhetoric style employed in the inner-Nordic debate about the Baltic inclusion.713

II. Application Pattern II: Sketching a Model of Explanation

Application pattern II addresses the question of how the meso-level (i.e. the BSR) relates to its macro-level framework, the wider complex of European integration or more specifically, the European Union. The main point of reference here is the consideration presented at the beginning of this section that both Baltic Sea Regionalism (a meso-phenomenon) and the European project (a macro-phenomenon) can be seen as instances of “regional integration” or “regionalism”.714 There are many ways of how the two levels can be related to each other.715

The following figure tries to outline the spectrum of possibilities in this respect.

713 For a detailed discussion, see chapter “Old North vs. New Regionalism. Visions Competing for the Same Space?”, p. 76-.
715 For a discussion of system levels and considerations about the micro-meso-macro distinction of regionalism, see chapter “Levels of Regionalism: Macro-, Meso- and Micro-Regionalism”, p. 37-.
As shown in the figure, macro-regionalism could, for example, be perceived to be building on regionalist formations at lower levels. From another point of view, it could be seen to provide the framework or means that enable (sub)regional activity. The various possibilities listed above show clearly that most relationships are based on a two-way dynamic. Equally, the different variations are not all mutually exclusive but partly interlocking or conditioning each other. Given the variety of possible relations, this list remains exemplary and non-exhaustive. Application pattern II could be addressed by making use of a traditional tool current in the field of IR. Many IR studies approach research questions from a systemic perspective, asking questions like: how is phenomenon X embedded in the wider system of global politics? How does it relate to the ‘outside world’? To what extent is a regional entity subject to systemic impacts and of what sort and intensity are these impacts? How does the regional entity persist despite broad systemic impacts and with what instruments and action strategies does it seek to encounter what infiltrates from ‘outside’? While searching for an answer to this sort of questions, IR studies very often avail themselves of abstract models that help to visualize how a bilateral relationship is e.g. marked by superiority and dependence, or to demonstrate how an alleged centre relates to its periphery.

Hence, what could be derived from the scheme above are various different models of meso-macro inter-relation or inter-action, where single elements from the list together form a distinct type of relationship pattern. Picking out for example the idea of the macro-level entity (in this case, the EU) providing the (necessary) framework for regionalist activities at the meso-level (Baltic Sea Regionalism), the following elements could be combined to build a coherent and comprehensive model of explanation:

- the macro-level provides the necessary normative (or other) framework for the emergence or functioning of regionalist action at the (sub)regional level;
- the macro-level enables Meso-Regionalism by offering appropriate systemic conditions;
- the meso-level is dependent on the framing quality of the macro-level;

Figure 8: Interaction and Influence Flows Between Meso- and Macro-Level
the meso-level forms part of the macro-level by operationalising integration as delegated ‘from above’ downwards to the sub-regional and sub-sub-regional/local level.

Following this procedure, different distinct models can be developed that help to approach the macro-meso issue on the basis of a systemic perspective. When adding a time factor, the different models can also be thought of as scenarios, as development patterns whose underlying cause-effect logic also informs about future structural or functional inclinations and ultimately, the finality of the complex and interlocking integration processes that compete against each other across levels, concur or happen independently from each other. The models presented hereinafter are seen to typify the most current (and obvious) relationship patterns, treating the BSR as

- a European region or a subset of the wider European integration framework;
- a peripheral region positioned at the margins of the EU system of gravity, (a model that could be seen as a variation of a);
- an auto-dynamic entity that emancipates from the EU framework and incorporates a more comprehensive Europeanness with border-transcending elements.

The explanatory power of these models is limited to the extent that they offer little proficiency for the identification of cause and effect chains or the exact ascertainment of independent variables underlying a relationship as complex as the one between the BSR and the EU. However, this working tool helps to structure a multidimensional research problem by offering a practicable way of depicting relationships between any sort of delimitable entities that emerge, operate and develop in the intricate system of IR.

1. The BSR as a Subset

According to this model, the BSR is perceived a sub-region of the EU and could – drawing on the terminology of set theory (Mengenlehre) – be termed a “subset” that is largely framed and dominated by its “superset”, the EU polity including all its normative implications. The impact of the macro-level is perceived to dominate any regionalist action occurring at a lower level. The BSR is subordinate to the wider EU framework to the extent that both its emergence and future development is dependent on the course of the general integration process. Accordingly, regionalist action within the subset cannot be seen as detached from the broader frame of European integration.

"region" is the subset of "EU"
"EU" is the superset of "region"

Figure 9: Model of Explanation I: Subset vs. Superset
A model that builds on similar considerations is the one assuming a Europe of “Concentric Circles”. It has originally entered the scholar debate in the context of general European integration and the question of a prospective “variable geometry” for the European project. The circles were then perceived to depict subgroups of member states, which have achieved or strive for different levels of integration, with the candidate countries and prospective members building some sort of ‘adjacent circle’ around the Union. A similar notion is the one of selected or ‘functional circles’ (e.g. the currency, security and defence circle) with the EU building the unifying space or centre. Applied to the context of meso-regional formations relating to a macro-level context, the EU would be interpreted as the centre and reference point for its ‘adjacent’ circles, the meso-regions on the European continent. As the ‘centre’ of this constellation, the EU would be seen to function as a regulatory power relating to its ‘outer elements’ by way of standardised and/or multilateral patterns of interaction. Applying a similar interpretation to the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Michael Emerson suggested calling it the “Cobweb Model”. This constellation could also be illustrated as a “Hub-and-Spoke-Model”.  

These two models depict two different ways of how the macro-centre (i.e. the EU) can relate to certain regional entities or how the macro and the meso-level interact with each other. While the Cobweb Model allows both for multilateral and bilateral relations and action flows, the Hub-and-Spoke-Model clearly emphasises the bilateral element. This bilaterality can also be interpreted in terms of a differentiated approach, which involves

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that the macro-core develops a specific framework for each regional entity (e.g. different nation states based in a region, or different meso-regions in Europe), seeking to take into account the individual specificities of each bilateral link ‘outwards’.

2. *The BSR in a Cobweb Variation: Peripheral and Marginal?*

The first model of concentric circles could be developed further by stressing certain aspects about the alleged meso-macro relationship. Assuming that the core function of the Union is very distinct and strongly pronounced so that the BSR is put into a slanting position, one could develop the following cobweb-variation.

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**Figure 12: Model of Explanation II: the BSR as a Peripheral Region**

According to this model, the BSR is seen as a peripheral region situated at the very margins of the EU centre of gravity. The model is extended to the aspect of (physical) peripherality, which is thought to assume a certain air of political marginality. This model is close to the concept of “subsidiary systems” in that the EU itself including its closest neighbours is defined as a “regional system” consisting of a set of geographically proximate states with a certain perceived interdependence or interconnectedness on the political, economic and/or security level. The EU polity builds the core of this system that is surrounded by a number of “subsidiary systems encompassing the relations of a part of the regional area.”

These ‘subsidiary systems’ consist of a group of states “alienated from the core in some degree by social, political, economic and/or organizational factors but which nevertheless play a role in the politics of the [regional] system.” The peripheral sub-systems are thought to be both dependent on and conditioned by the core of the regional system. As for the BSR example, this dependency would e.g. be consisting of the EU’s political impact (regulative/‘disciplinary’) and financial assistance (distributive relation). Many studies about the BSR follow this pattern of interpretation, mostly in the context of a general criticism of the centrality thesis that assigns everything that is perceived ‘far off’ from the centre to the political margins of the integration project. Browning underlined the importance of challenging this dominant tendency of underestimating the role of (perceived) ‘marginal’ regions in respect to the wider European integration process.

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Post-modern developments in Northern Europe have challenged the very figure and subjectivity of the EU and Russia [...]. For example, there has been much discussion in Europe of whether the EU is moving in an increasingly statist direction, or if it is instead developing more along the lines of multilevel networks and interlocking dimensions. Whilst the modernist statist discourse has strengthened in recent years, elements of dimensionalism also remain significant. Importantly, Northern Europe has not just been a recipient of these different debates, but has also arguably played a notable role regarding just how Europe (and Russia) unfolds. This is to say that the wide array of projects of regional cooperation that have developed in Northern Europe since the end of the Cold War have fundamentally re-conceptualised the nature of borders in the region (including EU borders), and as such significantly problematise any Westphalian aspirations that may exist at the EU centre.\(^{718}\)

The core message of this abstract offers the basis for yet another variation of the scheme. It seeks to grasp the issue of what repercussions the awareness about this pattern of perception (the ‘thinking the North marginal’) could have on the conduct of (sub)regional stakeholders towards the alleged centre and in view of the (sub)regional strategies they seek to pursue. If there are permanent signals of marginalisation coming from the centre, this practice is likely to influence the way region-based actors perceive their influence potential. This again can be expected to determine the strategic choices they take in order to maximise this influence towards the centre, or rather, compensate the marginality they are being assigned from outside, or in fact, from the centre.

3. The BSR as an Auto-Dynamic Unit Within the Wider Unit Europe

Building on the foregoing model of explanation, the BSR could also be seen as an auto-dynamic (albeit not autonomous) unit that does correlate with the wider framework ‘Europe’ to some extent but does not operate out of a consciously subordinate position or under the exclusive auspices of the EU framework. Part of the action and interaction directed to actors beyond the inner circle of European integration may be ascribed to the stakeholders’ awareness about their perceived marginality. Their awareness about their own reduced influence potential is expected to impact on their behaviour in a way that it makes them more reactive and susceptible to defensive or proactive strategies. Signals of marginalisation coming from the centre are perceived as a challenge to the regional stand-alone quality that fuels the efforts regional stakeholders make in order to substantiate the convergence of their (sub)regional surrounding and thus, to build up a compact and solid counterpart to the alleged centre.

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The major motivational background of these efforts could be termed a “positive self-awareness” of the region’s own marginality. This awareness is not only thought to provoke defensive reaction, it also inspires the regional stakeholders to develop strategies of compensation that help to impair the systemic centrality of the alleged core. One important strategy in this context has been mentioned at another point of this study.\footnote{Cave Andrew: Finding a Role in an Enlarged EU. In: Central Europe Review, Nr. 20. 22 May 2000. Online publication www.ce-review.org [26 November 2007.} This strategy is particularly common among the Nordic countries, but most present in the Swedish conduct on the European scene. Sweden has systematically tried (and still does) to profit politically from its own perceived marginality, trying to maintain its reputation as the “boring backwater of Europe” and thus, to gain important leeway and legitimisation for its exceptionalist stance in many questions about a further deepening of European integration.\footnote{Browning Christopher S.: Introduction. In: Id. (ed.): Remaking Europe in the Margins. Northern Europe after the Enlargements. Aldershot 2005, pp. 1-10, here p. 1.} This study confirms Browning’s postulation that a position in the margins often entails particular resources for action that enable the margins to play a significant role in shaping the nature of the whole. [...] Developments in Northern Europe may not just impact on the policies of the European centres, but to some extent also impact on the very nature and subjectivity of those centres, which in turn impacts on the nature of the broader European constellation.\footnote{See chapter “Remotenesss and Marginality – the Periphery’s Romantic Temptation”, p. 28-.}

The mere fact of a region being situated in a geographically peripheral position does not automatically imply that it is also politically marginal. However, in essence, I would not ascribe this alleged effect coming from the Northern periphery to what Browning calls the “formative power of the margins.” Besides the fact that the choice of words itself appears somewhat esoteric, it also neglects the role of state action and interests, and most importantly, of the regional orientation of single states. States often seek to instrumentalise the action arena offered in the regional context in order to reflect their foreign political orientation at a lower scale. In a second instant, this may also be expected to determine their political conduct on the European scene, hence as formal members of the macro-level project.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Figure_14.png}
\caption{The Auto-Dynamic Unit as an Arena for State Action (e.g. Sweden)}
\end{figure}

The examples of Sweden and Finland have shown that states are likely to develop very different strategies in this context. While Finland since the end of the Cold War has always sought to “europeanise” its national interests and objectives, Sweden retained most of its suspicion towards supranational integration and comprehensive Europeanisation.
Generally, it appears to be easy and therefore particularly attractive for peripheral states to try to establish themselves in the best possible way at the regional level before they try to counter other more influential powers that are situated closer to the core. The regional self-containedness resulting from this sort of strategic considerations may, in the long run, promote the establishment of a rival sub-system that easily removes itself from the zone of visibility, and thus, gains considerable latitude to pursue objectives independent from or even running contrary to what is suggested by the core. The hub between the meso and the macro level in this model is built by nation states. In respect to the concrete case of Baltic Sea Regionalism, they also build the natural link between the EU framework and the phenomenon of sub-regional cooperation on the basis of initiatives coming from within, or rather from below in terms of a systemic hierarchy. Even grass-root action is potentially linked to the state level, since most sub-regional cooperations can only operate when given support from the national level. For example, cross-border co-operation for regional development normally requires an improvement of transport infrastructure, of communication systems, of border control procedures, education systems etc. Such improvement measures need efforts and decisions to be taken at the national level.

Coming back to the model, this means that states based in a certain region are thought to be striving to transcend borders to the outside world (e.g. towards Russia) without employing the channels that emerge from their formal affiliation with the core. Such a tendency could potentially lead to the emergence of a region state, which is, as specified earlier in another context, a region that has reached a level of interdependence and integration that enables it to operate as a single actor. However, looking at the concrete circumstances in the Baltic Sea case, there are no clear indicators for an emerging region state in this very sense. What could instead be told from the regional strategies of single states, and here I am again alluding to the prominent Swedish example, is that they seek to build up their own image of the region. This implies that the region or regionness is not a ‘fact’ in terms of a political consensus between a set of involved actors. The single state is thought to construct its own version of the region, which serves as an arena for foreign political action without having to comply with broader supranational instructions. This convenient construct builds the basis for regional action up to the level of distinct proactiveness and regional activism.

The future development and deepening of the EU is not least a question of unity among the member states, unity about the question of finality of the European project (what Europe of the regions?). One of the imaginable scenarios could be that regionalist tendencies backfire and lead to disintegrative developments that are different from mere intergovernmentalisation (pillarisation) of integration. The question is whether the dynamic of asymmetric efforts, the “regionalist alternative”, could even reinforce the existing divisions within the EU-25. Holger Moroff underlined the danger that the EU ND could, for example, further a falsely perceived regionalism within the EU und lead to the intergovernmentalisation of the European project.

723 On “regionalist activism”, see chapter “Baltic Sea Region: What Sort of Regionalism?” , p. 35-.
In the EU official context, regionalist interactions are mostly viewed as a positive and desirable phenomenon that helps to strengthen transnational ties and thus, enhances deepening of the overall integration process. This study claims that transnational regionalism can also assume a counterproductive and disintegrative quality that furthers diversification and, in the context of peripheral regions, stimulates single state tendencies of isolationism and disengagement from membership responsibilities. The factor of regionalist self-sufficiency seems particularly significant in the case of the Nordic members, since their populations are among the most euro-sceptical in the EU-27. In this sense, the reading of ‘regionalism’ is fairly critical and polemic. It implies that proactive regionalism in terms of regional assertiveness can lead to region-oriented self-centeredness and self-marginalisation on the European scene. Thus, at a certain scale, regionalism can gain a highly disintegrative effect on a member state’s European policies because it potentially affects the membership conduct of the respective country.

4. What Kind of ‘Europe of the Regions’?

The notion of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ (EoR) has originally entered usage in the context of the regional federalist movement of the 60ies and 70ies. The phrase then used to have positive if not enthusiastic implications for the future of the European project.

The EoR conceptualization seemed to serve as a handy tool for both the ‘governmentalists’ and the ‘region enthusiasts’ in describing the spatial future of the EU: the EoR was seen as much a construction of neo-nationalistic region states as one of flexible and overlapping (trans)border regions. […] Writers recognized that questions over the nature and structure of ‘real regions’ in a regionalized Europe would remain unsolved, as the ‘region’ concept would always be interpreted in multiple ways. […] However, it was precisely the tremendous vagueness of the region concept, and the conceptualization of the EoR for that matter – that made it so popular.725

Despite this pluralism of interpretations, in its narrow sense the notion can be said to spell the promise of a Europe in which the nation state is no longer the primary unit of action and governance. This idea is very closely connected to the vision of a federal state of Europe since the “Euro” regions are thought to constitute the principal level between the nation state and the supranational level.726 In this ‘strong’ sense, the vision of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ entails the idea of emerging “region-states”; a concept that was also reflected in the aforementioned scale of regionness developed by Hettne.727 Hettne suggests the highest level of “regionness” to become materialised at what he calls “an acting subject”. This state-like regionness involves that the respective region features a distinct identity, legitimacy and certain structures that allow formal joint decision-making.728
would complete the picture of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ to replace the present ‘Europe of the Nation States’. The finality of this vision would be the establishment of a European federation that functions independently from the regulatory and distributive function performed by states. This concept is close to the idea of a ‘Europe of Olympic Rings’, which could be described as “a conception of Europe and the EU in which there is not one but several centres, power is dispersed throughout interlocking and overlapping regionalist formations with rather fluid external borders.”

The model suggests a polycentric structure that builds on horizontal interaction. Regional entities are perceived to co-exist and form a European (or global) patchwork net of regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Europe of ‘Concentric Circles’</th>
<th>Europe of ‘Olympic Rings’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>regions subordinate to Brussels</td>
<td>co-existing regional spaces ('neo-mediievalisation' of Europe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vertical integration</td>
<td>horizontal interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distinctive centre-periphery divide</td>
<td>neither a clear centre nor a clear periphery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sovereignty-based concept of space</td>
<td>post-sovereignty concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 15: Europe of Concentric Circles vs. Europe of Olympic Rings**

The more complex the EU is becoming intrinsically, the more space will be needed for regional groupings inside it, with each increasingly likely to seek more autonomy in making contact with non-EU members. This potentially emerging structure of European political space can be metaphorically depicted as promoting an ‘Olympic rings’ vision of Europe.

The joint effect of the two major parallel developments ‘beyond the nation state’, Europeanisation and regionalism, has been said to relativise the importance of nation states in European, and more generally, in international politics. According to this view, the state-centric distribution of the European territory does no longer seem to be the single “best”. National state borders are perceived “artificial” while ethnic or open spatial entities are seen as more natural or “really belonging together”, or, as Wiberg and Wæver put it, they are given as a “pre-political datum”, and thus are to be perceived

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730 The model does not fully comply with the original Olympic symbol, since no ring or unit intersects with all adjacent counterparts.


as far more legitimate than any other structural imposition. The self-evidence of nationality, sovereign statehood, and national written histories are said to be fading.

In brief, the now-familiar suggestion is that nation-states will fade away in favour of regions and super-regions that can survive and thrive within the EU and the global economy. This vision is reinforced by the increasing tendency of both the EU and the regions to try to bypass the central state, often in the name of subsidiarity. Still, [...] there is as yet little evidence that central governments will fade away any time soon. Indeed, it may be the case that the popularised and overly simplistic Europe of the Regions scenario actually diverts attention away from the actual, more nuanced realities of Regionalism.

In fact, the overall developments in European politics have made clear that there is no immediate prospect of a materialising ‘Europe of the Regions’ in the narrow sense of the concept, not least because of the widely differing strengths of regional feeling and identity among the citizens of the European Union. A more general and decent interpretation of the phrase ‘Europe of the Regions’ appeals to the argument that “regions matter”; this reading acknowledges the fact of regional allegiance as well as the value, in both economic and socio-political terms, of an intermediate level or interface between the local and the national or supra-national. In this sense, one might come to the conclusion that, in recent years, we have witnessed the establishment of a ‘Europe of the Regions’.

One of the most striking and important expressions of this new salience of regions in Europe has been the creation of the Committee of the Regions by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 and its coming into existence in 1994.

The notion of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ underlying the creation of the EU CoR is built on the vision of a Europe in which regions and regional representations of various kinds have found a new self consciousness and new roles in politics and policy-making at the European level and beyond, which had hitherto been denied to them. Another interpretation could be based on a different understanding of what regionness is about. A viable model would be, for instance, the vision of a Europe of functional regions, where common interests in certain policy fields build the basis for cooperation. This sort of integration by functional terms is then thought to occur at different scales and most importantly, without being bound by geographical adjacency. Physical closeness is still not ruled out as a factor since it could be thought to favour the build-up of ‘nodal points’ or ‘condensations of dominance’. Clusters of interest are perceived to result in a concentration along (a) certain policy fields, and (b) in regional clusters.

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738 For more details on the CoR, see chapter “The EU Committee of the Regions”, p. 92.
The finality of this ‘functional regionalisation’ process would be a “networked Europe”. One of the related scenarios or variations could be a functional flexibilisation with regional clusters building on and allowing for open intersections (offene Schnittmengen). It may be assumed that functional considerations on either side produce certain agglomeration forces that encourage geo-political clustering of political and socio-economic activities. This clustering may result in the build-up of “functional regions”, i.e. groupings of actors on either state or sub-state level according to their positive interdependence. These agglomeration forces thus lead to sectoral clustering: one policy sector leads to clusters in a certain position, another sector in another a.s.o. The geo-political distribution of political activities is thus very concentrated in each sector but dispersed at the level of all sectors together.739

E. A Short Ride into the Field of Comparative Theory

After consulting the bulk of EIT and taking a short excursion into the field of traditional IRT, this study will eventually turn to the “third” camp, the set of comparative models and system theory. There are various different practical considerations to support the methodical choice of calling on Comparative Theory (CT) while analysing an instance of (sub)regional integration. In fact, theorists like Ernst Haas have produced significant contributions in the field of European studies, obviously viewing the analysis of the European case as a distinctly comparative-historical enterprise. In his early contributions, Haas composed systematic comparisons between various forms of regional integration that were emerging in the immediate post-war setting (including the Nordic Council, the Council of Europe, NATO, and, as yet another instance, the European Communities).740 From a methodological perspective, this short ‘ride’ into the field of CT is intended to function as a showcase as for how alternative (and for some, probably also absurd) theoretical choices can offer an added value when it comes to the analysis of an empirical phenomenon as complex and multifaceted as the “Baltic Sea