

## **Crossing borders via mental bridges**

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# Crossing borders via mental bridges: The case of the Danish-German Femern Belt Region

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## ABSTRACT

The PhD-project studies cross-border regional integration in Europe drawing on the example of the emerging Danish-German *Femern Belt Region*. It focuses on cross-border networking within public administration as part of regional integration. My central question is how national-cultural differences influence cooperation, coordination and collaboration in administrative cross-border networks. In this connection the project asks after the perception of regional integration seen from the different national backgrounds. The research concentrates on the group of decision makers within the field of public administration, and in specific on the attempt to initiate and promote cross-border regional integration via the building of mental bridges between Danish and German parts of the *Femern Belt Region*. Here one of the first projects aiming primarily at building mental bridges in the *Femern Belt Region* is the Kulturbro (Cultural Bridge). I will look at culture in its function as a possible catalyst for regional integration.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a new transnational European region is emerging at the Danish-German sea-border. Areas both sides of the Femern Belt joint into an intensified cross-border cooperation aiming at regional integration within a larger area that is commonly called *Femern Belt Region*. But this new region does not yet appear clearly defined. What actually is the *Femern Belt Region*, why is it emerging, and how does it work? Going out from the theory of regions being constructed by practise and discourse, and from the conception that regional spaces are developing in a triangular relationship of culture, geography and politics (*Encountering the North. Cultural Geography, International relations and Northern Landscapes.*, 2003) where the single regional spaces are conceived as subspaces and thus as regions that do not just exist but which are *made* (*Die Ordnung des Raumes. Mentale Landkarten in der Ostseeregion*, 2006), I see the *Femern Belt Region* as a region in the making and as a discursive construction.

The *Femern Belt Region* is not only originating from former cross-border contacts between the neighbouring Danish and German counties dating as far back as to the 1970<sup>th</sup>, it is also strongly linked with the more recent project of crossing the belt with a permanent traffic connection. This connection will be a major improvement to the already existing ferry link between Denmark and Germany, called Vogelflugline.

Looking at this permanent traffic connection crossing the Femern Belt, one needs to remember the prehistory of this project. When in 1989 the Danish parliament decided for a new inner Danish traffic connection, a large bridge across the Great Belt, the Danish county Storstrøms Amt and the German county Kreis Ostholstein became increasingly concerned that this new connection would dramatically change the traffic flow within Denmark. Until then the international traffic to and from Scandinavia was going through Ostholstein and Storstrøms Amt being a vital line for those two counties. They now feared that in the future the traffic flow would be redirected via Jutland and the new bridge. Thus the two counties would be disconnected from this vital line. Therefore they passed a resolution in 1989 demanding that the existing traffic link via the Vogelfluglinie should be intensified, hoping that way to keep the vital traffic line within their territories. In 1991 the two counties joint into a formal cooperation within the European INTERREG-programme and thus their cooperation became more intense and coordinated. It developed via different project stages into the project *Euroregion Femernbelt* (INTERREG in der Fehmarnbeltregion, 2009). Later more partners joint the project. These were on the German side the county Landkreis Plön and the municipality Hansestadt Lübeck. On the Danish side Storstrøms Amt and three other counties united after an administrative reform in 2007. This new unit was called Region Sjælland and became as a whole project partner.

The Femern Belt traffic link itself developed from the idea of intensifying the Vogelfluglinie into the vision of a permanent traffic connection. In 1992, Germany and Denmark agreed on comprehensive preliminary investigations of the Femern Belt fixed link to be prepared. By the year 2000 another transnational bridge connecting Sweden and Denmark, the Øresundbridge had been build. Thus a transnational permanent link crossing the Femern Belt became the missing link on the traffic axis from Germany to Denmark, or that is to say from central Europe to Scandinavia. This missing link was already pointed out in a paper published by the Round

Table of European Industrialists analyzing trans-European traffic connections in 1984 (Round table of European industrialists, 1984). In 2007 the Danish and German governments agreed upon the project of the permanent Femern Belt link, and in 2008 the ministers for traffic of both nations signed a contract concerning the building of this link, which is most likely to be a bridge straddling the 18 km broad belt (Femern Belt Bridge History, 2009). This bridge between Denmark and Germany will be one of the world's longest bridges. Together with the Øresund-bridge it is considered a key element of a new traffic axis between central Europe and Scandinavia. The metropolises Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmö with each their surrounding economic prosperous areas are seen as the two points at the ends of the international traffic corridor via the future bridge.

The bridge itself will connect the Danish island of Lolland and the German island of Femern, which are considered the geographic centre of the emerging *Femern Belt Region*. Especially here in its geographic centre the region is today a peripheral rural region and characterized by infrastructural and economic deficits. By building the international traffic corridor between Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmö, the *Femern Belt Region* indeed will stay connected to the vital line of traffic flow between Germany and Denmark / central Europe and Scandinavia. But the region will become a *region in between* two superior metropolitan regions. Therefore the development of this *region in between* is now very much emphasized from the local and regional political perspective. The aim is to promote growth and to develop a dynamic region that will stand strong in between Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmö. It should not stay a transit-region, but become a region that itself profits from the Femern Belt Bridge and obtains its own strength. Here the INTERREG-project *Euroregion Femernbelt* can be seen as a possible tool to hold a self-contained position against the metropolitan areas that are significantly *not* part of the project *Euroregion Femernbelt*, but could very well be considered part of a *Femern Belt Region*. But the INTERREG-project only covers the Danish Region Sjælland and the German counties Kreis Ostholstein, Kreis Plön and the Hansestadt Lübeck.

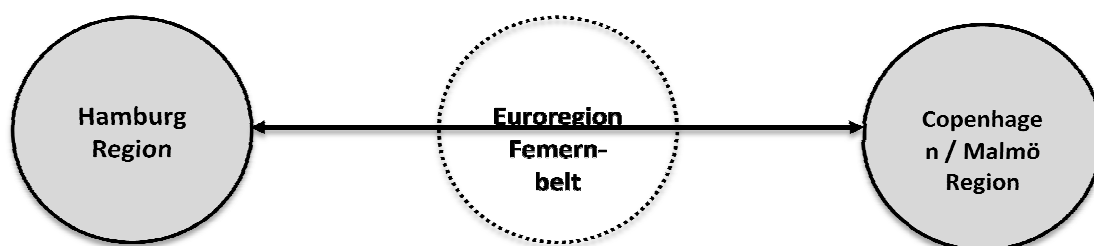


Figure 1: The Euroregion Femernbelt as a region in between

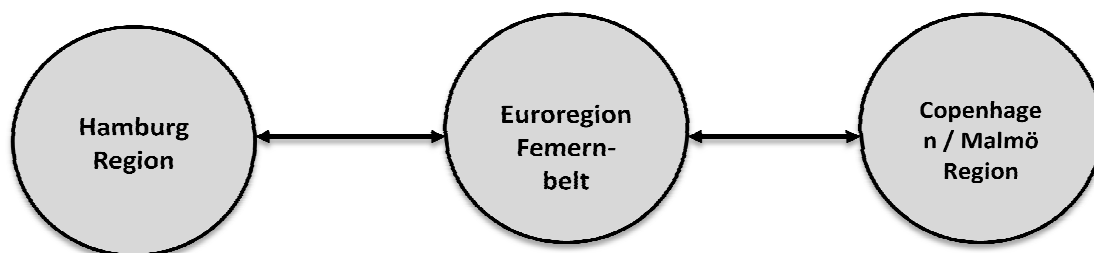


Figure 2: The Euroregion Femernbelt as a self-contained region

Geographically we can thus see three spatial units that are connected to the idea of the *Femern Belt Region*: The metropolitan regions of Hamburg and Copenhagen/Øresund, and the *Euroregion Femernbelt* as the *region in between*. But concerning that the traffic axis from Hamburg to Copenhagen/Malmö is the infrastructural element that will be the backbone for the entire region, one can as well see the whole area as a meta-region consisting of all those three spatial units. Furthermore all units on Danish territory also belong to the Øresundregion that is covering Sjælland and the Swedish Skåne. Considering that the Øresundbridge as well as the Femern Belt Bridge is considered a key element for the traffic axis from mainland Europe to Scandinavia it would seem logic to think about an even larger meta-region covering the Swedish Skåne to. But as pointed out before, what really the *Femern Belt Region* is remains to be clearly defined.

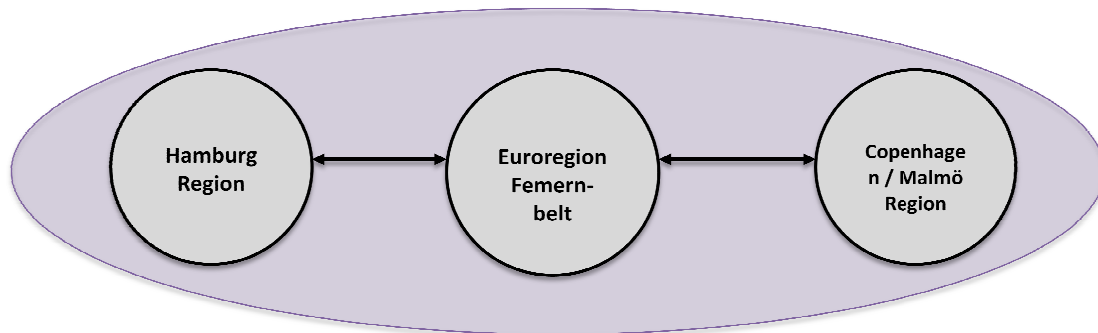


Figure 3: The Euroregion Femernbelt as part of a meta-region

In the following I will use the term *Euroregion Femernbelt* for the cross-border region that is covered by the INTERREG-project. The term *Femern Belt Region* I apply to a broader concept of the cross-border region, a region that is not limited to the *Euroregion Femernbelt* only. Even if the main focus of my research is on the *Euroregion Femernbelt* as the *region in between*, I see the idea of a new Danish-German cross-border region reaching further, and this region cannot be understood from a perspective limited to the Euroregion only.

### A COMMON CROSS-BORDER REGION?

The area of the *Euroregion Femernbelt* is covering communities in Denmark and Germany that joint the INTERREG-project. But is the implementation of an INTERREG-project named *Euroregion Femernbelt* tantamount to the emergence of such a region? The INTERREG programme as a Community initiative of the European Regional Development Fond (ERDF) aims at stimulating interregional cooperation and at reducing border barriers within the European Union. National borders should be no obstacle for a well-balanced development and integration within the EU in the economic, social and cultural field. An area being covered by an INTERREG-project is therewith itself not necessarily a common region. Even if the INTERREG-project is named *Euroregion Femernbelt*, this region is therewith not simultaneously emerging, neither is it given that an eventually emerging cross-border region will be congruent with the area covered by the INTERREG-project.

In order to support the idea of cross-border regional integration around the Femern Belt three institutions were founded: The German Femern Belt Forum Ostholstein, the Danish Fonden Femern Belt Development and the transnational Femern Belt Committee. In its statute this committee defines the *Femern Belt Region* as the “area between Copenhagen/Malmö and Hamburg, with special focus on those regions directly situated at the Femern Belt, i.e. on the German side Kreis Ostholstein, Kreis Plön and Hansestadt Lübeck and on the Danish side Region Sjælland” (Vedtægter for Femern Bælt Komitéen (Udkast), 2009). In this document the committee defines the area of the entire *Femern Belt Region* alike with the INTERREG-project as excluding Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmø. The main target of the committee is “to work out and implement a shared vision for the Femern Belt Region” (Vedtægter for Femern Bælt Komitéen (Udkast), 2009). This should be achieved (1) via reducing border barriers, (2) via starting, recommending or supporting projects and activities that help developing the region, and (3) via supporting all kinds of bridge-building within the mental, cultural, social and economic field in order to create a lively and people-orientated integration process.

But the background for developing a common cross-border region with one shared vision is not an easy one. In the past there were no geographic, cultural or historic factors determining the areas both sides of the Femern Belt growing together into a common region. Besides there were no conurbations to link, only rural areas disconnected by an 18 km broad water border.

Furthermore the separating character of a national border does not appear very prominent on neither the Danish nor the German side. The natural water border makes signs unnecessary, which normally would clearly present a border, e.g. boundary posts, booms or fences. Besides the two coasts are so far away from each other that very often can hardly see the land on the other side. The long distance between the national parts of the region and the missing visual borderline makes the idea of a coherent cross-border region somewhat abstract. A feeling that something should better be united in one region, that is yet too much separated (like e.g. the former East- and West Germany) does not apply to the areas south and north of the Femern Belt.

One can conclude that a cross-border *Femern Belt Region* will not be likely to develop out of its own, since the background conditions for such a development are inconvenient. Furthermore a well-balanced regional development, interregional cooperation and reduced border barriers do not necessarily require the existence of one common cross-border region. But there is a strong political interest in building a region now, while in the past neither the political nor the public interest in regional integration were strong enough to lead to the development of a common cross-border region. Thus the project of the *Femern Belt Region* appears to be closely linked to the project of building the Femern Belt Bridge, and there would probably be no region building without bridge building.

## METHODE AND BASIC TERMS

The question is not only what the region is, that is to say, what type of region. That does not only refer to its geographic position or its scope. It also refers to the to its significant elements, contents and structures. And the question is also: Who makes the region and how do they make it?

Within my research project I will take a closer look at the terms *Region*, *Region building* and *Regional integration* in order to come closer to an answer about what kind of region the *Femern Belt Region* might be. In this context the concept of *Euroregions* and the *INTERREG-programme* will be looked at.

I assume that in the case of the *Femern Belt Region* cross-border networks are playing a key-role for regional integration, and that therefore the region could be described as a *Network-region*. "The notion of a network-region is emerging in practice: rather than perfecting institutions, the focus is on perfecting relationships and functions" (Seltzer, 2000). As network-region I understand a region that is based mainly on individuals, groups and institutions working together in networks, and less on a geographic space, a regional centre or common institutions. It will be to find out whether network cooperation mainly takes place within the *Euroregion Femernbelt* or whether networks are also stretching out from there to the metropolitan regions of Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmö and maybe beyond. In this connection the project will also look closer at *Governance Networks*. For governance networks I apply the definition by Sørensen and Torfing who see a "governance network as 1: a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors; 2. who interact through negotiations; 3. which take place within a regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary framework; 4. that is self-regulating within limits set by external agencies; and 5. which contributes to the production of public purpose" (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007).

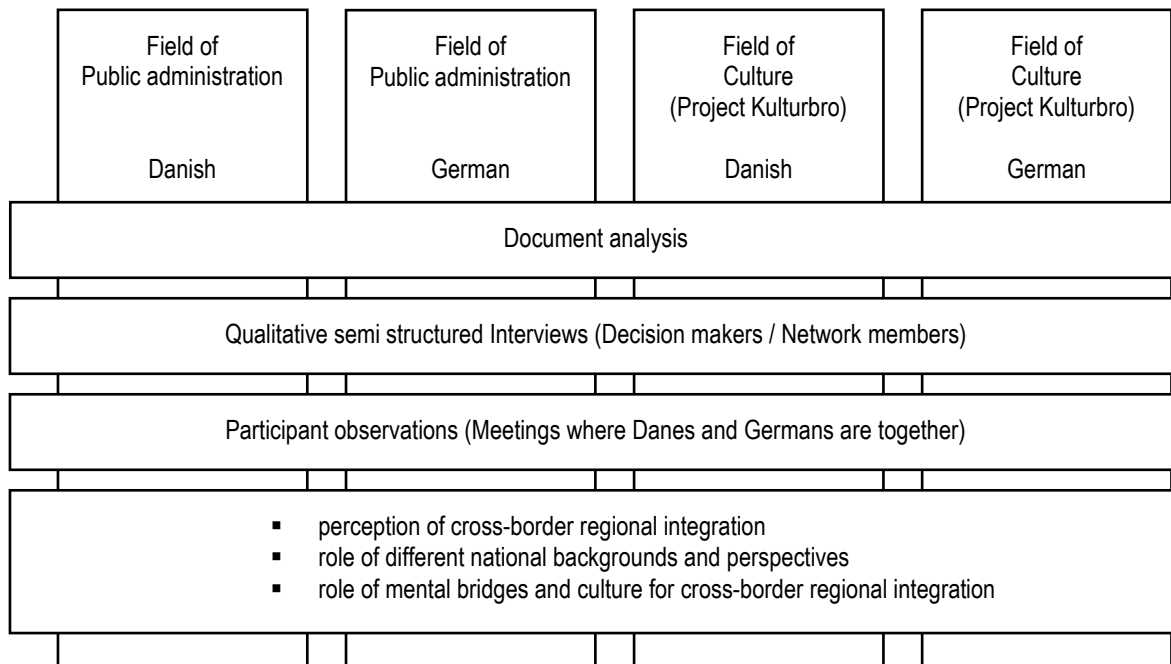
The most prominent governance networks that are directly connected to the project of regional integration are the two national Femern Belt Forums and the transnational Femern Belt Committee. Therefore I will put these networks into the centre of my empiric research. Going out from there I will look at further networks connected to those three ones. Therefore I am going to analyze documents originating from these networks, carry out participant observations (if I get permission) and carry out interviews with network members. Via open qualitative semi-structured interviews I want to find out to what extend the network members share the same ideas about what the region is or should be: What is its identity, what is its substance, what is its target, how far should regional integration go, and to what extend is there a shared vision for the Femern Belt Region already developing. If there are differences, I want to find out to what extend these are connected to the network members having different national backgrounds. Furthermore I am going to ask after the driving forces and the policy entrepreneurs in the *Femern Belt Region*. Moreover I am interested in how cross-border cooperation in these networks practically works, and how the work is influenced by the different national backgrounds of their members.

Originating from the different national-cultural backgrounds of the network members I assume there are:

- A. different perceptions regarding the common region and regional integration and
- B. different perceptions of coordination, cooperation and collaboration across the border.

Furthermore I assume that a common perception concerning those two points is essential for building and governing sustaining and successful cross-border networks, and in order to make the *Femern Belt Region* appearing and working as one common region.

In the following figure I give a graphic overview regarding my methodological approach.



After having finished and analyzed the interviews and documents I will oppose the results of these analyses to scientific theories and concepts regarding region, region building and regional integration. Thus I will work out how the perceptions and practises of the network members can be positioned within the field of theory.

## A PRELIMINARY PILOT STUDY

At the time being my research is concentrating on the interview design and on finding the right sample of interviewees. I intend to interview a source of network members who represent not only the different networks but also (1) the different national backgrounds, (2) the field public administration, (3) the field of culture and (4) the counties in the core area of the Femern Belt Region.

In the interviews I am searching after information within the following fields:

A. How is the *Femern Belt Region* understood, and how is regional integration perceived?

I have divided this question into sub questions:

- What kind of region is the *Femern Belt Region*, where is its location, what are its structures, contends and significant elements?
- What are the main targets for the *Femern Belt Region* to achieve, and how should regional integration be achieved? How far should regional integration actually go?
- Are there significant differences between the Danish and the German approach towards cross-border regional integration, and what impact do national-cultural differences have on the everyday praxis of region building?



- d. What function has the attempt to build mental bridges, and what role does culture have for regional integration?
- B. What are the driving forces, and who are policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 2003) in the *Femern Belt Region*, what is their official function within the region, and in which way are they active?
- C. Which governance networks operate within the *Femern Belt Region*, and how do they operate? The question aims at finding out about the structures and organization of networks, how did they start and develop. Furthermore I want to find out more about the relation between network building and region building. In addition it will be interesting to investigate if there is a perspective for networks becoming institutionalized.

Mirroring to this set of questions I formulated an interview guideline with a row of possible questions regarding my research interests. But first and foremost the interviews should be open and only structured to a minimal extend. The interview partner should as far as possible have the freedom to talk about topics of his/her choice without being too much influenced from the researcher. After the first contact to the interview partner is established, a formal letter/ e-mail will be send giving a brief information about the research project and the interview. Once the partner agrees on giving an interview, than the interview itself will start with a brief oral presentation of the project. After that the partner will be asked to draw mental map of the *Femern Belt Region* seen from his/her perspective. This mental map functions as icebreaker and as helping tool within the course of the interview. If the interview is proceeding well and the researchers areas of interest are covered already, than the pre-formulated questions do not need to be applied. Otherwise they can be asked in order to pursue the course of the interview. The pre-formulated questions in the interview guideline are as follows:

#### Region and regional integration

- What is significant for the *Femern Belt Region*?
- What is needed to achieve one common Danish-German cross-border region?
- What do you consider the main targets of the *Femern Belt Region*?
- How can one achieve those targets, and to what extend do you think they can be achieved?
- How is the working together with partners from (Denmark/Germany)?
- Where do political and administrative structures in (Denmark/Germany) differ from those we have in this country?
- Are there major differences between Germans and Danes affecting the working together?
- What are mental bridges, what do they mean for you?

#### Driving forces and policy entrepreneurs

- What is your function in connection with the *Femern Belt Region*, and what do you consider your most important tasks?
- Who are the most important people for cross-border regional integration?
- Who where in the last years the most active protagonists in the *Femern Belt Region*?

#### Networks

- In which network/s regarding the *Femern Belt Region* are you participating?
- What function does/do this/those network/s have?
- Who is organised in this/these network/s, and how does it/do they work?
- How do you see the future for this/these network/s?

- What (other) networks are dealing with the *Femern Belt Region* and cross-border cooperation?

## THE INTERVIEW

In November 2009 I was doing a preliminary pilot study, an interview with the department leader for culture in the Danish county Lolland Kommune, Anne Merethe Brahe Møller (ABM). She is also part of the secretary group of Kulturregionen Storstrøm, a cultural governance network covering the area of the former county Storstrøms Amt, which is today part of the Region Sjælland. I already had a contact to ABM dating back to my further work as a museum leader on Lolland. This offered the possibility for an unproblematic re-establishing of the contact, and getting ABM to agree to this interview as preliminary study for my research project. The interview took place in her office in the old Maribo town hall and took about one hour.

The interview started in a relaxed atmosphere, and the beginning with the mental-map-question worked fine. The idea that the conservation would develop without me asking many questions did however not comply with my hopes. Thus the interview developed along my interview guidelines, but did not develop into other and maybe unexpected areas.

The interview was performed in Danish and later in parts translated into English.

### The perception of the *Femern Belt Region* and of regional integration

ABM sees the region in two different ways. It is percept as geographic region connected to its infrastructure and the future improvements of this infrastructure, i.e. the Femern Belt Bridge. ABM: "I think it is defined as geographic space in connection with the bridge, with geography in general." But most important for her is the idea of the region as a network that brings people together and that helps understanding each other. This she sees as precondition for a successful cooperation and a successful region. But that does not necessarily demand the whole region becoming one single unit. The idea of the *Femern Belt Region* as one common regional unit seems rather surprising to her. To my question: "If you look at the whole thing that eventually might be one region, what is most important to create a common region", she answered surprised: "Are you thinking about the Femern Belt Region as one common region?" (0:12:59-0:14:28) Well, I actually did, and was surprised myself that one could consider the common cross-border region as not aiming to eventually become one region.

Geographically the core of the region is seen in the area of the Danish Lolland-Falster and the German Ostholstein. But another surprise to me was the scope of the region. Whereas the region in the south was seen as very open, and stretching as far as to Berlin and parts of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern including Rügen, the region had very sharp borders in the Danish north. ABM: "It is Guldborgsund, it is Lolland, and it is Sjælland minus Copenhagen, and minus Copenhagen South." (0:00:36-0:02:22) The reason why those two city areas are not included lies in their decision of not joining the cultural network in the Danish part of the *Femern Belt Region* because they orientate more towards Sweden.

The openness towards German areas in the south has its reason in co-operations with German partners dating long back. Even if that now is coursing some bureaucratic trouble since some of those German areas are not part of the INTERREG-

project *Euroregion Femernbelt*, ABM maintains that one needs to keep the area open: "With Mecklenburg-Vorpommern we did had some cooperation before. That's why they are in. Of course not in the eyes of INTERREG. (...) I go very far down, but that is because some of our institutions have a tradition of cooperating with those places. We can't just cut them off because we are now Femern Belt!" (0:46:59-0:47:52) Here the connection to North-Germany seem actually closer than that to the Danish capital area. Those traditions of cooperation and long term partnerships between the Danish and the German side within the field of culture and education, some of them being organized as INTERREG-projects, are seen as the basic structure for regional integration. But there is more coordination needed, and that is expected to come in connection with projects in the *Femern Belt Region* like the Cultural-Bridge project (Kulturbro).

The Femern Belt Region is seen as characterized by many differences and self-interests. ABM: "If one wants to understand the Femern Belt so there are many different interests. They depend on whom you ask. Some have exclusively business interests. And some have somewhat regional interests. And surely from my perspective there are art and cultural interests." (0:14:48-0:17:03) There are also differences within the own country, between the north and the south of the region Sjælland. And there are differences between the Danish and the German parts of the region. But the *Femern Belt Region* is characterized by a Danish orientation more towards Germany than towards Sweden. ABM: "Many on Lolland speak German. But there are not many speaking Swedish. That shows maybe where we gravitate to, and where we had the closest cooperation earlier." (0:03:41-0:05:02)

#### The main targets for the region

There are three main targets one can point out analyzing the interview. The first one is to achieve a common profile for the *Femern Belt Region*. This ABM sees as the most important target. She mentioned it several times within the interview. Something significant for the region is missing, and it is vital to find that something, a shared identity all can relate to. And this yet un-described something has to be designated and communicated. She refers to it also as a need for a common branding of the region. ABM: "Well, what the *Femern Belt Region* is about is that there are so many differences. But one should find a common brand, something big where one can meet around." (0:02:40-0:03:41) Therefore one needs to build mental bridges to achieve mutual understanding across the border. Here culture can function as a catalyst. "The big challenge is to find a common profile. But it is possible, and here now the Kulturbro<sup>1</sup> was suggested." (0:05:36-0:06:47) The Cultural Bridge is now suggested to the INTERREG as a project that also could help coordinating cross-border activities, because "coordination is vital" (ABM 0:05:36-0:06:47).

Another important target is to avoid the *Femern Belt Region* becoming a transit region. "The important thing is (...) that one gets people to be connected so that they can feel mutual benefit, joy and inspiration from each other. If one does not manage that, than the region will be a transit place! Where one does not want to stop, neither side of the bridge. One just needs it for crossing." (0:06:48-0:07:28) Therefore it is crucial to develop the region. "Well, I am coming from the Lolland-side, therefore for me it is very important that the bridge will promote development both sides, and that it will not just be a transit crossing to somewhere where you

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<sup>1</sup>This cross-border project named "Cultural Bridge" is aiming at cooperation between cultural institutions and the organisation of shared projects.

just drive through. But how we will develop, and how we will manage to turn our noses to the outside, aiming at mutual development and cooperation" that is to see. And it will need cooperation "because we are very small, even if we take Lolland, Falster and Sjælland" together (0:07:31-0:09:15).

This notion that the forces need to be united to be strong in unity is the third main target pointed out in the interview.

#### How far should regional integration go?

Regional integration is understood as mutual understanding leading to regional cooperation. But we are all different and that is all right. "For me integration is that one can meet on equal feet, and with respect and understanding for each other for the gain of a common benefit. For this one does not need to become totally alike (...) we do not need to deny our own cultures in order to integrate." (0:43:09-0:46:34) There is no need to become one. But openness and respect for each other as equal partners are an absolute must. And that is what sometimes is still missing. And because of the lack of openness for each other, language problems can be used as excuse for a denial of communication and thus as a barrier for the project of transnational integration. ABM: "I f there are some language problems and one does not have the will to understand, or the will to meet with each other, than it is easy to say: If they want something, than they should also speak our language! This shows that there is no understanding for integration. (...) Sometimes language can be a crucial problem and sometimes it is not." (0:43:09-0:46:34)

#### Danish-German differences and the process of working together

Regarding ABMs experience in networking across the border, language never really was a problem. Within the field of cultural administration and cultural institutions there is a strong will of the people to understand each other. And that is for the simple reason than one really wants to do something with each other. So working together was going easy even if most Germans do not speak or understand Danish. ABM: "Mostly we communicate in German, because there are almost no Germans who can understand or speak Danish. (...) In the beginning we were discussing: Should we speak Danish or German or both? But than we agreed that at the point of departure it will be German. (...) But that actually has not been a barrier. It has not. I really don't think it was a barrier – and that is because we were so positive! We would do almost everything, even standing upside down, to just understand each other." (0:31:58-0:34:24) But nevertheless, of course do the Danes wish the Germans would be better in Danish. ABM: "I do think a distinct mental shift from the German side is needed. Germans are so used to Germany being so big that it is enough to just know ones own language to manage communication. Denmark is a small country, so if one wants to communicate with others one needs to speak their language. So there is a little mental shift needed that has to come more from the German side than from the Danish." (0:03:41-0:05:42) But anyway, meetings and Danish-German cooperation have so far not been problematic. ABM: "I think it worked fine. We had quite some meetings (...) and there were going pretty easily." (0:26:20-00:27:09)

But there was one problem based on Danish-German differences that was not expected and came surprising to both Danes and Germans. This was about differences in political practises between Danish and German public administration. Since in Denmark many politicians and several political levels are involved in decision-making, dealing with a case like a shared Danish-German INTERREG applica-

tion takes its time. In Germany the decision-making process is comparably much faster. And that really was a difference that impressed. I asked: “Are there some differences in the way Danes or Germans deal with a case?” And ABM replied: “There is a world of a difference! A whole world. We experienced that our biggest challenge was a common INTERREG-application together with the Germans. The Germans did not need to deal with it at so many political levels. If we would not had the funding in the Kulturregion<sup>2</sup> we would have to discuss this project in each single community council or committee. And it had to go to the regions committee, and to the other Kulturregion. We really could see that the Germans thought that this was taking a little too long. (...) At the same time they could not really relate to that there were politicians sitting in the management boards. On the Danish side it is very often a must that one is politically steered, that administration is politically steered, and of course should political representation and management boards stand above everyday business. (...) We take our time in Denmark. While the Germans were already ready to go. (...) They obviously don’t need so many political statements. (...) That was in any way a distinctive experience for us. (...) And it came surprising to us when we realised that they thought: Why can’t we hurry a bit and get that case finished? And why should there be a management board of this kind? They thought they could do with a management group of five people. Altogether! On the German and Danish side! They didn’t even realise what large area we have to cover. And of course they all would like their politicians to be equally represented, including the Region. So we could not live up to the Germans expectations. And that really was an a-ha experience. It really was.” (0:27:21-0:30:18) ABM sums up this narrative with the thought that we all are maybe thinking to limited to our own political structures.

### The role of culture and building mental bridges

As ABM mention several times in the interview, bringing people together is important. Differences within the region can be putted and the national parts be connected. “I think that culture is the putty that connects things. Plain economy can’t do that. (...) Culture makes it easier to meet, find good perspectives (...) and thus one can better manage the other necessary things. I think that this is really important. And from my point of view are art and culture the putty that connects internationally.” (0:09:58-0:11:12) This is the way to build mental bridges between the regional partners. Each time “one gets people to meet one also builds mental bridges. And the important thing about the mental bridge, besides it being a really good slogan is (...) that one gets people connected.” (0:06:48-0:07:28)

Art and culture can also help dealing with another problem. Economic and the mental integration often don’t go hand in hand. These are spheres developing parallel to each other, but they are not enough connected. And here “I think art and culture can go in and bring things together. I look at art and culture from an economist’s perspective too, but I am not sure that economists often think about art and culture. (...) The mental cultural bridge for instance (Kulturbro), developed out of its own, and parallel to the business world. (...) But I hope that within the field of economy they also will realize what benefit a cultural approach can bring within the job-, educational and business –world. What does it help if a German enterprise is active in Denmark, or a Danish enterprise in Germany, if they cannot conceive each other’s culture? Without understanding how business live,

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<sup>2</sup>Kulturregions are governance networks of several counties in Denmark that commonly deal with cultural affairs within their common territory.

education and people are? And if art and culture can help founding a basis for mutual understanding, than that will be a big success.” (0:14:48-0:17:03)

### Networks and policy entrepreneurs

There is a row of governance networks active within in the field of culture. Very important seen from the cultural perspective on the Danish side are the inter-communal cultural networks Kulturregion Storstrøm and Kulturregion Midtvest. The Kulturregions are governance networks of several counties in Denmark that commonly deal with cultural affairs within their common territory. The first one is covering the counties that formerly belonged to the Storstrøms Amt, the latter covers counties on western Sjælland. “At the moment we have Kulturregion Storstrøm covering Lolland Kommune, Guldborgsund Kommune, Vordingborg Kommune, Faxe Kommune, Næstved Kommune, and Stevns. (...) And we have the Kulturregion Midtvest that covers eight communities. (...) Copenhagen South has decided not to participate it is orientating towards the north, that is to say towards Copenhagen and Sweden. So this has started being a network. (...) At the same time we got a network with the Region established. (0:17:33-0:21:04)

Further networks are the transnational INTERREG *Euroregion Femernbelt*, the transnational Femern Belt Committee, and as coordinating bodies the Danish Femern Belt Development and the German Fehmarnbelt Forum Ostholstein.

Additionally a somewhat formalized cooperation is carried out between several partners: Between the two Kulturregions and the Region Sjælland, and between Kulturregion Storstrøm, INTERREG and the Deutsche Handelskammer Lübeck. A kind of secretary group consisting of four persons coming from the legally responsible county for Kulturregion Storstrøm, i.e. Vordingborg Kommune, from the Region Sjælland, from the Kreis Ostholstein and from the Deutsche Handelskammer Lübeck are engaged with the every day administrative work.

Furthermore there is an active networking going on directly between cultural institutions on the Danish side, as well as between Danish and German cultural institutions. But a problem appears if cooperation is intended with partners that do not belong to the official structures and governance networks in the *Femern Belt Region*. ABM: “The biggest challenge was for us that some of our cooperation partners in Germany were coming from outside the INTERREG-region. But well, it is material to determine that not INTERREG should decide where networks develop.” (0:21:22-0:22:33)

In ABMs perspective there were in the beginning two driving forces on the Danish side forwarding the project of a *Femern Belt Region*: Lolland and Falster, nowadays Lolland Kommune and Guldborgsund Kommune. But today the Femern Belt Development is bundling the most activities. “Well, in the beginning Lolland and Falster were most active (...) but now it is clearly Femern Belt Development.” (0:38:23-0:42:13)

Concerning some outstanding people who could be considered policy entrepreneurs, ABM is mentioning members of the Kulturregion, from the Femern Belt Development, from the Kreis Ostholstein and from the Deutsche Handelskammer in Lübeck.

## CONCLUSIONS

With that first interview as a preliminary study I got some of my assumptions confirmed while others turned out to be problematic.

In the interview it was confirmed that the basis for the Femern Belt Region is the long tradition of cross-border cooperation between Denmark and Germany. The future bridge is also an important corner stone for the region, but did not appear as basic as I assumed it would. Especially the traffic axis between Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmö, that is to say between central Europe and Scandinavia did not play much of a role in the interview. The idea of a meta-region stretching from North Germany to South Sweden did not appear at all. I was confirmed that the regional focus lies on the core of the Femern Belt Region, i.e. the areas close to the Femern Belt, but it was surprising to me what a clear cut was made in the North. While in the south the region is seen as reaching very far and being very open, it was made distinctively clear that the regions in the north ends before Copenhagen and Sweden. So thinking about a meta-region, it would be one only reaching down south but not north.

Obviously the fear of becoming a *region in between* was real, the fear of becoming a transit region only, and that issue is taken seriously. The *Femern Belt Region* should become a dynamic growth region that stands strong in between Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmö. And Copenhagen/Malmö are distinctively taken out of the concept of the *Femern Belt Region*. The INTERREG-project *Euroregion Femern-belt* is considered a tool to support regional integration. This is connected with building mental bridges and bringing people together. It is also considered to be the frame within a common profile for the region could be developed and branded. This profile is strikingly missing. Here a close interaction between the field of culture and economy would be necessary, but until now those fields only develop parallel to each other. It appears, as if INTERREG is the “soft” part of the region, engaging itself to the mental side of regional integration, while the Femern Belt Development is dealing with the “hard” transnational business-matters. Surprising for me was that the idea of the Femern Belt Region becoming eventually one common region seemed somewhat far out the interviewee. Regional integration was more limited to mutual openness and cooperation, even if the name *Femern Belt Region* indicates that we are dealing with one regional unit. But most important for regional integration in the *Femern Belt Region* are networks; they are prior to geographic concepts of the region. This shows that the basic idea of the region being a network-region can be used for the further work within this research project.

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