

THE EMERGENCE OF BALTIC EUROPE: AN OVERVIEW OF POLISH RESEARCH ON REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT: Baltic integration studies, though dispersed and involving researchers of various disciplines, generally fit well in the field of economic geography research. This article attempts to review the study results of research conducted in Poland in the last four decades. It identifies eleven leading issues, including: the Baltic wide cooperation (conditions and factors, progress and collaboration perspectives), the development of the maritime economy, international legislation, environmental protection, spatial planning and cross-border cooperation. The research focus evolved reflecting the major milestones in geopolitical transformations. In Baltic Europe we can identify three evolutionary phases: identification of cooperation paths and conditions in the competitive environment of two political and military blocks, a recast of options in the period of political transformation and European integration, studies of EU enlargement consequences.

KEY WORDS: Baltic Europe, Baltic Region, Baltic Sea Region, regional integration, literature review

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Introduction

The centennial of the Polish Geographical Society was preceded by the fortieth anniversary of instigating Polish research devoted to the Baltic Europe region. The publication of the monograph entitled *Baltic Europe* by Zaleski and Wojewódka (1977) marks the beginnings of Polish studies in the field. The convergence of the two anniversaries gave the premise to write this article. It aims at presenting the Polish scientific input to studies about Baltic integration processes. The common denominator of the subject theme is the concept of a functional region,

whereas the general study addresses the question of the region's strengths and trends in the evolving political, economic and cultural relations compared to the relations with external structures (Zaucha 2007). Regional integration, so defined, covers a wide spectrum of issues, making systematic review of research outcomes difficult because of the numerous study lines and relevant literature illustrating achievements in the field. The authors of this article also faced this selection challenge. The main selection criterion was the objective of the review – the specification of the genesis and evolution of Polish research on Baltic integration, and its relation to



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the international research legacy. Thus, the article refers to works selected by the authors as representative for particular issues and study phases¹. The limited volume of the work allows for a mere overview and does not provide a critical review of the relevant literature.

In earlier attempts to draft the Baltic related research, Zaucha (2007) noted many academic centres progressing Baltic studies and the dispersed nature of the studies, which seem to derive from the diverse approach of maritime academic researchers to the subject. He also emphasised the initial involvement of Polish researchers in the trend of general Baltic studies, and their later surrendering to the initiative of Scandinavian research centres.

The article comprises three major parts. The first part focuses on the spatial and time dimension. It covers the genesis of *Baltic Europe*, the borders of the region and suggested alternative terms. The time range of the analysis is also specified, dating the beginnings of the contemporary phase of Baltic studies in 1977. From that year on, research progressed at varied pace for four decades. The second part describes the dynamics of Baltic integration, identifies the key phases resulting from geopolitical transformations on the continent and even those in the global scale. These phases are a crucial factor for the research. The third part focuses on key subjects and study lines² illustrated by a set of chosen scientific studies. The thematic and time variability of research originates from the changing geopolitical environment. The article concludes with the most important generalisations and suggestions for further studies.

¹ The choice is not based on formal bibliometric criteria – an approach commonly applied in review studies. A considerable volume of valuable material have the form of monographs, which are not generally ranked in literature databases like articles published in international journals. The choice was based on research experience, knowledge of the texts and a subjective assessment by the authors regarding the significance of the work for the development in the field, the context in which it was written and how it was received by researchers.

² The themes covered by some works cannot be explicitly classified to one of the subject categories. In such cases efforts were made to identify the key dominating study lines to assign the work to a given category, nevertheless, this approach sometimes failed to dispel the authors' doubts.

The concept of Baltic Europe

Political, economic, social and territorial changes at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s awakened the renaissance of regional thinking in Europe. Areas earlier remaining in the outskirts of the main series of events of European political and economic life became animated European cooperation actors. This peripheral role fell to Baltic Sea countries, which were limited in their search for partners by their affiliation to opposite integration groupings. The disintegration of one of them erased the majority of antagonisms and allowed for the development of a new order for international Baltic cooperation in the last decade of the 20th century. In the following years, the countries lying around the Baltic Sea developed a dense network of state, institutional and self-governmental programmes and nongovernmental organisations. Their activity contributes to closer ties of societies inhabiting Baltic Europe. Presently, Baltic Europe is more than a configuration of independent state bodies located around a common sea. It has become a region gaining in importance, featuring growing internal interactions though lacking full institutional forms of the process. Baltic Europe can be perceived as one of the new forming regions of great political and economic potential, which appeared on the map of united Europe.

In view of the above, the presence of the term *Baltic Europe* in Polish and international literature from the beginnings of the 1990s continued to gain in popularity. It was not a new term at the time. It appeared for the first time in 1977 in a study published by a Gdańsk scientific centre, within the framework of cooperation between the University of Gdańsk and the Maritime Institute (Zaleski, Wojewódka 1977). The Baltic Europe area covered all countries along the Baltic coast and those administrative parts of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union, the borders of which either neighboured directly or clearly tended towards it – Schleswig-Holstein, the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Soviet Socialist Republics and the Kaliningrad, Leningrad, Pskov and Novgorod Oblasts. Today the term 'Baltic Europe' is widely used in scientific publications and the defining of its borders suggested by Polish geographers (Piskozub 1977, Jaworski 1991, Ruszkowski 1999, Palmowski

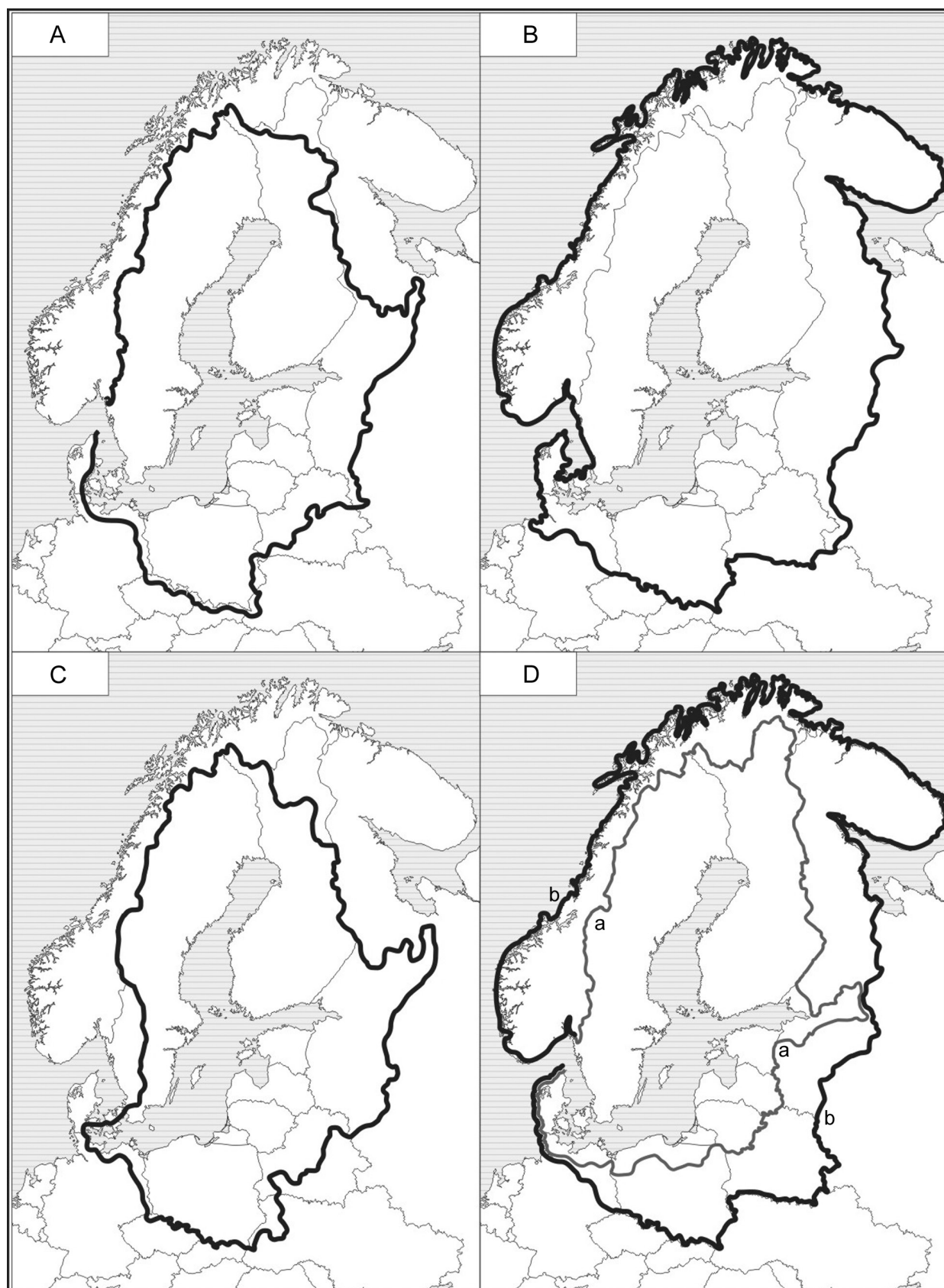


Fig. 1. The delimitation of Baltic Europe: (A) catchment area of Baltic Sea, (B) *Wizje i strategie...* 1994, (C) Buchhofer 1997, (D) Palmowski 2000 - (a) core area, (b) extended area.
Source: authors own study based on the above mentioned publications.

2000) is generally accepted (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, the delimitation of Baltic Europe should be subject to certain modifications. Therefore, it should be treated as the point of departure for further analysis and discussions.

English language literature, apart from the term 'Baltic Europe', 'Baltic Sea Region', 'Baltic Region' (in German – Ostseeraum, in Russian – Baltiyskiy Region), also features 'Baltic Rim' to specify the territories most densely populated in the region and having the greatest impact on ongoing processes in Baltic Europe as a whole.

Development of Baltic regional cooperation

After the Second World War, two political and economic systems and two military blocks³ clashed in the Baltic Sea area (Table 1). Balance was maintained by the sense of threat created by political and military doctrines. The dominating question of international safety and political polarisation in the second half of the 20th century forced countries in the region to seek alliances and to define their position in the antagonistic political and economic groups. The problems of Baltic regional cooperation involving all the states along the Baltic coast were pushed to the background.

In these circumstances, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland) achieved an exceptional position among all world regions by developing an area of multi-dimensional and diversified relations (both in terms of the range, as well as legal and institutional instruments). Multilateral neighbourly cooperation of these countries, sharing a similar history and tradition, covered practically all areas of life⁴ (Matera 2001). Nordic countries developed a template for regional integration, the

components of which were applied in all the Baltic European countries following 1991.

The first relations of this type in the post war history of the Baltic Region concerned the marine environment, an area relatively less touched by political rift that inhibited the development of multilateral relations. Joint efforts to protect the Baltic waters and its live resources by all countries in the region (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, FRG, GDR, Poland and the USSR) were instigated in 1973, in Gdańsk with the signing of The Gdańsk Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources in the Baltic Sea and the Belts (Gdańsk Convention), and in Helsinki, in 1974, the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki Convention)⁵.

In 1991, the existing geopolitical system disintegrated and led to major transformations, and consequently new conditions appeared to break away from the artificial isolation of Baltic neighbours. The change of the geopolitical situation generated new opportunities and options for dynamic economic and cultural cooperation in this part of Europe. The need to animate the development of existing relations was noted, initiated and revived in various forms. New ideas sprang up in the multinational territories around the Baltic Sea, a surge to seek new original solutions, differing from earlier measures developed, that were to define the future of the region (Zaleski 1993a). The process of developing the Baltic region started and provided grounds for the development of a regional network of economic and social relations.

The significance of the relations of the Baltic Sea Region with the European Union grew following the accessions of Sweden and Finland to the Union in 1995. In 1997, Finland proposed to establish the Northern Dimension of the European Union, an initiative to progress the EU policy towards Northern Europe by economic integration, competitiveness and sustainable development of Northern Europe.

After the enlargement of the EU in 2004, Baltic Europe entered a new development phase. This fact no doubt strengthened cooperation of the

³ The EEC member states (FRG, Denmark), Comecon (GDR, Poland, USSR) and those not part to alliances (Sweden and Finland); the Warsaw Pact countries (GDR, Poland, USSR); the North Atlantic Alliance (FRG, Denmark) and neutral countries (Sweden, Finland).

⁴ One of the key bodies managing Nordic cooperation is the Nordic Council (a cooperation forum and council for national parliaments, established in 1952) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (cooperation forum for governments established in 1971).

⁵ The Conventions provided a cooperation platform for protection of the marine environment of countries of two contrary ideological, political, and economic orientations, which was a unique solution worldwide.

Table 1. The timeline of Baltic regional cooperation.

Years	Political events	Forms of cooperation	
		Nordic	Baltic wide
Before 1973	Denmark and Norway in NATO (1949) Poland and USSR in COMECON (1949) GDR in COMECON (1950) FRG in NATO (1955) Poland, GDR and USSR in the Warsaw Pact (1955) FRG in EEC (1957) Denmark, Norway and Sweden in EFTA (1960)	Nordic Economic Co-operation Committee (1948) Nordic Council (1952) Scandinavian Joint Committee for Economic Cooperation (1954) Treaty of Helsinki (1962) Nordic Council of Ministers (1971)	-
1973–1988	Denmark in EEC (1973) Finland in EFTA (1986)	Nordic Investment Bank (1976) Nordic Economic Research Council (1980)	Gdańsk Convention (1973) Helsinki Convention (1974) Helsinki Commission (HELCOM, 1974) Baltic Sea Tourism Commission (1983)
1989–2003	The fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) Unification of Germany (1990) Dissolution of COMECON (1991) Dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (1991) Disintegration of USSR (1991) The independence of Lithuania (1990), Latvia (1991) and Estonia (1991) Sweden and Finland in EU (1995)	Nordic Environment Financing Corporation (NEFCO) (1990) Multiyear cooperation plans Several tens of organisations coordinating Nordic integration	INTERREG (1989) Baltic Sea Declaration (1990) Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (since 1991) Union of the Baltic Cities (1991) Baltic Ports Organisation (1991) The Baltic University Programme (1991) Ars Baltica (1991) Update of Helsinki Convention (1992) Council of the Baltic Sea States (1992) Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce (1992) VASAB 2010 (1992) Baltic Sea Forum (1992) Social Hansa (1992) Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) conference (1993) Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region (1996) Baltic Sea Region Energy Cooperation (1998) Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (1999) Baltic Development Forum (1999) Baltic wide programmes (INTERREG II)
After 2004	Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in EU (2004) EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (2009)	Nordic Defence Cooperation (2009)	Baltic Metropolises Network (2002) International Baltic projects (e.g. Matros, USUN) INTERREG Baltic Sea Region Programme (2007–2013, 2014–2020)

Source: own study.

countries around the Baltic Sea. It led to the development of further joint regional initiatives within the European Union to mitigate the continuously peripheral position of Baltic regions. Political stabilisation and economic development may, in a longer time span, transform the emerging cross-border Baltic Europe into a new economic and cultural European centre (Veggeland 1994).

The varied local, regional, national and international, social and organisational collaboration and cross-Baltic relations, programmes and projects all shape the image of Baltic Europe in the

second decade of the 21st century. Apart from the widely outlined and mature programmes, which form and strengthen relations in the Baltic dimension, such as *Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB)*⁶, the sectoral cooperation forms are clearly on the rise.

In 2009, the European Council adopted the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The document embraces EU member states around the Baltic

⁶ The program was initiated in 1992, at a conference of Ministers for spatial planning of Baltic countries.

Sea as well as Belarus, Norway and Russia. One of the goals of the Strategy is to enhance the competitiveness of Baltic Europe both in the European and in the global context. The document is to promote the image of the Baltic Sea region, maintain and attract human capital, successfully promote the region for foreign investments, support export of goods under the principle “good because produced in the Baltic Sea region” as well as popularise the tourist offer of the region.

Baltic Europe as a research subject

Baltic integration covers a wide range of issues. A review of the Polish literature led to identifying eleven leading problems. The major study lines are specified in the case of the most wide-ranging subjects (Table 2). The intensity of studies of particular topics varied in time and remained related to the most important events shaping the dynamics and the nature of Baltic

Table 2. Baltic integrations research themes in the years 1971–2016 and selected subject literature.

Subject areas	Main study lines and selected works
Scandinavian and Baltic wide aspects – regional synthetic approach – comprehensive analysis of the natural environment and/or social and economic aspects, the process and perspectives of Baltic integration	General geographic characteristics of the region Łomniewski, Mańkowski, Zaleski 1975; Zaleski, Wojewódka 1977; Groth (ed.) 2002; Waśniewska 2013; Michalski 2014. Baltic region potential and development trends Jałowiecki (ed.) 1992; Zaleski 1993a, 1993b; Ćwikliński, Owsiniński (eds) 1994; Ciesielski (ed.) 1995; Kukliński (ed.) 1995, 1997; Owsiniński, Stępniański (eds) 1997; Kisiel-Łowczyk 2000; Palmowski 2000; Pacuk (ed.) 2001; Wendt (ed.) 2001; Palmowski, Pacuk (eds) 2004; Palmowski (ed.) 2006; Rossa-Kilian 2006, 2009; <i>Europa Bałtycka</i> 2010; Parteka (ed.) 2010; Grzela 2010; Runiewicz-Jasińska 2012; Śmigierska-Belczak 2014. Further integration perspectives Parteka, Dutkowski, Toczyski, Turek 1992; Kołodziejski, Parteka (eds) 1993; Parteka 2005.
The development of Scandinavian countries and the nature of their relations with Poland	Cieślak et al. 1971; Makać 1972; Niemoćko 1972; Frączak 1974; Sulimierski 1977; Krawczyk 1978; Klepacki, Ławniczak 1976; Jaworski 1991; Popiński 1989; Doliwa-Klepacki 1996; Szymański (ed.) 2000; Czarny 2016a, 2016b.
The state of the Baltic Sea natural environment	<i>Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings</i> 1980–2017.
Legal aspects of Baltic cooperation, including environmental protection	Baltic cooperation legal environment Gelberg 1976, 1981; Góralczyk 1978; Gilas (1996); Łukaszuk 1997. Environmental protection legal conditions Brodecki, Żmudziński (eds) 1997; Krzyżanowski 1993; Łukaszuk 1991; Tomala 2011.
Transit location of Poland and the development of ferry shipping on the Baltic Sea	Sójka 1973; Chlebionek 1985; Drzemczewski 1986; Wojewódka 1989; Pacuk 1997; Mańkowska 2010, 2011; Urbanyi-Popiołek 2013, 2014, 2015; Wiśniewski 2016.
The developments of ports and maritime trade among Baltic Europe Countries	Zaleski 1974, 1980; Tubielewicz 1970; Grzywaczewski 1990; Andruszkiewicz 1993; Grzelakowski 2010; Czermański 2015.
Development of tourism	Toczyski, Lenzion, Zaucha 2007; Studzieniecki 2009; Grzybowski 2011; Palmowski 2011; Kizielewicz 2012; Skrzyszewska 2012.
Cooperation with the Kaliningrad Oblast, Russian Federation	Cooperation environment, progress and perspectives Kulesza 2003; Palmowski, Fiodorov, Korneevets (eds) 2003; Żukowski (ed.) 2004; Palmowski (ed.) 2007; Fiodorov Korneevets, Zverev 2011; Żukowski, Kotowicz 2011; Chełminiak, Kotowicz 2012; Palmowski 2013; Anisiewicz, Palmowski 2016. Consequences of introducing small border traffic Dudzińska, Dwyner 2013; Anisiewicz, Palmowski 2014; Domaniewski, Studzińska 2016.
Spatial planning	Toczyski (ed.) 1998, 1999; Zaucha 2007, 2014a, 2014b.
Regional security and defence cooperation	Jaworski 1978; Michałowski 1998; Kozakiewicz 2003; Szubrycht 2010; Bucalowski, Kadukowski 2013; Pacuła 2013.
Historical and cultural integration environment	Goliński (ed.) 1993; Maciejewski (ed.) 2002; Waldziński 2010; <i>Horyzonty Balticum</i> 2015.

Source: own study.

integration. Thus, they became part of wider research trends abroad by scholars and institutions interested in international and interregional cooperation in the region.

Though Baltic integration remains part of regional studies – the core of economic geography (Czyż 2004) – geographers were part of a wide group of scientists dealing with the subject, which included economists, historians, political scientists, lawyers, biologists, environmentalists and geologists. This wide spectrum of researchers reflects the interdisciplinary character of regional studies.

The regional-synthetic studies embracing Baltic wide questions, including the research narrowed down to Scandinavian issues, constitute the core of the Polish scientific achievements in the scope of Baltic integration studies. The number and volume of studies and the broad perspective of the analysed issues, the comprehensive approach manifested by noting the causal relations between various factors in the geographical environment and their significance for interstate and cross-regional interactions are the essence of integration processes. At least three research lines may be identified in this subject range (Table 2), which refers to events that affected the major phases of Baltic integration. The first phase covers two general geographic studies about the characteristic of the region. They appeared directly following the conclusion of the Gdańsk and Helsinki conventions – the initial attempt to break down the profound geopolitical divisions in the studied region. Both studies fundamentally affected the Polish studies of Baltic integration. The earlier of the two studies (Łomniewski et al. 1975) presents the overall natural science issues and major questions of the maritime economy, as well as the beginnings of the Baltic integration process. The later work by Zaleski and Wojewódka (1997) introduced, in scientific circles, a visionary, for the political reality of the times, concept of Baltic Europe. Efforts to develop comprehensive geographic characteristics of the region were continued by authors abroad. Newig and Theede (1985) with a team of over 40 experts from all countries in the region showed the role and the function of the sea in the process of establishing cultural and economic relations around the Baltic Sea.

Profound changes in Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s also touched Baltic Europe and

gave rise to the need of assessing anew directions for research. The number of publications referring to the region's potential, conditions and factors grew, as did the variety of regional cooperation aspects (Table 2). The studies show optimism characteristic of "end of history" periods. Baltic Europe appeared as an area of strong international and interregional cooperation in the new geopolitical environment (following the disintegration of the USSR and the independence of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia)⁷. The small water basin, the geographical proximity of the countries, complementary economies, considerable economic, cultural and civilisation potential and a big market are attractive factors that favour cooperation and integration, which in the deliberations of the majority of authors referred to in this study were to facilitate the modernisation of Poland and to provide a sustainable anchor in the West European world, and at the same time to open up to neighbours on both sides of the Baltic Sea. Important issues studied at the time included the delineation of the region, eco-development, and the position of the Polish Baltic region in Europe. In 1996, the Polish Geographical Society held a nationwide congress *Poland in Baltic Europe*. Researchers from other countries also noted the new perspectives for Baltic Europe (Joenniemi 1991; Kukk et al. 1992; Peschel 1993, 1998; *Perspectives for the economic...* 1994, Manniche et al. 1998; Fiodorov, Korneevets 1999).

The forecasts and diversified perspectives for Baltic Europe, particularly in view of measures introduced to improve the competitiveness of the newly formed region, was the third area of Polish Baltic integration studies, which is not represented by a lot of research. Further expansion of the EU stimulated growing interest in the Baltic Region. The studies in foreign literature

⁷ Approximately fifteen years after the first publications about Baltic Europe, the fundamental works seem to fall into oblivion. In 1992, a team of the European Institute for Regional and Local Development and local Warsaw University experts published a study, edited by Jałowicki, entitled *Baltic Europe*. The publication surprisingly shows unawareness of the Baltic Europe genesis. It includes the following flawed statement: "The concept of Baltic Europe appeared with the transformations that took place in USSR and former socialist countries." (p. 7) and "The presented volume is the first, so extensive, study of Baltic Europe in Polish literature" (p. 10).

(Lundqvist, Persson 1994; Hansen 2000; Cornett 2001) did not accompany a comparable interest of Polish authors⁸ in the subject.

The most inclusive of the compendiums on Baltic integration, published up to date, which combines all the research lines is the series *The NEBI Yearbook* (North European and Baltic Sea Integration) issued in the years 1998–2003. These publications prepared by several dozens of exceptional authors (including Polish geographers) were devoted to economic integration, spatial planning and the environment, cross-border and economic cooperation, political integration as well as peaceful cooperation and regional safety of Baltic Europe countries.

The development of Baltic regional-synthetic studies would not have been possible had the scholars not shown parallel interest in Nordic countries and their relations with Poland. Works referring to the above form another numerously represented area of Polish studies on Baltic integration. The periods featuring a better atmosphere and the false appearance of reviving mutual contacts (e.g. the concept of transforming the Baltic into “a sea of peaceful cooperation” at the beginning of the 1970s) increased the number of publications in the following years. The second wave of studies appeared after 1989 and was related to geopolitical changes, which opened options for wider cooperation. The integration of Nordic countries, referred to in the publications of that period, which have a much longer and richer tradition than that around the Baltic Sea, inspired (good practice) the development of a new model for international and interregional relations in Baltic Europe. Apart from researchers of various study centres, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, which dedicated a lot of attention to Scandinavian issues, played a significant role in the process.

The foundations of Baltic Europe originate in the concern for protecting the Baltic Sea marine environment. Its poor and deteriorating condition was identified as a serious threat to the social and economic development of the water basin's coastal

countries. A single country could not effectively counteract the swelling problem. The awareness of the fact provided grounds for signing and ratifying the Gdańsk and Helsinki conventions addressing protection of the sea and its resources. The aftermath of the latter convention was the introduction of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), which published the *Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings*. In the years 1980–2017, 150 volumes were published covering varied themes, among others: biodiversity, the state of particular plant and animal species and their life environments, the impact of agricultural and industrial pollution on sea waters, shipping, oil spills, waste and noise pollution, marine protected zones, spatial planning at sea and environmental monitoring. The publishing institution is an international body; nonetheless, Polish researches had their important input to research studies. The theme gained in importance and settled well in renowned international periodicals and scientific monographs. Another interesting publication which appeared in 1994 was the *Baltic Sea Atlas* (Majewski, Lauer [eds] 1994). The Atlas presented the diversification of the natural environment. It also included a section dedicated to the maritime economy. This area of research remains crucial, although obviously it is no longer a pioneer area of study for the development of Baltic cooperation.

The role of international conventions in implementing cooperation of Baltic countries naturally inclines researchers to study its legal aspects (Table 2). The cooperation framework designated by international marine law deserved their special attention. The acute need to counteract efficiently the degradation of the Baltic Sea ecosystem resulted in a number of studies focusing on the protection of the marine environment.

Other study trends evident in Baltic integration studies refer to the geographical environment specifics of the region, which developed along the sea coastlines. Strong reference is here made to the maritime economy – land and marine transport, including ferries, port operation, marine trade and tourism (Table 2). The engagement of researchers in this theme was particularly vivid in the 1970s, to a lesser extent in the '80s, and again in the '90s. The fluctuation of interest was rooted, as mentioned earlier, in the crucial geopolitical transformation. The above subject became a

⁸ Perhaps the integration process of Poland with the EU directed the attention of society, politicians and researchers towards the west – the relations with the biggest member states and not the north, which was often seen (particularly by Pomerania outsiders) as a peripheral EU territory.

permanent item on the study agenda in geography and the transport economy. Initially special attention was assigned to benefiting from the transit location of the country and reviving ferry connections with Sweden and other Nordic states, which was a milestone in the development of Baltic cooperation. Later studies focused on other issues, particularly after the EU eastward expansion (including Poland) that eliminated a number of cooperation obstacles. Research regarding ports and ferry connections in the European network of transport corridors is the closest to the concept of Baltic integration. Other works appeared dedicated to, e.g. the competitiveness of ferry links and air connections, passenger preferences, and challenges faced in view of stricter fuel quality regulations binding in Baltic marine transport. Marine port literature demonstrates similar trends. The early phase studies emphasised their importance in the Baltic integration process. The most recent works focus on problems generated by political transformations and European integration. The question of global and regional competition seems to have become more important than cooperation, which to a certain extent reflects the changes in port operations. Efforts to maintain good standing in controversial hinterlands, in competing for ocean shippers, in the role of port supra- and infrastructure are underlined.

The study subject of Baltic tourism developed relatively late. Early works hinted the issue in the context of revived and growing ferry connections. Since those times, the subject area within the framework of tourism geography has strongly developed, nevertheless, reference to Baltic Europe integration is not common. The questions referred to international cooperation favouring the development of marine tourism, regional specifics of demand for accommodation and region marketing. Ferry connections continue to be perceived as an important tool for tourism development. The role of passenger ships is appreciated, as the Baltic Sea is one of the most attractive water basins for this type of tourism. All the described subject lines of the maritime economy are well represented in international literature. Each deserves a separate article.

The EU expansion of 2004 implied growing interest in studying the development of the Russian exclave – the Kaliningrad Oblast – and forms of cooperation of this Russian territory

with regions and countries around the Baltic Sea. Research subjects covered primarily the social, economic and political situation of the Oblast, perspectives of possible changes and the course, consequences and perspectives of international cooperation, particularly cross-border cooperation. The awareness, manifested by Russian geographers working in Kaliningrad, of the weight of the issue, and the achievements of the several-years-long cooperation with the University of Gdańsk resulted, among others, in publications in the series *Coastal Regions (Regiony Nadmorskie)*. German researchers (Müller-Hermann 1994) showed interest in the Kaliningrad Oblast for historical reasons. The question of cross-border cooperation along the Baltic coast, so important in relations with the Russian exclave, appeared in foreign research works of other bordering Baltic Europe countries (Stålvant 1996; *Global – local interplay...* 1998; Scott 2002).

Spatial planning linked the theoretical and empirical scientific works with Baltic integration practice. The development of transport infrastructure, the establishment of protected areas, and the location of selected service facilities in cross-border areas must be internationally coordinated to ensure the best effects. This function lies primarily with the programme *Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB)* launched in 1992. Polish researches also had their technical input to the functioning of the programme by dealing not only with the traditional land spatial planning, but also marine spatial planning. In the case of the Baltic Sea – a water basin suffering a strong human impact – these issues are of both cognitive and practical significance.

The development of territorial systems is easier when we can refer to a common heritage, experience and values. They provide grounds for people to identify themselves with the region. Scientific discussions were also part of Polish research, which delivered historical arguments in the discussion on the present and desired shape of Baltic Europe.

Conclusions

A review of Polish scientific achievements on Baltic integration indicates the wide diversity of research questions. Analysing the representative

works for this research field, we identified eleven leading problems. In the case of some, we managed to show more specific, and concurrently cohesive deliberation trends. The majority of Polish studies correspond well to the international research trends and some of them defined further areas of studies.

The best-represented area of studies refers to the Baltic in its entirety including the Nordic themes. The representative works focused on the complex natural environment aspects and/or the social and economic aspects, conditions, progress and perspectives of Baltic integration. The studies featured a diversity of approaches in terms of research and detail of the subjects studied. On one hand, they were creative, and on the other hindered the disclosure of wider principles. Nonetheless, three cohesive subject lines can be identified: general geographic characteristics of the region, identification of Baltic integration potential and development trends, and the perspectives of further integration. No analysis would have been possible, if the knowledge gathered in Nordic states studies and their relations with Poland had not been available.

In the case of a region around a sea, studies dedicated to the maritime economy are a natural subject: shipping, ports, marine trade and tourism. The research on environmental protection, international law and spatial planning was fundamental in stimulating and strengthening the collaboration of Baltic countries and regions. Their common determinant was the specifics of coastal regions and marine territories.

Following EU expansion covering all the Baltic countries, except for Russia, the question of cooperation with the Kaliningrad Oblast gained in importance. Polish literature includes many studies on cross-border cooperation and the consequences of introducing small border traffic. The works on historical and cultural conditions of cooperation formed another study line. Studies about the region's past inspired and drove towards stronger relations beyond state borders.

The review of the Baltic region research also showed the evolving interests of researchers in reflecting the key stages of geopolitical changes in Baltic Europe. The 1970s and 1980s are a period of identifying development assets and barriers, as well as the potential development road in two competing political and military blocks. The '90s

marked the redefining of options in the circumstances of political and economic system transition and European integration. The post accession achievements focused, in turn, on studying social and economic phenomena resulting from EU expansion. The perception of Baltic Europe also evolved. It became an important element of the European Union involved in complex, global interrelations also reflected by the rising interest of researchers in the subject.

So far the evolution of Baltic integration studies has been prone to geopolitical events profoundly changing conditions and factors of the development of countries and regions along the sea coastline. Thus, it seems that the direction of further studies should respond to the greatest civilisation challenges. A question emerges how the European integration crisis (financial, migration, Brexit, isolation trends in member states) affect the cooperation processes in Baltic Europe. The question of the future model of European integrations is largely a question of the future Baltic integration. After three decades of detente, the importance of a military threat is gaining momentum. Potentially, Baltic Europe may face repeatedly a military conflict with cross-regional consequences. The question of safety and security is becoming an important theme of research. Apart from geopolitical problems, the resilience of both the entire area and its constituents to a crisis is imperative, as well as the competitiveness of the economy, including the local economy, the unique assets supporting a strong position on international markets and thus assurance of stable and well-paid jobs. The migration crises, which merely touched Baltic Europe, showed the significance of migration issues, and in a wider context, the problem of social cohesiveness and life standard. After all, Baltic Europe, similarly as the entire world will have to cope with the consequences of anthropogenic climate changes, progress power economy transformation, or even convert the social and economic system. Despite the fact that the mentioned issues are only projections, the processes underlying change are in progress for the last two, perhaps three decades. Researchers have noted the phenomena; nevertheless, the research domain continues to remain extensive. Perhaps the functioning of Baltic Europe and the position of Poland in the region will gain popularity among Polish

researchers. A possible sign of growing interest was the conference (July 2017) organised in Gdańsk by *Klub Jagielloński* entitled: *Shift to the north! Opportunities and obstacles in the cooperation of Poland with Scandinavian countries* (Balcer 2017). The conference had a more practical than scientific dimension. Nevertheless, as stated above, Baltic studies are usually inspired and driven by politics, economy and the detrimental effects of environmental degradation.

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