Facilitating Political Dialogue in the Baltico-Mediterranean Axis

Attitudes and Prejudices between the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean Regions

Kehys – the Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU

Anna Lindh Foundation

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Background

Kehys (Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU), in cooperation with the Anna Lindh Foundation, presents the programme *"Facilitating Political Dialogue in the Baltico-Mediterranean Axis"*. This programme gathers together civil society actors from six countries from the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions to enter in dialogue on issues of common interest, such as mobility, culture and environment. The main objective of the programme is the promotion of political dialogue, the strengthening of networks, and the building up of a platform for cooperation between the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions. The programme and this study are financed by the Anna Lindh Foundation.

This study on attitudes between the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions is a part of the programme. The study provides ideas and content for round table discussions and a final conference of the project. Furthermore, the aim of the study is to more generally give ideas for future civil society cooperation between the two regions at issue.

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Introduction

The aim of the study is to get a better understanding of how citizens of the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions understand themselves, their neighbours, and each other. From the survey results that are presented below it is possible to draw some conclusions on similarities, differences, and the prospects for future cooperation. Does regional identity exist, how does the self-perception look, and what are the attitudes towards the other region? The aim of the study is to be able to answer the following questions:

- How do the citizens of the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean areas perceive their own region, respectively?
- Is there something such as a common Baltic Sea or Mediterranean identity?
- Which challenges does the general public think that their region faces?
- What is the attitude towards and perception of the other region among the general public?
- To what extent are these areas seen as regions rather than a group of individual countries?
- Do citizens see similarities between the regions?
- Is there a common ground for cooperation between the regions on challenges such as environmental degradation and mobility?
- What is the role of the EU in the integration within and between these regions?

The survey

This study is based on a survey pursued in the two regions in order to find out how the general public perceive themselves and their region, as well as their opinion about the other region at issue.

The study mainly uses the information gained from a survey conducted in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions to answer the above questions. The study focuses on the three project themes: culture, mobility, and environment. The survey was filled in online form in June-August 2010 by 260 participants of 18 nationalities (see descriptive information in *Methodological discussion and limitations* below).

The study does not aim at presenting a comprehensive charting of attitudes in the two regions; its purpose is rather to get an indicative idea based on a limited sample of respondents.

The Baltico-Mediterranean Axis?

Is there something such as a Baltico-Mediterranean Axis? A link between two regions of great internal diversity situated in the very north and south of the European continent, what would this axis consist of?

The Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions are very different, and yet they have great similarities. Both have during the last decades experienced a rapid economic growth and societal change and both are partly in the EU and partly not. Both regions have strong historical, economic and cultural ties to Western Europe, yet some of the countries have for a long time politically and economically been in the periphery. The interaction between the regions has been limited and the knowledge and mutual understanding of each other is not well developed. The non-EU members of the regions at issue, however, face similar situations, and in both areas cooperation is needed in order to address challenges related to migration, environmental issues, and security.

The era of globalisation has been a societal transition for the regions and has in some of the countries coincided with an impressive economic growth that has worked as a catalyst to the process. The psychological concept of intersubjectivity has diverted and developed with globalisation, and identities have been strongly affected by foreign (mainly Western) influences. The global patterns of consumptions among young people are mirrored in the society of the countries at issue. In the southern and eastern Mediterranean region and the eastern Baltic Sea region, youth has a confidence as never before and feels part of the globalised world, accelerated by high annual GDP growth and booming economy. It is however a youth society of great heterogeneity.

Mediterranean identity, food, culture and history are all fairly famous. Mediterranean lifestyle is to some extent a concept known world-wide. The Mediterranean region is popularly seen as the “cradle of Europe” because of its ancient history and massive cultural and historical influence on the entire continent.

Less considered and accepted is that also the Baltic Sea area has a common history and cultural identity. For more than 40 years the iron curtain divided the Baltic Sea, but during the last two decades cooperation has rapidly developed. Historically, northern Europe has been regarded as cold and undeveloped, but during the 20th century at least some of the countries became associated with democracy and social

welfare. Nevertheless, Baltic Sea cooperation has never gained as much attention as the Union for the Mediterranean in European press.

The Baltic and the Mediterranean regions are both centred around the sea. The maritime life plays an important role and brings the regions together to face common concerns and challenges. Ships transport most goods nowadays, and transport routes are crucial for both regions. They also share common environmental challenges related for example to loss of biodiversity and rise in sea-levels.

In terms of foreign affairs, both regions are important to the EU. How can you be a central player on the international arena if you cannot cooperate with your neighbours? Russia is the huge neighbour and partner of the north, while the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries are in the south. Good partnership with these countries, and the development of closer ties with them, is of uttermost importance for the future of the EU for political, economical, and security reasons.

There is a lack of mutual understanding between the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions. Prejudices and racism are widespread. The media cover is limited and cultural exchange relatively small. Despite this, the regions have much in common. They understand the concern of cooperating with neighbouring countries that are not part of the EU. They can support each other's ambitions and challenges. But is there a common understanding?

A *Baltico-Mediterranean axis* has until now not been a common concept, but it might very well become one, taking the similarities and common challenges of the regions into account.

The Baltic Sea region: self-perception

What do the citizens of the Baltic Sea region think about their neighbours and their region? The concept of 'Baltic Sea identity' is surely not as widespread as the Mediterranean one. The term "Baltic countries" normally refers to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which creates further confusion when discussing the Baltic Sea region. The area was for a long time divided between east and west and was a heavily militarised zone until the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Now, two decades later, the picture is different. The EU brings states from both sides together for intense cooperation and the citizens can freely move over the sea and between the states. The Russian enclave of Kaliningrad is surrounded by the EU. Nevertheless, there might be traces of the past left in peoples mind as well as in political and economical structures.

Lack of common identity

What does it mean to come from and to live in the Baltic Sea region? Do people in the region identify themselves with this concept? Is there something like a Baltic Sea identity, and do different nationalities of the region share common values and culture?

In our survey, 62 percent answered that they do not at all consider themselves to be Baltic (Figure 1). Only 19 percent answered that they consider themselves 'Baltic' 'much' or 'very much'. This suggests that there is not much of a Baltic Sea belonging.

On the other hand, 52 percent answered 'much' or 'very much' on the question "Do you feel close to your neighbouring countries in terms of history and culture?" (Figure 2). This means that a majority of the respondents feel some kind of link to at least some other countries of the region, and hence, there seem to be a general feeling of common history and culture. Presumably this implies a certain level of common references and mutual understanding.

Figure 1 – Baltic Sea: “Do you consider yourself to be Baltic?”

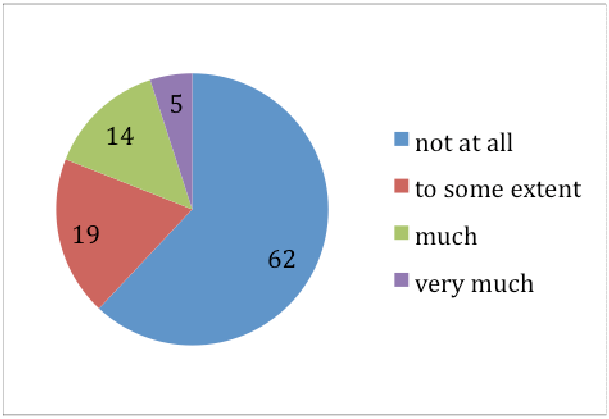
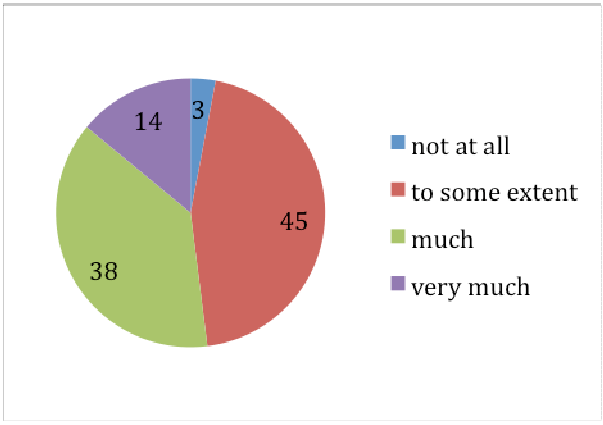
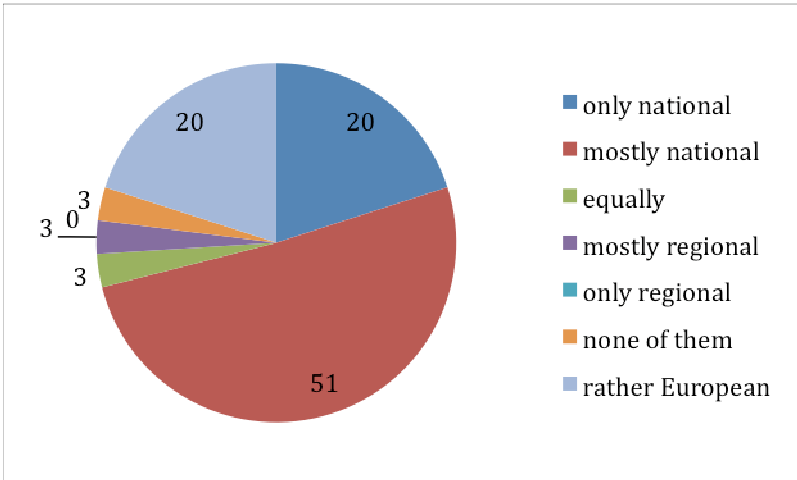


Figure 2 – Baltic Sea: “Do you feel close to your neighbouring countries in terms of history and culture?”



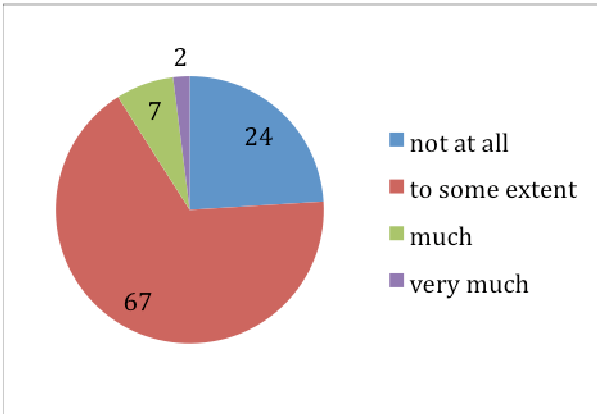
The vast majority, 71 percent, answered ‘only national’ or ‘mostly national’ to the question “Do you identify with your nationality or rather with the Baltic region?’” (Figure 3). 20 percent answered ‘rather European than something else’ whereas only 6 percent answered ‘mostly regional’. Thus, the national identity in the Baltic Sea region is still predominant. There is no strong identification with the Baltic Sea region. On the other hand, one out of five respondents identify themselves with Europe rather than something else. This number has most probably increased significantly during the last two decades, when most of the states of the region have become members of the European Union. As one out of five consider themselves European today, the question is how the role of the nation state will develop during the coming decades.

Figure 3 – Baltic Sea: "Do you identify with your nationality or rather with the Baltic region?"



In general, the survey does not suggest that the notion of a common Baltic Sea identity is strong among the general public. Asked "Would you say that a Baltic identity exist?" merely 9 percent answer 'much' or 'very much' (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Baltic Sea: "Would you say that a Baltic identity exists?"

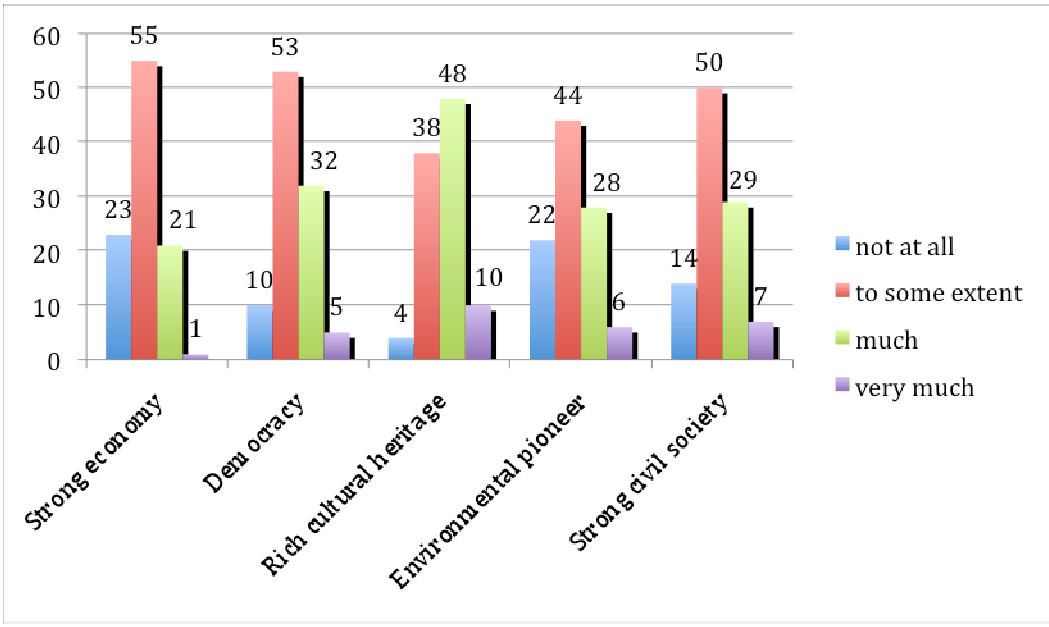


Cultural heritage and environmental challenges

What characterises the Baltic Sea region, according to its citizens? Figure 5 displays to what extent the citizens associate a few parameters with their region. It shows that the citizens of the Baltic Sea area find their region to be characterised by a rich cultural heritage to a high extent, with a strong economy to a low extent, and with democracy, environmental pioneering and a strong civil society only to some extent. Figure 5 tells that many find cultural links with their neighbours, and apparently the general public is strongly associating the Baltic Sea region with a rich cultural

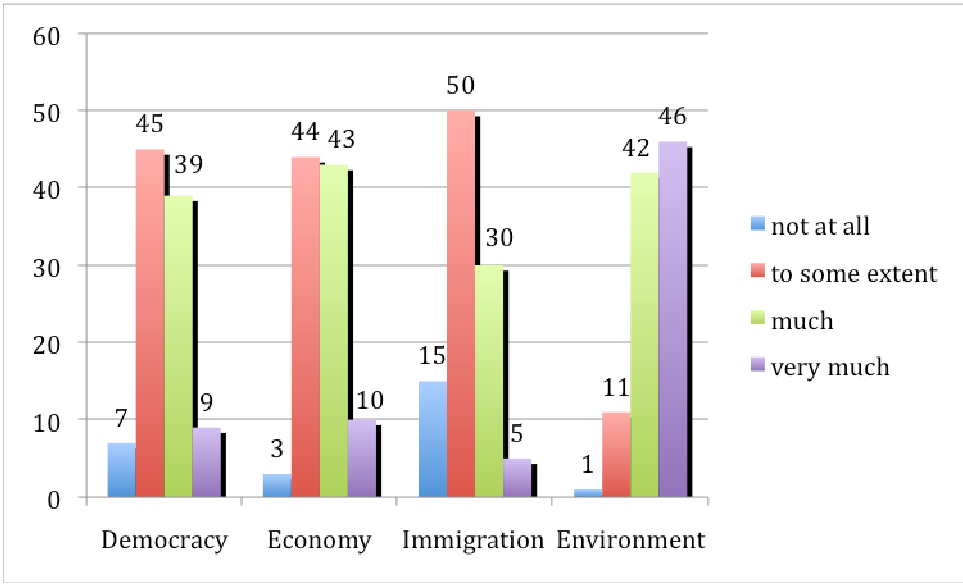
heritage, which presumably is shared between the countries. On the other hand, the economy is not considered very strong, maybe because compared to the other parameters it is easy to measure.

Figure 5 – Baltic Sea: "To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Baltic region?"



Which great challenges does the Baltic Sea region face for the moment, according to its citizens? Figure 6 tells that the environment by far is considered to be the greatest challenge of the region: 88 percent regard the issue 'much' or 'very much' to be a challenge. Economy and democracy is also considered to be rather challenging issues, whereas immigration to less extent is seen as a problem of the future.

Figure 6 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think the following parameters are great challenges for the Baltic region?"



The environment of the region is of great concern to the majority of the citizens. Figure 7 displays that maritime pollution is considered a major challenge according to 88 percent of the respondents, which shows that the Baltic Sea plays a central role in the region. Almost half of the answers point out global warming as a major challenge, which also is connected to the sea in terms of bio-diversity and rising sea-levels. Tourism is however not seen as a threat to the environment; only 22 percent answered 'much' or 'very much' to this question (Figure 8).

Figure 7 – Baltic Sea: "What do you think are the major environmental challenges to the Baltic region?"

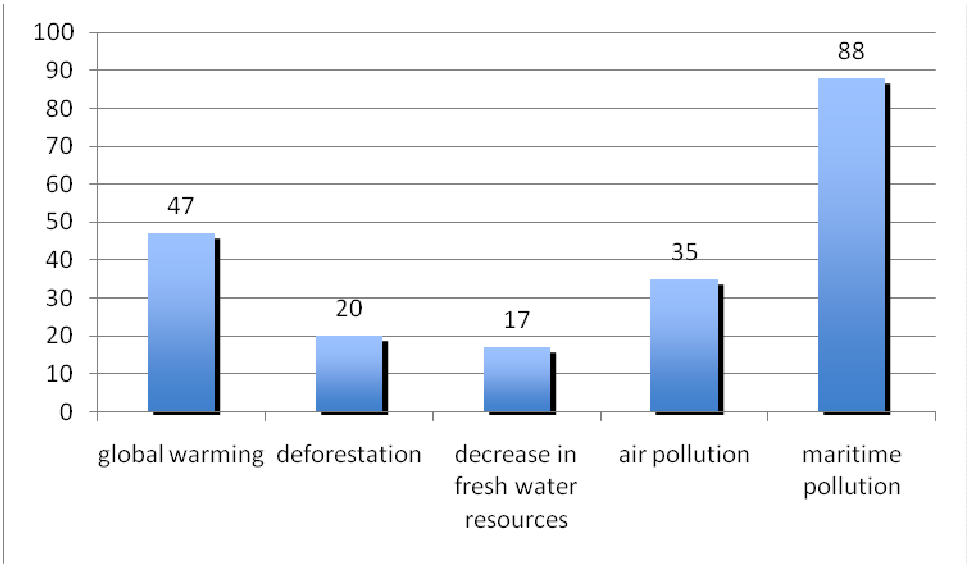
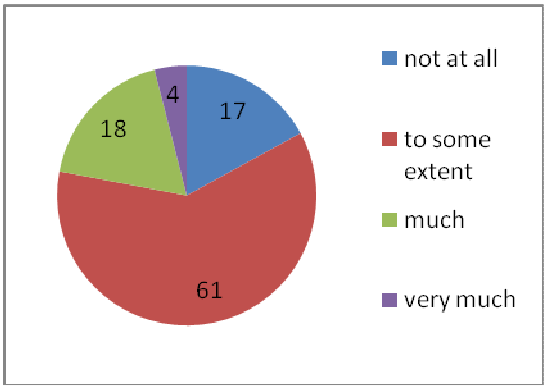


Figure 8 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think that tourism is a threat to the environment in your region?"



Religious and linguistic tolerance

What are the barriers for integration in the Baltic Sea region? According to the figures 9 and 10, neither language nor religion are seen as major obstacles. The latter might not be a surprise, taken the strong (or at least stronger than other religions) position of Christianity around the Baltic Sea into consideration. More surprising, however, is that the great linguistic diversity, with various languages of Slavic, Germanic and Finno-Ugrian origin present in the region, is not seen as a great barrier to integration.

Figure 9 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think that language diversity is a barrier to integration in the Baltic region?"

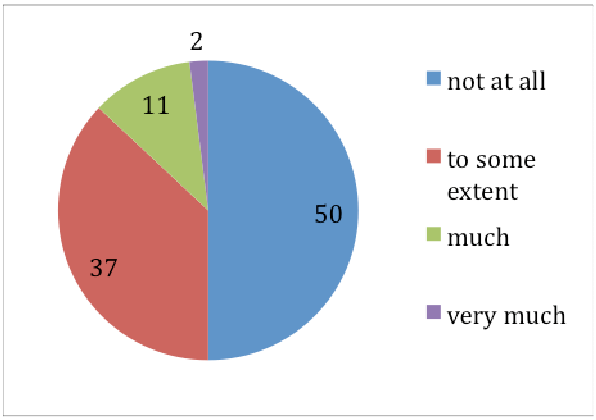
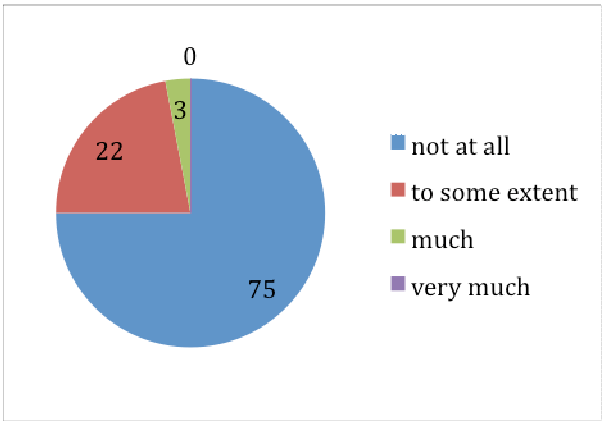


Figure 10 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think that religious diversity is a barrier to integration in the Baltic region?"



Conclusion

- There is not much of a common Baltic Sea identity, although many feel cultural and historical links to their neighbours.
- The citizens predominantly identify themselves with their nationality, but 20 percent mainly identify with Europe.
- The citizens of the Baltic Sea area associate the region with a rich cultural heritage, and to a lower extent with democracy, environmental pioneering, and a rich civil society. A strong economy is not associated with the region to a high degree.

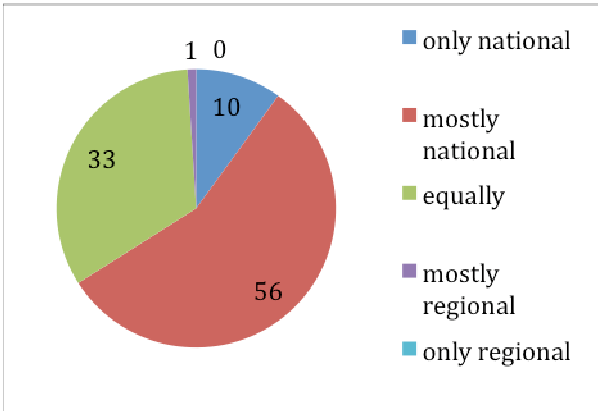
- The environment is seen as a great challenge of the region, followed by democracy, economy, and, to a less extent, immigration.
- Maritime pollution is considered a major challenge.
- Religious and linguistic diversity are not seen as barriers to regional integration.

The Mediterranean region through the eyes of the citizens of the Baltic Sea region

Through history the Baltic Sea region has been very influenced by the Mediterranean area. In several countries, such as Sweden and Russia, French was for a long time the court language, and the cultural influence cannot be overestimated. This was however long time ago, and since then the socio-economic development has partly changed.

Is the Mediterranean region, characterised by diversity, considered as a region or rather as separate nation states with their own characteristics? Apparently the state focus is predominant: 66 percent see the Mediterranean region as 'only national' or 'mostly national' (Figure 11). Presumably the great differences of the states of the region make the general public of the Baltic Sea region view the region rather as separate countries.

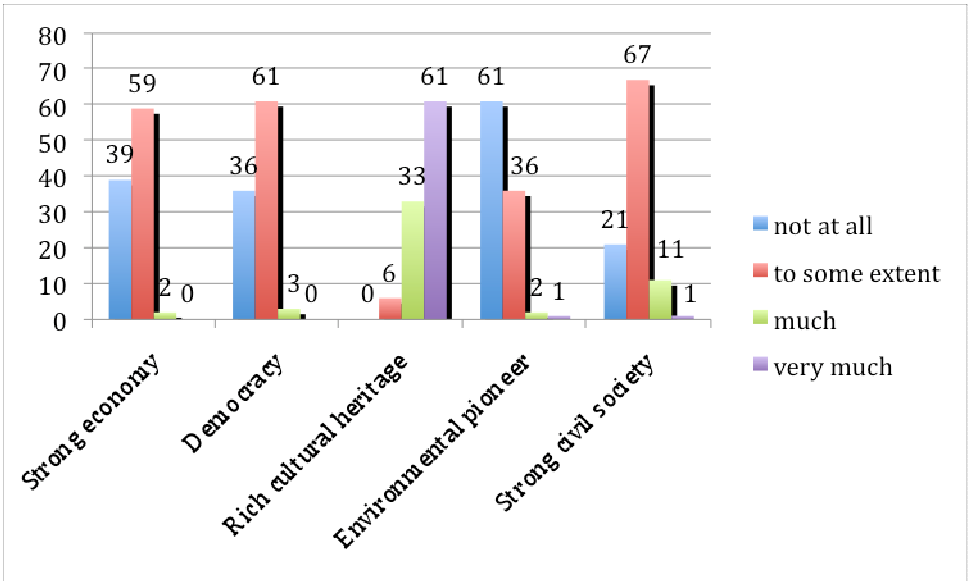
Figure 11 – Baltic Sea: "Do you see the Mediterranean region as separate countries or rather as a region?"



Positive and cultural associations

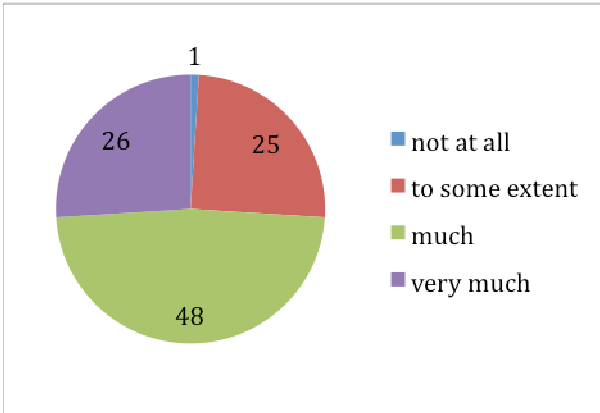
The cultural influence of the Mediterranean region has historically been strong, and cultural issues are still today very much associated with the region. 94 percent associate a rich cultural heritage 'much' or 'very much' with the Mediterranean region (Figure 12). Much less people associate the region with a strong civil society, democracy, a strong economy or, even less, environmental pioneering. It seems like the Mediterranean region to some extent is living on old merits.

Figure 12 – Baltic Sea: "To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Mediterranean region?"



The Baltic Sea perception of the Mediterranean region is positive. 74 percent have a general positive attitude towards the region and only 1 percent are not at all positive (Figure 13).

Figure 13 – Baltic Sea: "Do you generally have a positive attitude towards the Mediterranean region?"



The majority does not think that there are many immigrants from Mediterranean countries in the Baltic Sea region (Figure 14). The image of these immigrants is not overwhelming positive. To the question "Do immigrants from the Mediterranean region have a positive influence on your society?" 15 percent answered 'not at all' and 61 percent answered 'to some extent' (Figure 15). Thus, the attitude towards the

Mediterranean region seems to be more positive than the attitude towards immigrants of Mediterranean origin.

Figure 14 – Baltic Sea: "Do you have many immigrants from the Mediterranean region in your region?"

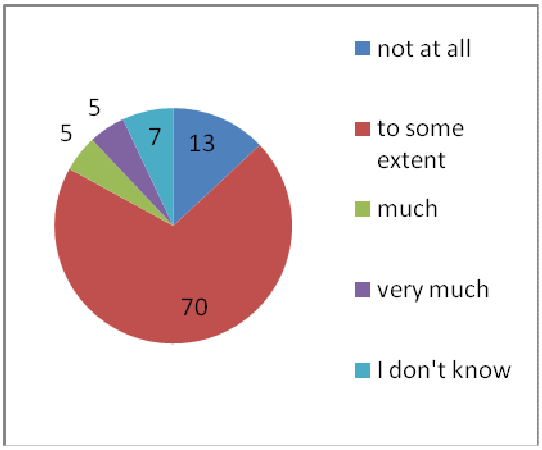
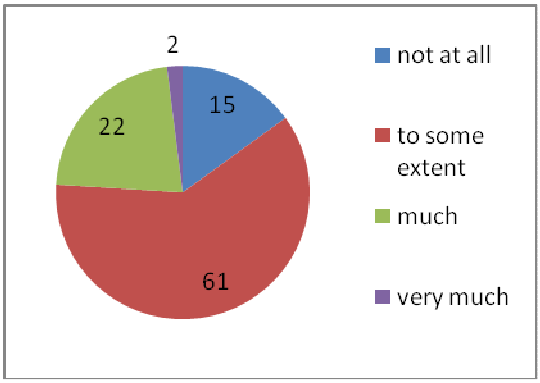


Figure 15 – Baltic Sea: "Do immigrants from the Mediterranean region have a positive influence on your society?"



Conclusion

- Although tendencies of a 'regional approach' exist, most citizens of the Baltic Sea region see the Mediterranean region as a group of national states.
- A rich cultural heritage is to a high extent associated with the Mediterranean region while a strong civil society, democracy, a strong economy, and environmental pioneering is so to a much less extent.
- The general attitude towards the Mediterranean region is positive.
- Mediterranean immigrants are not considered to add very much positive to the society.

The Mediterranean: self-perception

The Mediterranean region indeed has an ancient history and the cooperation within it is just as old. Three continents meet in this sea that always has been a cultural melting pot. The iron curtain divided the region partly, but Europe only constitutes one side of the Mediterranean Sea. Nowadays the border is to some extent stretched between those that are members of the EU and those that are not.

The Mediterranean region is to a higher extent than the Baltic Sea region subject of religious diversity. Muslims, Christians, and Jews surround the Mediterranean Sea and through history there have been several clashes between these groups. The economical situation differs widely between the countries although the current economic crisis sheds new light on the fact that some states grow much faster than others.

The Mediterranean identity is strong

The concept of Mediterranean identity and culture might be widespread in other parts of Europe and the world, but what do the Mediterraneans themselves say about it? In the survey, being Mediterranean is a concept that many are signing up for. 66 percent say that they consider themselves to be Mediterranean 'much' or 'very much', whereas merely 1 percent do not do so at all (Figure 16). These numbers differ greatly from the case of the Baltic Sea region, and the regional identity is much more prevailing in the Mediterranean region than in the Balitic Sea area.

Furthermore, figure 17 displys that the vast majority feel close to their neighbouring countries in terms of history and culture. Only 7 percent do 'not at all' feel such ties.

Figure 16 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you consider yourself to be Mediterranean?"

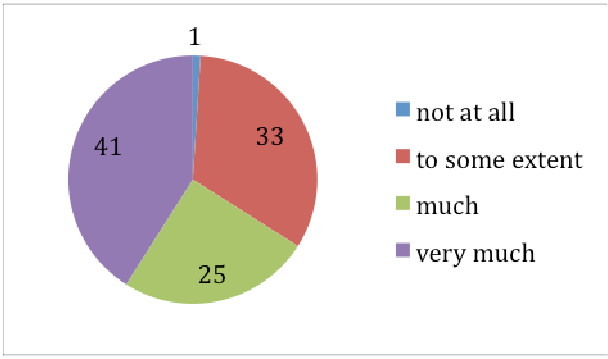
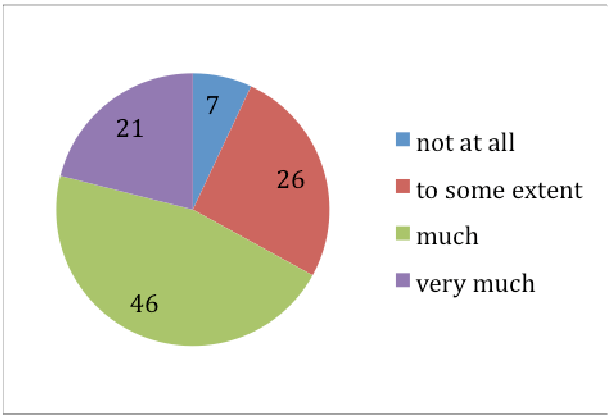
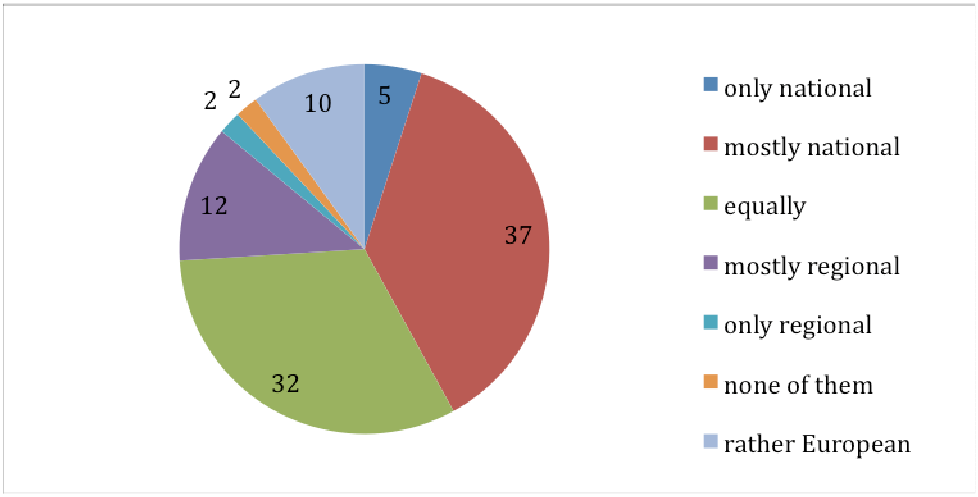


Figure 17 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you feel close to your neighbouring countries in terms of history and culture?"



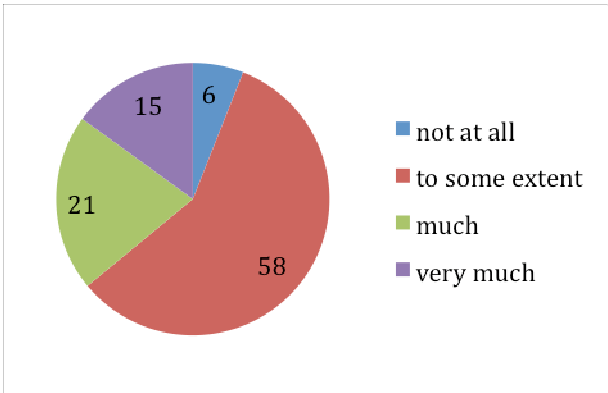
Many mainly identify themselves with their nationality, although to a less extent compared with the Baltic Sea region (Figure 18). However, 12 percent answer that they mostly identify with the Mediterranean region, which is rather striking. 10 percent (half the number of the citizens of the Baltic Sea region) see themselves as European rather than something else. How can this difference be explained? There are probably several reasons, but two of them are rather obvious. Firstly, the Mediteranean Sea is not a European inland sea, as several of the Mediterranean countries are African or Asian. Secondly, many of the European countries are not members of the EU.

Figure 18 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you identify with your nationality or rather with the Mediterranean region?"



Despite these figures, the majority of respondents thinks that a Mediterranean identity exists only to some extent (Figure 19). This sounds contradictory. Maybe this can be explained by some people feeling close to their direct neighbouring countries, but not with the entire Mediterranean region. Nevertheless, taking the different results into consideration, there are strong tendencies of an existance of a common Mediterranean identity as well as a feeling of joint history and culture.

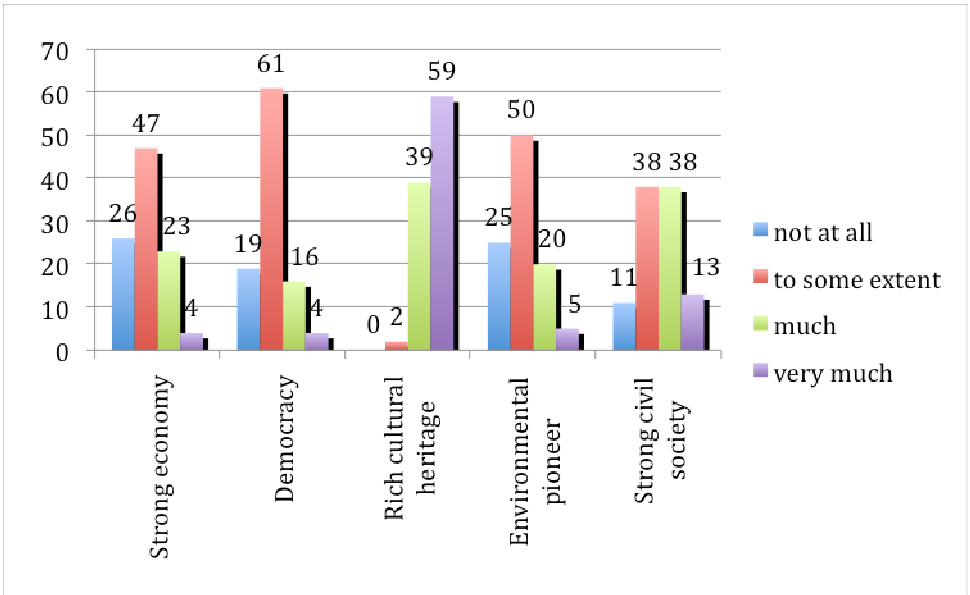
Figure 19 – Mediterranean Sea: "Would you say that a Mediterranean identity exist?"



Rich cultural heritage

What do the Mediterraneans mainly associate their region with? As displayed in figure 20, they mainly highlight the rich cultural heritage, just like the citizens of the Baltic Sea region. Many further associate the region with a strong civil society, whereas fewer seem to think that the Mediterranean area can be associated to environmental progress, strong economy, or democracy.

Figure 20 – Mediterranean Sea: "To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Mediterranean region?"



According to the survey, the Mediterranean region faces serious challenges within several fields. Figure 21 tells that the general public thinks that the region faces challenges within environmental issues, immigration, economy, and democracy. All the parameters are rated highly, which is very different from the Baltic Sea region where only 'environment' was close to be considered as challenging.

Figure 21 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think the following parameters are great challenges for the Mediterranean region?"

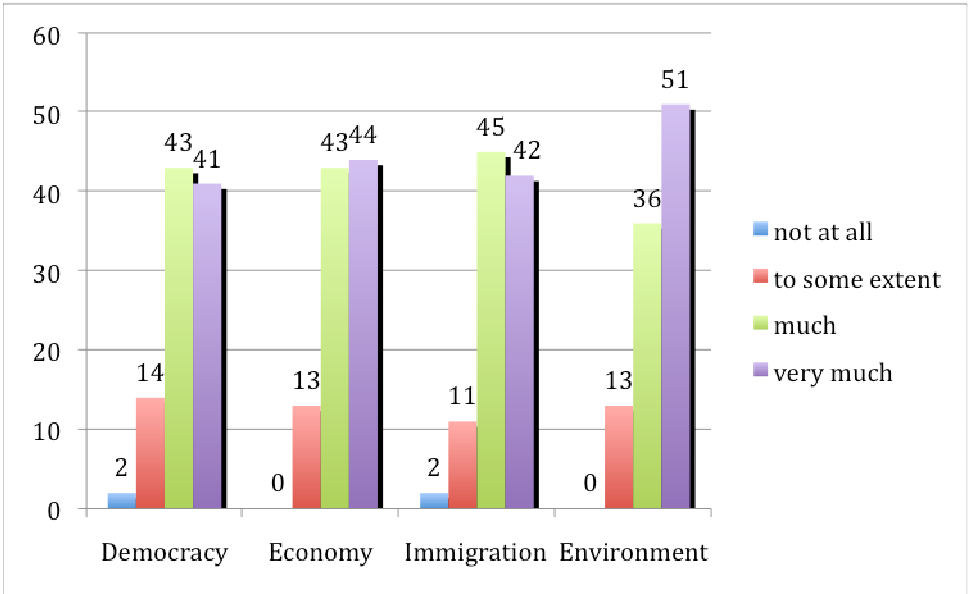


Figure 22 displays that several environmental threats are considered to be major challenges for the Mediterranean region. The decrease in fresh water resources is the most frequent answer, followed by maritime pollution, desertification, and global warming. Hence, the awareness is high, and the implications of environmental degradation for the Mediterranean Sea and the entire region is an important issue for the vast majority. A significant part of respondents, 38 percent, find tourism 'much' or 'very much' to be a threat to the environment in the Mediterranean region (Figure 23). In several countries golf courses and other resource-demanding resorts built for the tourist industry have had negative impact on water management and the environment in general.

Figure 22 – Mediterranean Sea: "What do you think are the major environmental challenges to the Mediterranean region?"

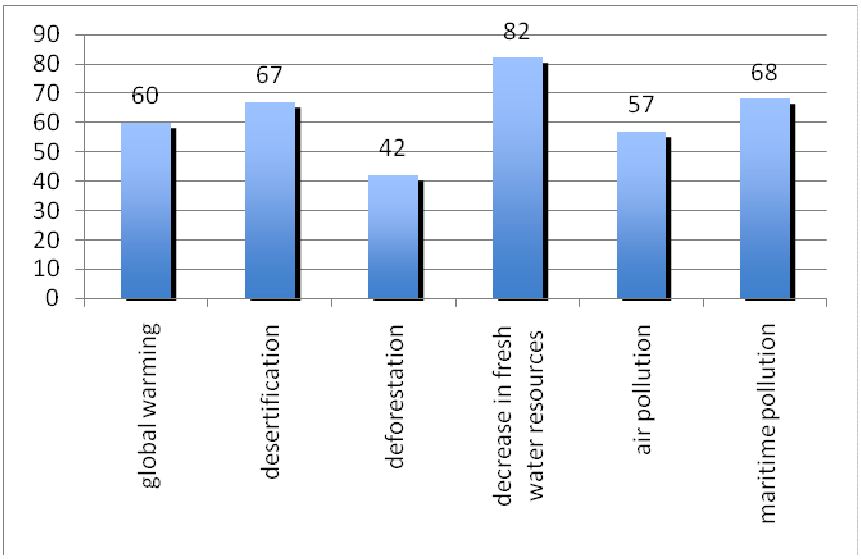
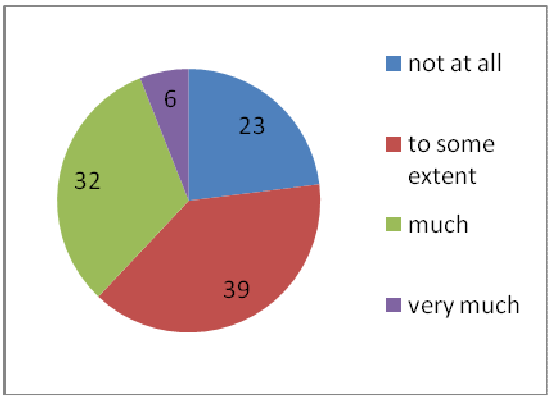


Figure 23 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think that tourism is a threat to the environment in your region?"



United in diversity

Which are the obstacles for further integration within the region? The Mediterranean region is characterised by great linguistic diversity. Religion has in history been subject of great confrontation in the region, and to some degree still is. Despite this, few recognize language differences and religious diversity as major obstacles (Figures 24 and 25).

Figure 24 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think that language diversity is a barrier to integration in the Mediterranean region?"

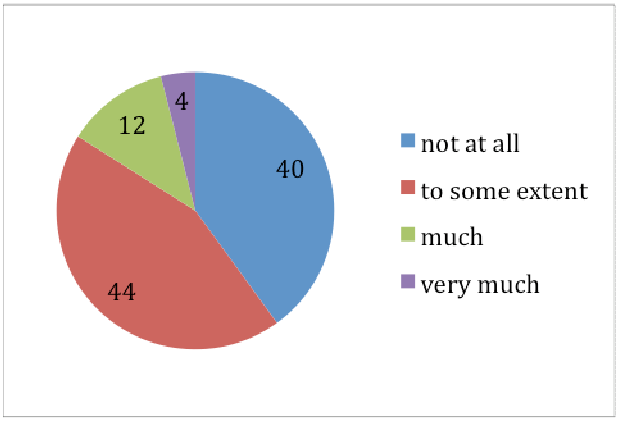
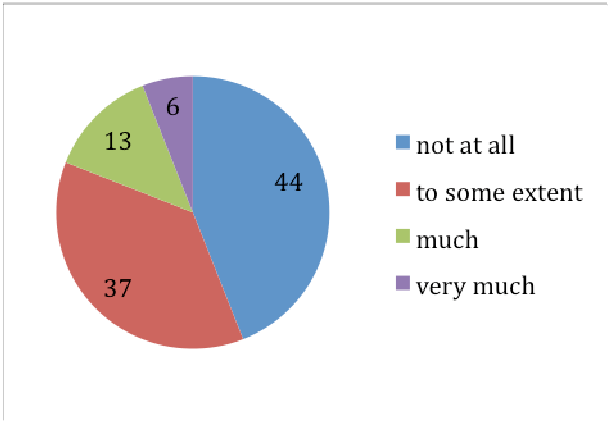


Figure 25 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think that religious diversity is a barrier to integration in the Mediterranean region?"



Conclusion

- There is a Mediterranean identity, and many feel strong cultural and historical ties with their neighbouring countries.
- The Mediterraneans strongly associate their region with a rich cultural heritage.

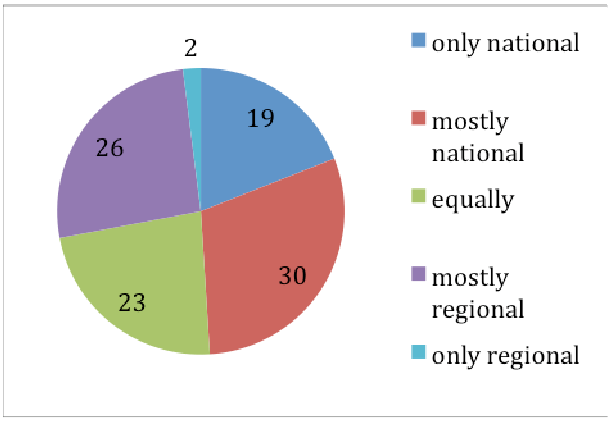
- It is commonly agreed that the region faces challenges related to democracy, economy, immigration and environmental issues.
- The decrease in fresh water resources, maritime pollution, desertification and global warming are considered to be major environmental threats to the region, and a significant percentage think that tourism can worsen the environmental degradation.
- Religious and linguistic diversity is not seen as a barrier to regional integration.

The Baltic Sea region through the eyes of the Mediterraneans

Maybe the general knowledge and notion of the remote Baltic Sea region far in the north has not been very developed in the Mediterranean Sea region. The cultural influence from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean has historically not been as significant as the influences going to the opposite direction.

Figure 26 tells that the majority of the Mediterraneans see the countries of the Baltic Sea to some degree as a region. Taking the great diversity of the Baltic Sea region into consideration this is remarkable. The regional notion of the Baltic Sea region is stronger among Mediterraneans than among the citizens of the Baltic Sea region. Maybe this is because the Mediterraneans are not aware of the country specific differences?

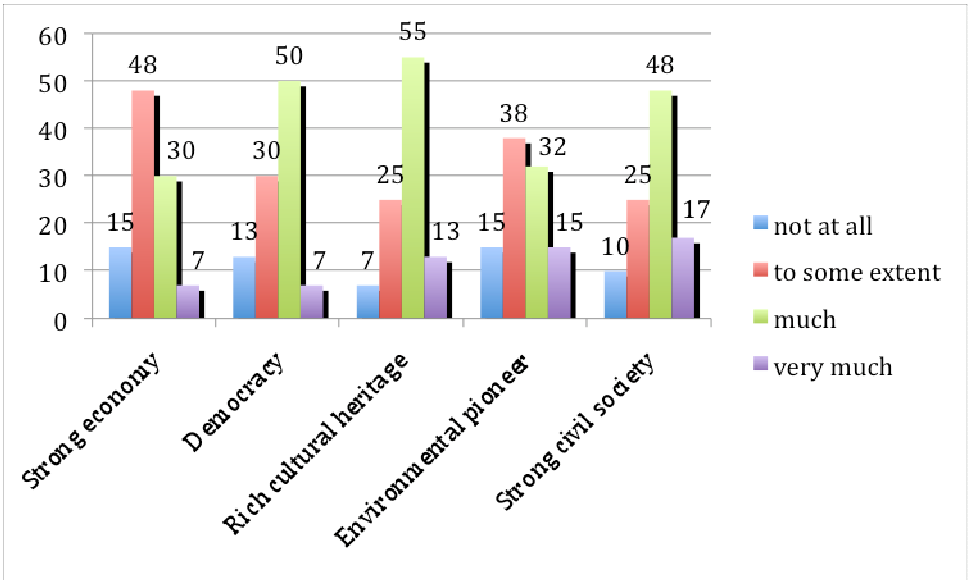
Figure 26 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you see the Baltic region as separate countries or rather as a region?"



Culture and democracy

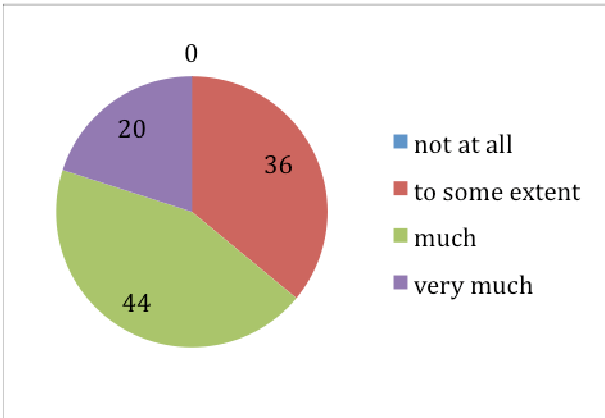
What characterises the Baltic Sea area and its countries according to the Mediterraneans? Once again, the culture is strong. One could believe that the cultural heritage of the Baltic Sea region would be unknown in the Mediterranean region, but the majority associate the Baltic Sea region 'much' or 'very much' with a rich cultural heritage (figure 27). Also democracy and the civil society are subjects of fairly high ranking, and environmental work to some extent. On the other hand less people are associating the Baltic Sea region with a strong economy.

Figure 27 – Mediterranean Sea: "To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Baltic region?"



The Mediterraneans are positive about the Baltic Sea region. Figure 28 shows that the majority is clearly positive towards the Baltic Sea region, and nobody stated to be 'not at all' positive.

Figure 28 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you generally have a positive attitude towards the Baltic region?"



There is not an abundance of immigrants from the Baltic Sea region in the Mediterranean region. This fact is reflected in the general opinion, and the vast majority does not think that there are many immigrants from these countries (Figure 29). The few immigrants that after all exist are not considered to add much positive to

the Mediterranean society; 77 percent say that that they do so only 'to some extent' or 'not at all' (Figure 30).

Figure 29 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you have many immigrants from the Baltic region in your region?"

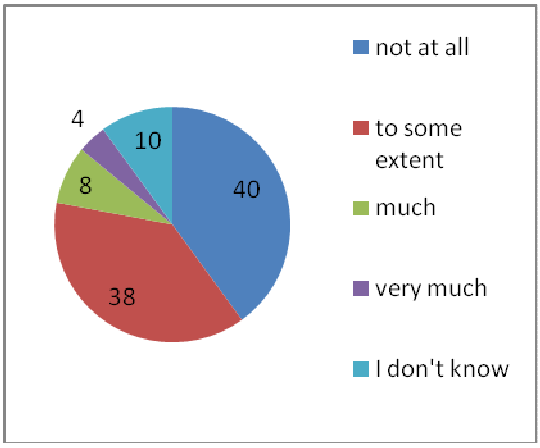
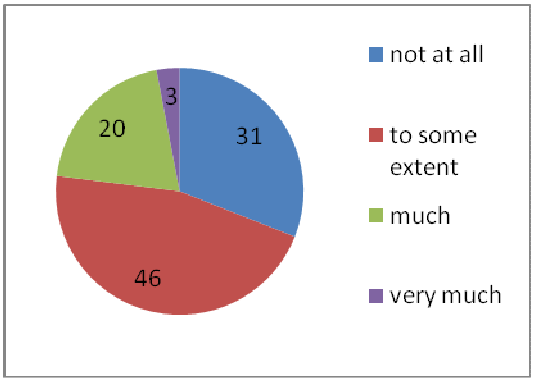


Figure 30 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do immigrants from the Baltic region have a positive influence on your society?"



Conclusion

- The majority of the Mediterraneans see the Baltic Sea area as a region rather than specific countries.
- The Baltic Sea region is commonly associated with a rich cultural heritage. The region is also fairly much associated with democracy, a strong civil society, and being an environmental pioneer, and to less extent with a strong economy.
- The general public holds a positive attitude towards the Baltic Sea region.

- The few immigrants from the Baltic Sea region living in the Mediterranean countries are not considered to have a very positive influence on the society.

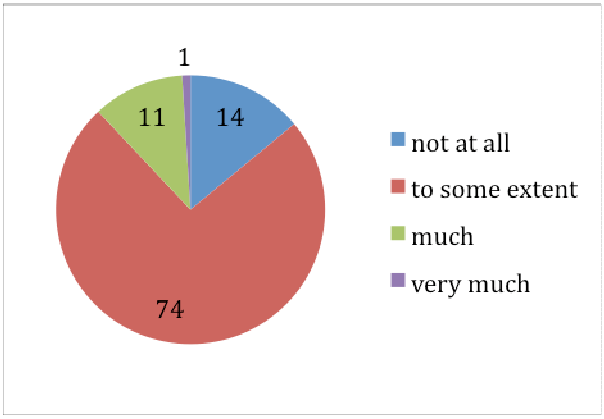
Common challenges and prospects for cooperation

That there are differences as well as similarities between the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea regions is an obvious fact that has been confirmed by the survey. Situated in border areas of the EU, and united by the sea, the regions have interesting links. How do the citizens perceive this?

Few similarities but common challenges

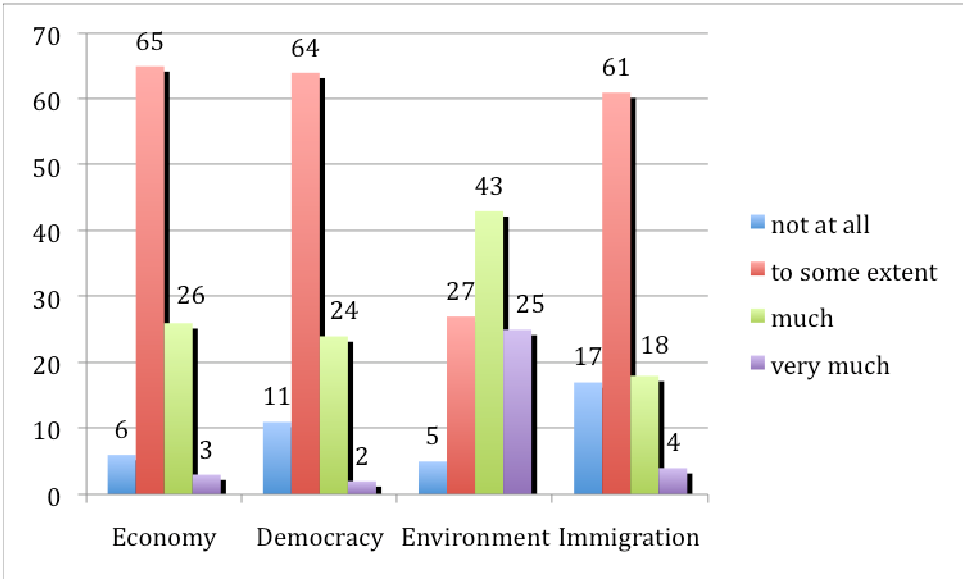
According to citizens of the Baltic Sea region, the differences between these two regions are more prevailing than the similarities. The vast majority say that they 'to some extent' feel similarities, whereas only 12 percent say that they do so 'much' or 'very much' (figure 31).

Figure 31 – Baltic Sea: "Do you feel any similarities between the Mediterranean and the Baltic region?"



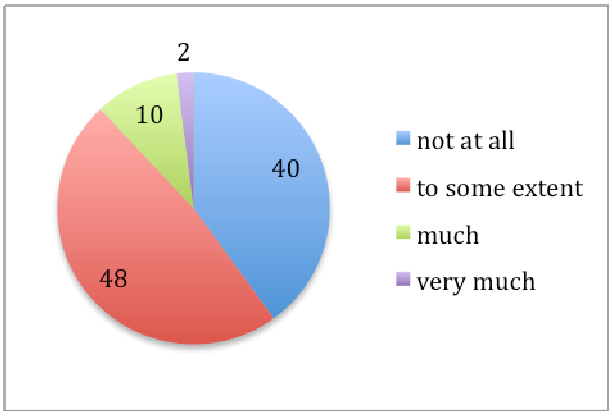
The general public of the Baltic Sea region finds common challenges being shared with the Mediterranean region in the area of environment. Once again the environment is emphasised while immigration, democracy, and economy to a much less extent is considered to be areas of common challenges (Figure 32). This goes in line with that the citizens of the Baltic Sea region are not considering immigration as a challenge.

Figure 32 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think that the Baltic region share common challenges with the Mediterranean region in the following parameters?"



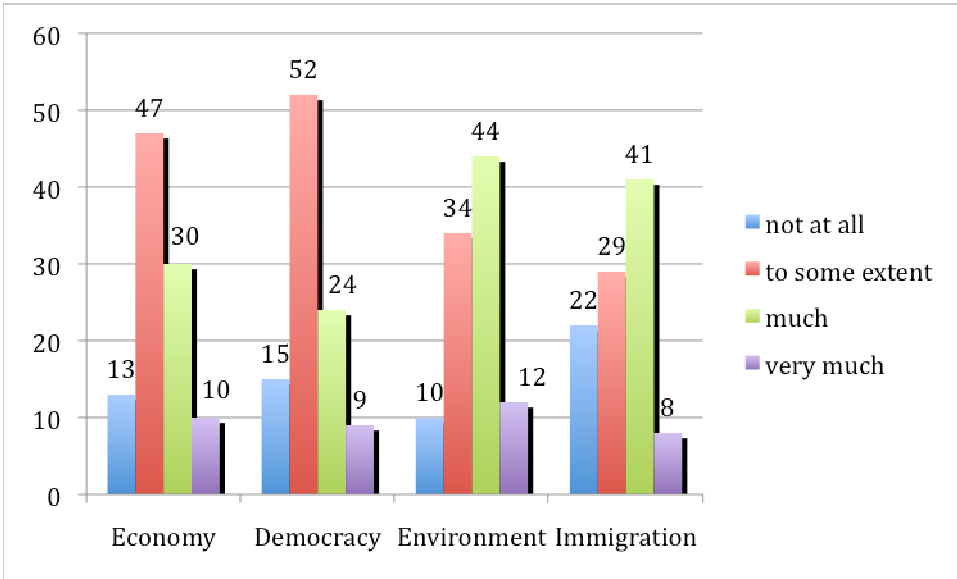
The Mediterraneans find similarities between the two regions to an even lower extent. 88 percent say that they only feel similarities 'to some extent' or 'not at all' (Figure 33). Hence, there is still a massive mental cleavage between these regions.

Figure 33 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you feel any similarities between the Mediterranean and the Baltic region?



The Mediterraneans, however, feel that both environmental issues and immigration challenges are shared with the Baltic Sea region (Figure 34). To a slightly higher degree than the Baltics did, although still not very commonly, the Mediterraneans consider economy and democracy to be issues with shared challenges.

Figure 34 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think that the Mediterranean region shares common challenges with the Baltic region in the following parameters?"



When the groups individually are asked about which challenges their regions face, the answers do not differ very much, but they do not think that they share common challenges to the same extent. There is hence some kind of misconception and lack of knowledge of that significant similarities actually exist.

The ambivalent role of the EU

The EU evidently is a crucial player in both the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea regions, as well as a connection point between them. On the other hand, the EU divides both of the regions internally, and possibly aggravates cooperation within the regions. The EU may be an obstacle to enhanced integration in the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions, respectively, as well as between them.

The majority ofrespondents from the Baltic Sea region think that the EU 'not at all' or only 'to some extent' has improved the political and economical situation in the Baltic Sea region (Figure 35). This can be considered as little, taken into consideration that all states except Russia are members of the EU. It reveals a picture where the EU is not significantly improving the region economically or politically. However, the survey shows that in the Baltic Sea region, the majority of respondents think that the EU 'not at all' or 'to some extent' divides the region (Figure 36). For inhabitants of Kaliningrad Oblast, the impression is probably different though, living in an island surrounded by the EU.

Figure 35 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think that the EU has improved the political and economical situation in the Baltic region?"

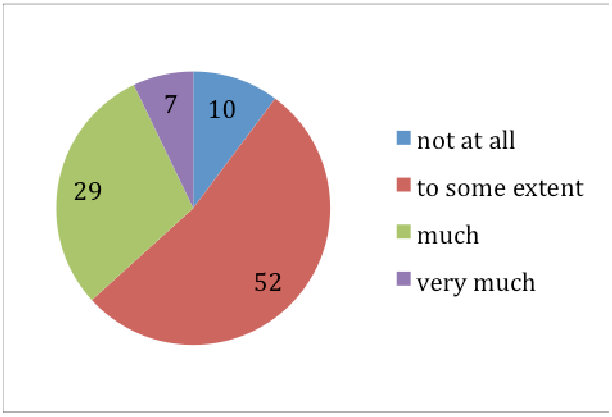
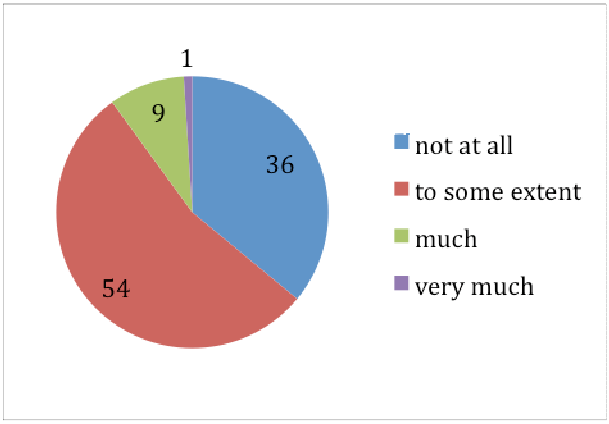


Figure 36 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think that the EU is dividing the Baltic region?"



In the Mediterranean region an even higher percentage, 69 percent, think that the EU has not improved the political and economical situation or has done so only 'to some extent' (Figure 37). However, in contrast with the Baltic Sea region, many of the Mediterranean countries are not members of the EU. Furthermore, the loyalty towards Brussels has been stagnating during the recent economic crisis that had significant impact on some of these countries. Despite the fact that the EU actually is dividing the region, the general thought seems to be that the EU is not adding any division or borders in the Mediterranean region; 70 percent find this being done 'not at all' or 'to some extent' (figure 38).

Figure 37 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think that the EU has improved the political and economical situation in the Mediterranean region?"

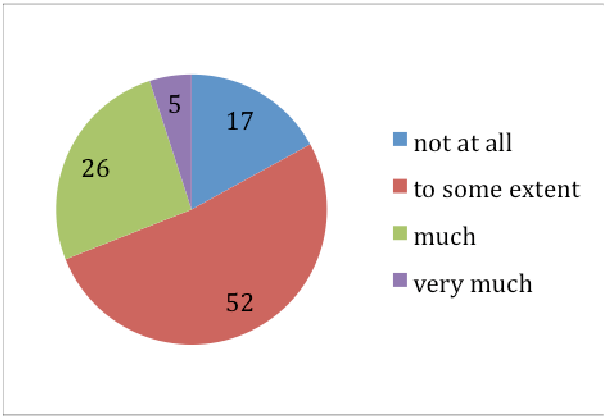
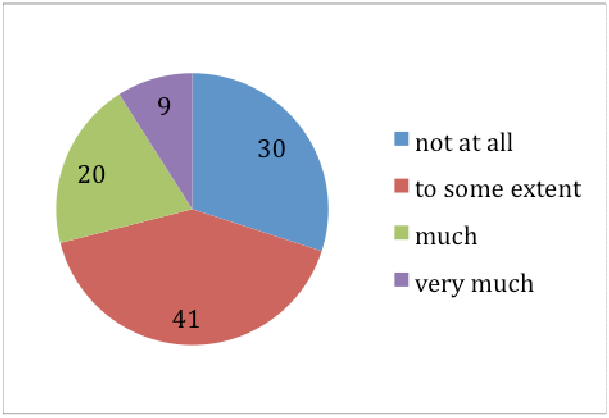


Figure 38 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think that the EU is dividing the Mediterranean region?"



The EU surely is a bridge and an intermediate for Baltico-Mediterranean cooperation. Thanks to the EU, politicians from the two regions meet regularly to discuss common issues. Despite this, few people have much trust in the EU bringing the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions closer together. In the Baltic Sea region only 28 percent of respondents think that the EU does so 'much' or 'very much' (Figure 39). In the Mediterranean region this group merely constitutes 14 percent of the respondents (Figure 40).

Figure 39 – Baltic Sea: "Do you think that the EU is bringing the Mediterranean and the Baltic regions closer to each other?"

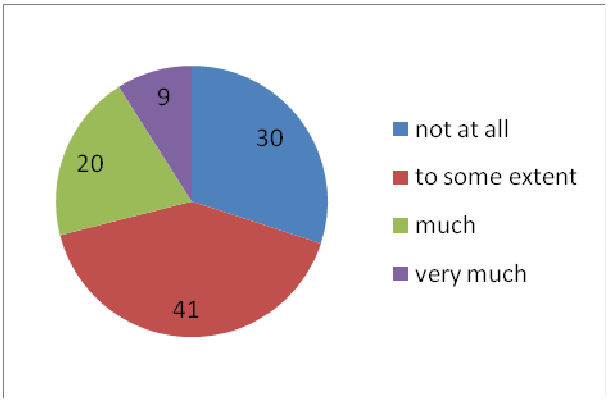
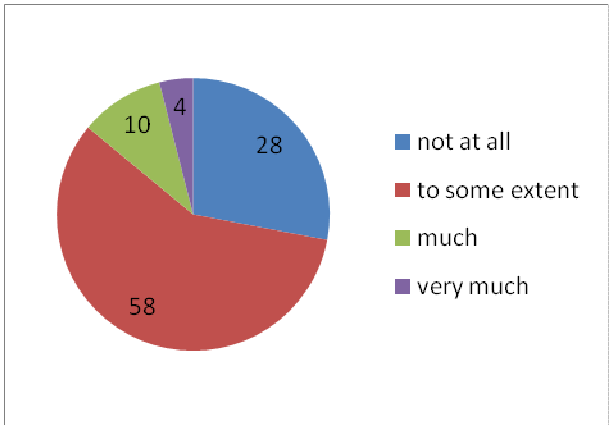


Figure 40 – Mediterranean Sea: "Do you think that the EU is bringing the Mediterranean and the Baltic regions closer to each other?"



Conclusion

- The general public of the Baltic Sea region sees more differences than similarities between the regions, and the Mediterraneans see even less resemblance.
- The citizens of the Baltic Sea region find common challenges with the Mediterranean region in the area of environment. The Mediterraneans point out environment and immigration matters.
- Neither the citizens of the Baltic Sea nor the Mediterranean region think that the EU has significantly improved the political and economical situation of their regions
- The EU is neither perceived as dividing the regions internally, nor as bringing the two regions closer to each other.

Discussion: A new era of Baltico-Mediterranean cooperation?

By carrying out a survey we have learned something about the way the citizens of the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions, respectively, perceive themselves and each other. Despite the limited number of participants and their somewhat heterogenous composition, some interesting conclusions can be drawn and used for further research and discussions.

Whereas the Mediterranean culture, food, character etc. are commonly known also in the North, the culture of the Baltic Sea region is not so to the same extent. The survey shows that the citizens of the Baltic Sea region to a less extent than the Mediterraneans identify with their region. The common identity can be difficult to recognise, but there are surely traces of common history and culture also up in the north. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the national identity still is prevailing also in the Mediterranean region, and that the difference in this aspect hence should not be exaggerated.

Culture

Culture is a crucial ingredient in identity and transnational cooperation. The survey reveals that in both regions the citizens associate their own region, as well as the other, primarily with a rich cultural heritage. Hence, this is a subject to work further on in the political cooperation. The attitude is in general positive towards the other region and its culture, which can strongly facilitate interregional dialogue.

The ties between these regions situated in the opposite sides of the European continent have a long history, and there is hence some kind of tradition of mutual understanding of each other's cultures. Cooperation within the cultural field may very well pave the way for cooperation in other sectors, generated by a spill-over effect.

The cultural sector and cultural understanding is often neglected by politicians. This is unfortunate, since it very well might be the most efficient way for the general public to open their eyes and promote their interest in another region. A conclusion from the study is that culture plays a crucial part in the identity of both regions at issue. The citizens are proud of their own cultural heritage and appreciate the culture of each other's regions. Thus, this is a good point of departure for further cooperation.

Mobility

Traditionally the immigration flows between the regions have been directed from the south to the north. Huge groups of labour immigrants from the Mediterranean region moved to the Baltic Sea region, e.g. to Germany and Sweden, during the second half of the 20th century.

The survey suggests that the impression of the other region is more positive than towards immigrants origin from there. This is an interesting phenomenon: you like the culture, but not necessarily think that immigrants with this culture add something to your society.

During recent decades many states in these regions have gained EU membership. This has changed the mobility within and between the regions, especially since the Schengen agreement entered into force implying free movement of people within the member states. The 2004 enlargement resulted in many people from the new member states, including Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, to move to other EU countries to work.

Whereas movements within the EU are simple and frequent, it is much more complicated to move to the EU from non-member states. Expressions such as *Fort Europe* are often used by critics to EU migration policies, and the EU could be said to divide both the Baltic Sea region and the Mediterranean region between members and non-members. Nevertheless, according to the survey, the majority does not think that such a border is strong. Furthermore, the general impression is that the EU has not strongly improved the economical and political situation of the regions, suggesting that the attitude towards the EU is far from purely positive.

Despite great diversity within the two regions, the general public does not see religious and linguistic diversity as an obstacle to regional integration. This can be interpreted in several ways. In the Mediterranean region immigration is seen as a major challenge. This is not the case in the Baltic Sea region. Several religions are present around the Mediterranean Sea, and during recent years immigration and religion, mainly Islam, has been heavily debated in media in many European countries. Taking this into consideration, it is almost surprising, although promising for the future, that religion not is considered as a barrier for regional integration.

Environment

One result of the study is clear: environment matters. In both regions environment is considered to be an issue of uttermost importance and a challenge of today and the future. It is furthermore a sector where people find common challenges for the two regions. Thus, this is one policy area where more emphasis should be placed within the Baltico-Mediterranean cooperation.

During the last decade, the awareness of environmental degradation and its implications has risen significantly. The borderless character of environmental issues implies that transnational answers to the problems are needed. Coastal regions face specific problems of environmental degradation. In the Baltic Sea region, 88 percent of respondents regard maritime pollution as a major challenge. Pollution can be devastating for the biodiversity of the sea, which for example the fishery sector is dependent on. Also global warming may have huge implications for coastal areas in terms of rise in sea-levels. In the Mediterranean area as well several environmental issues are considered to be serious problems, including the decrease of fresh water resources.

Despite great differences, these two maritime regions face similar problems related to environmental issues. The citizens recognize this fact, and hence it is an area of possible cooperation. Environmental cooperation is fruitful since it touches many areas and actors, including the civil society, the administration on several levels, technology and business, as well as politicians. Thus, environmental cooperation within the Baltico-Mediterranean axis provides many prospects for the future.

Prospects for Baltico-Mediterranean cooperation

The 'axis' between these two regions is neither natural nor obvious. The citizens emphasize rather the differences than the similarities between the regions. The general belief in common challenges is rather low.

Nevertheless, an 'axis' might be possible in the near future. There are surely interesting similarities and links between these regions, and the citizens show interest and positive attitude towards each other. The natural forum for cooperation could be the EU. However, taking the results of the EU-related questions in the survey into account, maybe multi-lateral cooperation outside the EU framework could also be one alternative.

Culture and environment are mentioned as areas where the prospects of future cooperation are rather good. Both themes are considered crucial, and environment is recognised as a common challenge of major importance. These are therefore issues on which future cooperation could focus. They are both also useful for paving the way for cooperation in other fields.

The geographical distance between the regions is self evident. Mentally, however, it has significantly diminished after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, enlargement of the European Union, economic equalization, democratization and the development of infrastructure. Hence, the regions have never been closer to each other than now. Enhanced cooperation between the Baltic Sea region and the Mediterranean countries is far from obvious, but perfectly possible and probably something that both regions could gain from.

Conclusion

This study is based on a survey and it aims to understand how people in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions perceive themselves and their regions, as well as the similarities, differences and common challenges between the two regions. The results can be summarised as follows:

- There seem to exist something like a Mediterranean identity with strong cultural and historical links in the region. In the Baltic Sea area there is less evidence of such a common identity.
- The citizens in both regions generally identify themselves rather with their nationality than with the region. A European identity is also not unusual.
- Religious and linguistic diversity is not seen as a barrier to regional integration.
- Both regions are to a high extent associated with culture; by themselves as well as by each other.
- In both the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean regions the general attitude towards the other region is positive.
- The general public in the Baltic Sea region sees more differences than similarities between the regions, and the Mediterraneans see even less resemblance.
- Environment is of great concern to the majority of respondents, and in both regions environmental degradation is considered to be a great challenge. This is also the area where common challenges for the two regions mainly are seen to exist.
- Migration flows between the regions are not equal, and immigrants are not considered to have a very positive influence on society in their new countries of residence.
- Neither the citizens of the Baltic Sea nor the Mediterranean region think that the EU has significantly improved the political and economic situation of their regions.
- The EU is neither perceived as dividing the regions internally, nor as bringing the two regions closer to each other.

Methodological discussion and limitations

This study is based on a survey. The survey consisted of a questionnaire with 37 questions available in two versions, aimed at citizens from the Baltic Sea countries and Mediterranean countries respectively (see Appendix). The questionnaire aimed to the Baltic Sea region was available in English and Finnish, while the Mediterranean version was available in English and French. The questionnaire was completed in online form during June-August 2010. Participants were contacted by e-mail through partner organisations of Kehys and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Altogether 260 people participated in the survey. The background of the respondents is in many ways biased: one Albanian citizen participated whereas 107 had Finish nationality, more than 90 percent had university education, and 60 percent were women. This uneven distribution has to be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions from the results. Nevertheless, some trends can be discerned from this material. These well-educated people probably are far more internationally-minded than the average citizens, and possibly have different attitudes towards immigration, environment and culture.

The study does not aim to present a comprehensive charting of attitudes in the two regions. Its purpose is to get an indicative idea based on a limited sample of respondents and other sources.

Participants

	Participants	Sex	Age (years)	Education
Baltic Sea				
English version	76	Female: 55.3% Male: 44.7%	Average: 32.0, Median: 28 Min: 20, Max: 65	90.8% University
Finnish version	107	Female: 82.2% Male: 17.8%	Average: 37.2, Median: 31 Min: 23, Max: 71	97.2% University
Mediterranean Sea				
English version	50	Female: 46% Male: 54%	Average: 43.8, Median: 45.5 Min: 19, Max: 76	98,0% University
French version	27	Female: 18.5% Male: 81.5%	Average: 42.3, Median: 43 Min: 25, Max: 65	92.3% University
Total	**260**	**Female: 60.8% Male 39.2%**	**Average: 37.5, Min: 19, Max: 76**	**95% University**

Nationalities of the participants (nr)	
Albanian (1)	Italian (2)
Algerian (1)	Lebanese (1)
Croatian (2)	Moroccan (23)
Estonian (37)	Palestinian (7)
Finnish (107)	Polish (2)
French (8)	Russian (3)
German (10)	Spanish (3)
Greek (5)	Swedish (24)
Israeli (20)	Turkish (4)

Appendix

Survey on attitudes and prejudices in the Baltico-Mediterranean Axis

All information will be treated anonymously.

A: Personal information:

1 Age:

2 Sex: (female / male)

3 Nationality:

4 Education: (elementary schooling, high school, university)

5 Profession:

B: Relation to your own region (the Mediterranean/Baltic region)

6 Which five countries do you primarily associate with the Baltic Sea/Mediterranean Sea?

7 Do you consider yourself to be Mediterranean/Baltic?
(Not at all, not so much, much, very much)

8 Do you identify with your nationality or rather with the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Only national, mostly national, equally, mostly regional, only regional, none of them, rather European than something else)

9 Do you feel close to your neighbouring countries in terms of history and culture?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

10 Would you say that a Mediterranean/Baltic identity exists?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

11 Are you interested in politics and culture of the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

12 Do you think that the EU is dividing the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

13 Do you think that the EU has improved the political and economical situation in the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

14 How important do you feel that the Mediterranean/Baltic region is on the international arena as a:

Political actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Economical actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Cultural actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Environmental actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

15 To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Mediterranean/Baltic region:

Strong economy? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Good governance/democracy? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Rich cultural heritage? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Sport? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Environmental pioneer? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Strong civil society? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

16 Do you think the following parameters are great challenges for the Mediterranean/Baltic region?

Good governance/democracy (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Economy (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Immigration (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Environment (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

17 Do you think that tourism is important for your country and region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

18 Do you think that tourism is a threat to the environment in your region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

19 What do you think are the major environmental challenges to the Mediterranean/Baltic region? (choose one or several alternatives: global warming, desertification/deforestation, decrease in fresh water resources, air pollution, maritime pollution)

20 What do you think are the major political challenges to the Mediterranean/Baltic region? (choose one or several alternatives: democracy, gender equality, environmental policies, social welfare, economic growth, education, immigration, employment, poverty, income distribution)

21 Do you think that religious diversity is a barrier to integration in the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

22 Do you think that language diversity is a barrier to integration in the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

C: Relation to the other region (the Mediterranean/Baltic region)

23 Which five countries do you primarily associate with the Baltic Sea/Mediterranean Sea?

24 Do you see the Mediterranean/Baltic region as separate countries or rather as a region? (Only as countries, mostly as countries, equally, mostly as a region, only as a region)

25 How important do you feel that the Mediterranean/Baltic region is on the international arena as a:

Political actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Economical actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Cultural actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Environmental actor? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

26 Do you think that the EU has improved the political and economical situation in the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

27 Are you interested in politics and culture of the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

28 What do you find most attractive in the Mediterranean/Baltic region?

Culture (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

People (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Politics/governance/democracy (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Welfare (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Tourism (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

29 To what extent do you associate the following parameters with the Mediterranean/Baltic region:

Strong economy? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Good governance/democracy? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Rich cultural heritage? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Sport? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Environmental pioneer? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Strong civil society? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

30 What do you think are the major environmental challenges to the Mediterranean/Baltic region? (choose one or several alternatives: global warming, desertification/deforestation, decrease in fresh water resources, air pollution, maritime pollution)

31 What do you think are the major political challenges to the Mediterranean/Baltic region? (choose one or several alternatives: democracy, gender equality, environmental policies, social welfare, economic growth, education, immigration, employment, poverty, income distribution)

32 Do you have many immigrants from the Mediterranean/Baltic region in your country? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

33 Do these immigrants have a positive influence on your society?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

34 Do you generally have a positive attitude towards the Mediterranean/Baltic region?
(Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

D: The link between the Mediterranean and the Baltic regions

35 Do you feel any similarities between the Mediterranean/Baltic region and the region you come from? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

36 Do you think that the Mediterranean/Baltic region share common challenges with the Mediterranean/Baltic region in the following parameters:

Economy? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Politics/governance/democracy? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Environment? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

Immigration? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

37 Do you think that the EU is bringing the Mediterranean and the Baltic regions closer to each other? (Not at all, to some extent, much, very much)

If you want to take part of a lottery and have the chance to win an invitation to the final conference of the project, taking place in March 2011 at the Mediterranean Sea, please enter your e-mail address below.