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CONTENTS

Politics

Economic geography

Tourism

Events Digest

Book Review

POLITICS

FRANCE'S STRATEGY IN THE BALTIC REGION: MILITARY AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

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This article examines the current military-political strategy of France in the Baltic region. This area has not traditionally been among the main priorities of French diplomacy. However, under President Emmanuel Macron, France pays closer attention to the Baltic Sea due to the growing tension between Russia and the West. According to France's key strategic documents, the government assesses the present-day situation mainly in a negative way, considering Russian actions as the main reason for the militarization of the region and expressing its readiness to show solidarity with NATO allies. On this basis, Paris is gradually increasing its military presence in the Baltic region, which now exceeds its contingents in the Middle East and the Sahel. For example, French forces still participate in the NATO air policing programme as well as in naval exercises, keeping the troops in Estonia within the Lynx mission. France's further activity in the region includes enhanced cooperation with Sweden and Finland after they accede to NATO, an already planned increase in military contingent in the Baltic States in 2023, and the development of the European Political Community project. The author concludes that even if France's presence in the Baltic does not yet pose a critical threat to Russian security, Paris's policy is becoming more pro-Atlantic to the detriment of previous statements about 'European sovereignty' and dialogue with Russia.

Keywords:
Baltic region, France, NATO, enhanced forward presence, militarization, wider Europe, Russia, Emmanuel Macron

Introduction

Recently, the Baltic region as a comprehensive security complex [1] has once again become a zone of increasing international tensions due to the confrontation between Russia and the West. With the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in 2022, it was in the Baltic that several crisis events and

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shifts indicating the deepening of the 'cool war' occurred [2]: the start of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO, the attempts by the Lithuanian leadership to restrict transit to the Kaliningrad region, the leaks on the Nord Stream pipelines and others. As indicated in the Russian Maritime Doctrine, at the Atlantic theatre, NATO continues a "direct confrontation with the Russian Federation and its allies", [1] pushes its infrastructure further to the East and strengthens its military capabilities. In this region, various coalitions are being formed implying the containment of Russia to one degree or another: the Lublin Triangle or the Three Seas Initiative in particular [3], not to mention regular exercises including the US Navy.

Another notable trend in this context is the growing interest of European countries not geographically located in the Baltic region. Of these countries, the French Republic stands out, as its foreign policy traditionally focuses more on the South (the Mediterranean and Africa). Under President Emmanuel Macron, France has been making efforts to pay attention to the north-eastern borders of the European Union as well. Since 2014, the French Armed Forces have regularly participated in various allied formats of NATO in the Baltic including the programme of Enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania and Estonia.[2] Paris is linked with the Baltic countries by numerous partnership documents: the Aachen Treaty with Germany (2019), bilateral declarations on cooperation in European affairs with Finland (2018) and Poland (2020), the Franco-Swedish letter of intent on defence cooperation (2021), etc. On President Macron's initiative, France consistently supports the idea of strategic autonomy of the EU and has managed to involve the Nordic countries in its projects [4, p. 138—141, 178—183]. There are also some cases of interaction beyond Europe: for example, the participation of Finnish troops in the French peacekeeping mission in Lebanon or the involvement of Danish and Swedish contingents in Operation Barkhane in the Sahel [5].

It should be noted that today French foreign policy remains a popular research topic both for Russian and foreign authors. For instance, Obichkina explores the diplomatic strategy of the Fifth Republic in the modern world emphasizing the intention of Paris to play the role of an all-European leader [6]. Chernega studies the European policy of President Macron in detail and notes that the attempts to make Europe more autonomous meet Russian interests, yet having several nuances [7; 8]. For their part, Narochnitskaya and Kaninskaya reveal the applicability

[1] On the Approval of Russia's Maritime Doctrine: Presidential Decree № 512 of 31 July 2022, 2022, *Official legal information website,* URL: http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202207310001 (accessed 01.10.2022).

[2] La France face aux enjeux de sécurité en Baltique, 2019, *Ministère des Armées*, URL: https://www.archives.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/551358/9392188/file/DGRIS_La%20France%20face%20aux%20enjeux%20de%20s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20en%20Baltique_vFR%20-%202019.pdf (accessed 02.10.2022).

of the Gaullist doctrine to contemporary international realities [9; 10]. Among foreign authors, Gomart [11; 12], Duclos [13], de Montbrial [14] or Vaïsse [15] discuss numerous challenges French diplomacy now deals with.

In addition, many researchers focus not only on France's foreign policy as such, but also on its specific regional aspects or relations with particular countries. Thus, Fedorov identifies new trends in the Russian-French dialogue that emerged with Macron's coming to power [16] while the author of this article, together with Alekseenkova, shows the problems and prospects for the Paris—Rome axis [17]. The close relationship between the Fifth Republic and Germany [18; 19], the French leadership's attempts to form alliances with Greece [20], as well as France's efforts to exert influence in the Western Balkans [21], are among many other topics that also attract attention. But despite a certain number of studies, it is clear that the strategy of France in the Baltic is usually of little interest to researchers. Among the few works on this topic one should mention Olenchenko's article on the French approach to developing relations with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania [22]. The same topic is elaborated on in Zueva [23]. Several mentions can also be found in the analytical materials by Polish researcher Zerka [24] and the papers of invited experts of the Estonian ICDS Centre [25]. However, in such publications, the aim has not yet been set to consider the Baltic region as a coherent direction of French foreign policy. In some cases, the authors prefer to mention the relations of France with local states in an indirect way bearing in mind their ambiguous perception of Macron's initiatives at the European level [7; 8]. Similarly, as Escach observes, in the French academic community there is a certain stereotype about the Baltic as a 'wasteland' of European integration where there are no significant events for the entire Union as if any profound study is simply unnecessary [26]. Hence, here is still space for discussion on France's strategic line conducted by the current leadership in the Baltic including its reactions to major events of 2022 as well.

The aim of this study is to identify the key strategic directions of French diplomacy in the Baltic region. To achieve this, the study will analyse the types of statements made by Paris in its foreign policy doctrine regarding the Baltics, examine how France's presence in the region is established, as well as outline the prospects for future developments in the region. The main theoretical premise is the regional security complex theory developed by the Copenhagen school [27] because it allows interpreting the Baltic flank of NATO as an integral security cluster which France aspires to join. Given the growing militarization of this zone, it seems appropriate to focus on the military and political side of the French strategy to determine the scale of threats it can create for Russia's interests and security. From a methodological point of view, the study follows the analysis of the main documents of French foreign and defence policy (in qualitative terms), as well as the elements of comparative analysis (to compare France's defence capabilities in the Baltic with its presence in other regions; to contrast the prospects for cooperation with various countries).

Security in the Baltic as seen by France

The study of the main doctrinal aspects of the French approach to the Baltic should begin by acknowledging that they were developed largely within the collective frameworks of the EU and NATO. According to many researchers, after the expansions to the East in the late 1990s — early 2000s, the trend of distancing from Russia as a way of internal consolidation got noticeable in both organisations [6, p. 178]. For Obichkina, "this choice contradicted the traditional geostrategy of the Fifth Republic, but France, not sharing it, did not actively resist it respecting the desire of the former socialist countries to break with the Soviet past" [6, p. 178]. As a result, Paris has to deal with a certain paradox: not considering it necessary to aggravate relations with Russia, French diplomacy nonetheless takes the path of confrontation being forced to gradually align itself with Eastern Europe (primarily with the Baltic States and Poland) in search of an all-European consensus. Some elements of this contradiction are evident in strategic documents where the problems of security on the eastern flank of NATO and, more specifically, in the Baltic region are raised more often.

For example, the 2013 White Paper on Defence and National Security has no direct mention of the Baltic Sea as such, and basically, it holds only a vague idea to maintain a dialogue with the Kremlin in the spirit of the Paris Charter of 1990.[3] On the contrary, the 2017 Strategic Review published already under President Macron takes into account new divergences between Russia and the West and develops a slightly more detailed position on the issue. The authors of the document believe that the northern and eastern borders of Europe "are affected by Moscow's intent to rebuild a sphere of influence" (including the Kaliningrad region as an outpost), and particularly in the Baltic, the Russian authorities observe an "aggressive posture".[4] As a response to their constant 'military demonstrations', France is positive about Western capacity-building in the region expressing its readiness to participate in air and sea patrolling missions.[5] The Review emphasizes that contemporary international relations are characterized by a tendency for great powers competition, especially in terms of sea power (transport arteries control, underwater cables and pipelines security and so on), and the North Atlantic along with the Baltic Sea are no exception. In this regard, the French

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[3] Livre blanc défense etsécurité nationale — 2013, *Direction de l'information légale et administrative, Paris*, URL: http://www.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/pdf/le_livre_blanc_de_la_defense_2013.pdf, p. 54 (accessed 07.10.2022).

[4] Révue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale, 2017, *France Diplomatie,* URL: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2017-rs-def1018_cle0b6ef5-1.pdf, p. 24 (accessed 07.10.2022).

[5] Ibid.

leadership is particularly concerned about the strengthening of Russia's military potential: although a part of the Russian Army and the surface Navy is considered inferior to Western standards, the document recognizes that in general Moscow has "very significant capabilities for power projection in its near abroad".[6] Nevertheless, it is proposed to maintain a bilateral dialogue on issues of mutual interest which Macron would do several times at meetings with Vladimir Putin in Versailles, St. Petersburg and Fort Bregançon (2017—2019).

Another significant mention of the Baltic region is made in the 2018 Military Programming Law (MPL) which defines the priorities of French defence policy for the next seven years. It states that participation in NATO initiatives in this zone is a feasible contribution to ensuring European security and, moreover, a practical confirmation of solidarity within the Alliance.[7] The government promises to pay increased attention to those types of weapons that could be necessary for conflict prevention and non-nuclear deterrence: small patrol ships, frigates, fighters, special forces equipment, etc. The participation in the NATO Enhance Forward Presence Programme and the Baltic Air Policing mission is perceived as one more outpost of French troops in the world along with advanced bases in Africa (Gabon, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Djibouti) and the Middle East (UAE).

The reasoning from the 2017 Review and the 2018 MPL is once again reproduced in the key document of 2021 — the so-called Strategic Update. In this document, the French leadership states that all the trends observed four years ago including the return of great powers rivalry, the scrapping of the former world order architecture, and the expansion of quantitative and qualitative diversity of crises, are only intensifying.[8] The Update points out that Russia continues to pursue its own strategic ambitions in different regions, to which Paris hoped to formulate a balanced response combining "firmness and dialogue". A significant part of this response should be defence and industrial cooperation with EU partners, and not only with Germany due to its traditional importance for French diplomacy [9; 10], but with other Baltic states like Sweden, Finland, Denmark and others. At the same time, special emphasis is still made on cooperation within NATO: France proposes to elaborate clear strategic guidelines for the Alliance (the reference to Macron's famous words on the "brain death") and supports the increase in

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[6] Révue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale, 2017, *France Diplomatie,* URL: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2017-rs-def1018_cle0b6ef5-1.pdf, p. 24 (accessed 07.10.2022).

[7] Loi n° 2018—607 du 13 juillet 2018 relative à la programmation militaire pour les années 2019 à 2025 et portant diverses dispositions intéressant la défense, 2018, *Legifrance.fr*, URL: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000037192797/ (accessed 07.10.2022).

[8] Actualisation stratégique, 2021, *Ministère des Armées*, URL: https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/dgris/REVUE%20STRAT%202021%2004%2002%202021%20FR.pdf, p. 7—8 (accessed 08.10.2022).

financial obligations of the members. In its 2022 National Strategic Review, Paris acknowledges its expectation to be an "exemplary ally" through active participation in joint missions, including those in the Baltic region.[9]

Besides several texts mentioned above, during the same years, the Ministry of Armed Forces of France prepared a special document on the Baltic — a short brochure "France and the security challenges in the Baltic Sea region". For all its brevity, this document is extremely remarkable being the first attempt of the Ministry to formulate a piece of strategy for this region. In addition to well-known points about the militarization of the Baltic Sea and the growth of Russian military power, the brochure highlights the fact that up to one third of the EU's GDP is produced in the region (as of 2018) and 200,000 French citizens live there.[10] On this basis Paris views the protection of the Baltic countries as essential to its national security and considers their strategic interests a priority, alongside other global concerns like countering terrorism and limiting illegal immigration from Africa and the Middle East. The document concludes that despite the increase in defence spending, in case of a major conflict none of the regional powers are able to keep fighting for a long time, so mutual assistance could play a crucial role. Without any reservations, France promises to maintain close ties with them presenting itself as a reliable partner ready for inclusive cooperation in all types of armed forces.

If in these documents the French leadership formulates its views on the Baltic in a distinctly pro-Atlantic, pro-NATO way, then during his trips to the countries of the region, President Macron sought to use another rhetoric — a pro-European one. For instance, at the meeting with Danish Prime minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, in August 2018,[11] he stressed that, without denying the leading role of NATO, the Europeans should find their own strategic autonomy — the ability to make independent decisions and develop European defence capabilities.[12] A little later, in a conversation with his Finnish colleague, Sauli Niinistö, he reminded about the desire for a uniform strategic culture (the same interpretation of main threats), as well as of France's intention, then

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[9] Revue nationale stratégique, 2022, *République Française,* URL: http://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/uploads/2022/11/revue-nationale-strategique-07112022.pdf, p. 39. (accessed 29.11.2022).

[10] La France face aux enjeux de sécurité en Baltique, 2019, *Ministère des Armées*, URL: https://www.archives.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/551358/9392188/file/DGRIS_La%20France%20face%20aux%20enjeux%20de%20s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20en%20Baltique_vFR%20-%202019.pdf (accessed 02.10.2022).

[11] Conférence de presse conjointe du Président de la République et du Premier Ministre Danois, 2018, *Elysee.fr*, URL: https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/08/30/conference-de-presse-conjointe-du-president-de-la-republique-et-du-premier-ministre-danois (accessed 08.10.2022).

[12] Those words were also addressed directly to Copenhagen because at that time the latter did not yet formally participate in the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU.

clearly declared, to follow the path of a 'Greater Europe' together with Russia.[13] Later, in Poland (2020) Macron stressed the importance of defence industrial cooperation within the EU referring to the possible participation of Warsaw in the next-generation tank project (MGCS).[14] During his visits to Vilnius and Riga (2020), the French leader pointed out that like the entire European Union, France and the Baltic States faced common challenges from ensuring technological sovereignty to restoring the economy after the COVID-19 crisis or protecting democratic institutions [23, p. 193]. In other words, the French president tried to convince his colleagues of the applicability of his 'European project' for the Baltic region and to show that he considered the states of Northern and Eastern Europe full-fledged parts of European integration. Yet the response was generally quite cold: most above-mentioned countries still assumed that only NATO could give firm security guarantees to the detriment of Macron's ideas on strategic autonomy and especially on the "European army" [8].

Hence, it is possible to say that France's policy towards the Baltic region is currently based on two considerations: 1) the increase in military and political threats provoked by Russia's actions (as Paris believes following a common Western narrative); 2) the readiness for deeper cooperation with local allies. Although France tends to create an autonomous European defence potential and maintain a dialogue with Moscow, across its basic documents Paris interprets the situation in the region basically in the same way as NATO in general whose priority is out of any doubt.

French military presence in the region

Based on the above, it is possible to state that the use of a military contingent participating in various missions and initiatives under the auspices of NATO is a key element of France's strategy in the Baltic. It seems necessary to specify what kind of capabilities France has at this theatre and what tasks they are focused on.

The Army is represented by a unit of 300 people stationed in Tapa, Estonia, as a part of the Lynx Mission (the name of the French element of the NATO multinational battlegroup under British command). This mission was launched in 2017 shortly after the approval of the Enhanced Forward Presence programme and was prolonged annually: first on a rotational basis (with the redeployment of French forces from Estonia to Lithuania and back), then with an unchanged basing point.

[13] Conférence de presse conjointe d'Emmanuel Macron et de Sauli Niinistö, Président de la République de Finlande, 2018, *Elysee.fr*, URL: https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/08/30/conference-de-presse-conjointe-demmanuel-macron-et-de-sauli-niinisto-president-de-la-republique-de-finlande (accessed 08.10.2022).

[14] Déclaration conjointe du Président Emmanuel Macron et de M. Andrzej Duda, Président de la République de Pologne, 2020, *Elysee.fr*, URL : https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/03/declaration-conjointe-du-president-emmanuel-macron-et-de-m-andrzej-duda-president-de-la-republique-de-pologne (accessed 08.10.2022).

Initially, the Lynx was planned to be completed in 2022 but against the background of the aggravation of the conflict in Ukraine, President Macron decided to keep the mission functioning for one more year at least. By that time, in addition to the manpower, it included 12 Leclerc tanks, 8 VBCI infantry fighting vehicles, about 30 light armoured vehicles and engineering equipment.[15] Currently, the main task of such contingent is to ensure interaction with the British, Danish and Estonian units located in the neighbourhood, to improve combat skills in wooded areas and in cold season conditions.

It should be added that during major NATO exercises, Paris demonstrates its readiness to project additional forces in different zones close to the Baltic. For example, 2,000 French soldiers and officers and 400 pieces of equipment were sent to the Brilliant Jump exercises held in February — March 2022 on the territory of Norway. 3,200 soldiers participated in the Cold Response exercise the same year.[16]

The French Air and Space Force participates in NATO Air Policing missions along the borders of Poland and the Baltic States as part of its presence in the region. Even in 2014, up to four Rafale and Mirage-2000 fighters were deployed at the Malbork air base, then at Šiauliai (2016) and Ämari (2018, 2022). According to the French Ministry of Armed Forces, after the beginning of the Russian military operation in Ukraine, the flights of French aircraft on the eastern borders of NATO in some chronological periods acquired an almost daily character; moreover, long-distance flights from French bases in Mont-de-Marsan and Istres began to be practised.[17] Since then, France is one of the most active participants in air patrolling in terms of the total number of takeoffs (2,800 by 2019) and hours spent in the sky (3,600).[18] Among other things, the pilots improve their skills in identifying targets and train various actions in case of a top-level alert.

At the same time, the French Navy also continues to be active in the Baltic Sea and, more broadly, in the North Atlantic. In June 2022, Paris participated in the BALTOPS exercises, where the US Navy reportedly tested promising

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[15] Dossier de presse. Mission Opérationnelle LYNX Estonie, 2022, *Ministère des Armées,* URL: https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/operations/20211230_LYNX12_Dossier-de-presse.pdf (accessed 10.10.2022).

[16] Renforcement du flanc est de l'OTAN, 2022, *Ministère des Armées*, URL: https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/europe/europe-du-nord-lest/otan/renforcement-du-flanc-est-lotan (accessed 10.10.2022).

[17] La France face aux enjeux de sécurité en Baltique, 2019, *Ministère des Armées*, URL: https://www.archives.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/551358/9392188/file/DGRIS_La%20France%20face%20aux%20enjeux%20de%20s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20en%20Baltique_vFR%20-%202019.pdf (accessed 02.10.2022).

[18] La France face aux enjeux de sécurité en Baltique, 2019, *Ministère des Armées*, URL: https://www.archives.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/551358/9392188/file/DGRIS_La%20France%20face%20aux%20enjeux%20de%20s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20en%20Baltique_vFR%20-%202019.pdf (accessed 02.10.2022).

prototypes of submarine drones. However, French forces deployed to the region used older military hardware, including the Atlantique 2 aircraft, the Sagittaire minesweeper, and the Latouche-Tréville frigate. Notably, the BALTOPS exercise was the last action for the Latouche-Tréville frigate before its decommissioning. Such a combination of forces clearly showed the focus on anti-submarine and mine warfare training. Paris usually deploys its more versatile naval forces, which are capable of fulfilling a wider range of tasks, in the Northern and Norwegian Seas, rather than in the Baltic. However, in 2022, the deployment of a Mistral-class amphibious assault ship in the region highlighted the Navy's attention towards the Baltic, as did the deployment of a Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier and escort group two years prior. Moreover, just in the North Atlantic one Triomphant-class ballistic missile submarine and one Rubis-class attack submarine are usually on duty.

France continues to collaborate with the Baltic countries in the field of cybersecurity. In particular, Paris has shown keen interest in partnering with Estonia, with whom they signed a declaration on bilateral activities in digital security in 2020. French cyber specialists have been actively participating in the Cyber Coalition exercises, which are usually hosted by Estonia and organized by the Allied Command Transformation, led by French generals since 2009.

Last but not least, Paris is trying to strengthen its position in the region by competing for arms trade tenders. In 2020—2021, the French defence industry had some hopes regarding Poland and Finland because these two countries planned to upgrade their fighter capabilities, so the great opportunity to offer them Rafale jets did occur. Getting a share in the Finnish market looked particularly promising, given that, as a part of its "security dilemma", Helsinki perceived the Fifth Republic as one of the most reliable partners in Western Europe [28] and, unlike Poland or the Baltic States, highly appreciated defence cooperation within the EU [29]. However, the American defence industry ultimately maintained greater influence in both cases. Furthermore, it was revealed in the fall of 2022 that the delivery of 15 CAESAR systems, which had been agreed upon with Denmark five years ago, was partially redirected to Ukraine with Copenhagen's consent. As a result, Germany remains the only major defence industry partner of France in the Baltic Sea region. Together with Berlin Paris conducts a significant part of PESCO projects and continues to design a new fighter and battle tank [18].

While the French military presence in the Baltic region is diverse, it remains relatively small, and thus may not meet the expectations of its transatlantic allies. According to RAND corporation experts in 2017, in the event of a significant escalation in the region, France would be unable to deploy large forces due to its military's primary focus on securing French territory and engagements in other parts of the world. These challenges persist to this day. [30]. Meanwhile, in French terms, the current presence in the Baltic can already be called significant. In 2019, the Ministry of Armed Forces reported 4,000 soldiers deployed in the region annually (in total for all types of troops).[19] Without further data, it can be assumed that the figure will increase by the end of 2022—2023, but even without any change it would exceed the French contingents in Iraq (600 people) and the Sahel (3,000 before the end of the Barkhane). It is noteworthy that in France, different political parties generally support the deployment of troops in the Baltic in such volumes. For example, during the elections to the European Parliament in 2019 even Marine Le Pen (often accused of having too close contacts with the Kremlin) visited Estonia where she said that the fight against the Soviet threat at one time also "formed the DNA" of her party.[20] An exception to this trend is Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of La France Insoumise (far left), who has repeatedly refused to acknowledge small Baltic countries as part of the 'true' Europe, and has urged the Elysée Palace not to engage in unnecessary confrontation with Russia [31].

The prospects of the French strategy in the Baltic

Given the systematic involvement of Paris in the region observed last year, as well as the escalating tensions between Russia and the West in 2022, it can be suggested that during Macron's second presidential term, the Baltic direction of foreign policy will receive increased attention and will not be neglected. Moreover, as of autumn 2022, at least three axes of further activity of French diplomacy are visible here.

Firstly, France will further enhance its defence and political relations with Finland and Sweden following their application for NATO membership. In August 2022, the French National Assembly ratified the protocols for the membership of both countries without any preconditions (unlike Turkey). The ratification received significant support from various established parties, with 209 deputies voting in favour and only left-populist politicians opposing it with 46 votes. Once the accession process is completed, it is possible for the cooperation between Paris and Helsinki to expand to various areas such as the entry of French ships into Finnish ports, air patrols along the Finnish-Russian border, or the deployment of additional land forces in exchange for the renewal of Finnish presence in Lebanon. However, the room for cooperation with Stockholm seems to be quite larger. In particular, the intensification of contacts between special forces (for which there is a common ground like the joint fight against terrorism in the Sahel in 2021—2022 within the Takuba Mission), the consolidation of defence industrial

[19] La France face aux enjeux de sécurité en Baltique, 2019, *Ministère des Armées*, URL: https://www.archives.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/551358/9392188/file/DGRIS_La%20France%20face%20aux%20enjeux%20de%20s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20en%20Baltique_vFR%20-%202019.pdf (accessed 02.10.2022).

[20] Mission séduction compliquée pour Marine Le Pen en Estonie, 2022, *Le Monde*, URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2019/05/15/mission-seduction-compliquee-pour-marine-le-pen-en-estonie_5462365_823448.html (accessed 29.11.2022).

ties (due to a high quality of the Swedish defence economy) and the interaction of Navies and coast guard services are likely to take place. The historical proximity of the two countries — the French origins of the House of Bernadotte — also should not be underestimated as a factor.

Secondly, the French Ministry of Armed Forces has already announced the strengthening of its capabilities on the territory of the Baltic States in 2023. The recent announcement of France's Lynx programme signifies the introduction of new infantry units equipped with additional Griffon armoured vehicles. Additionally, there is speculation about the deployment of more Rafale fighters in Lithuania. These developments are expected to strengthen the defence cooperation between France and the Baltic countries, with continued contact between their defence ministries, general staffs, and military academies [23, p. 193]. On a very limited scale, the latter are able to become customers for the French defence industry as the interest of the Lithuanian leadership in CAESAR artillery has recently shown. Such equipment can be acquired both for their own needs and for the subsequent transfer to Ukraine like in the Danish case.

Thirdly, Macron will certainly continue pursuing his vision of a Greater Europe, but with a shift away from his previous approach of openness towards the Kremlin. In October 2022, the founding summit of the new multilateral format proposed by the Elysée Palace, the European Political Community (EPC), took place in Prague. This event brought together 44 states from Iceland to Azerbaijan with the notable exceptions of Russia and Belarus. The pro-Ukrainian nature of the EPC became obvious almost immediately since the results of the summit were reduced to unsuccessful attempts by the European Union to expand the range of countries imposing sanctions against Russia and to create a special fund for Kyiv's weapons purchases. Due to this, the previous French ideas of a direct dialogue with Moscow accompanied by numerous reservations even before the start of the operation in Ukraine [32] were almost forgotten because of having no chance of support within the European Union and especially among the Baltic States. Conversely, the EPC initiative demonstrates Paris's commitment to promoting solidarity with Eastern European countries based on a shared goal of countering the 'Russian threat', while also providing an additional political framework for deeper engagement in the region.

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In conclusion, the ongoing intensification of French diplomacy in the Baltic region appears to conflict with Russia's interests. Instead of offering a new vision and reviving relations with Moscow, France's primary objective is to strengthen its position as a reliable NATO member and contribute to the Alliance's common defence potential in the region. France's interest in defending the eastern borders of the Alliance is seen as a clear indicator of solidarity by its allies, as evident from positive assessments in expert papers from Poland [24] and Germany [18]. The French strategy in the Baltic as is would not pose a direct threat to the security of the Russian Federation given the small scale of French forces involved. But today it is closely linked to the activities of other NATO countries. As a result, the French strategy in the region is getting more and more unfriendly. Any further build-up or, otherwise, the minimization of France's military presence in the region will depend on the confrontation between Russia and the West.

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THE TWO-PARTY TENDENCY IN POLAND'S POLITICAL SYSTEM: MANIFESTATIONS, CAUSES AND PROSPECTS

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The article analyses the Polish political system and the increasing role of two political parties in it. This tendency has been observed in Poland for more than 15 years. We can draw a conclusion that two-and-a-half-party system has formed in Poland. Using Duverger's phrasing, there is a "two-party tendency" in the functioning of the Polish model. The study analyses the facts that firm up this conclusion: not only the distribution of seats in the Sejm (the main criterion) but also many other quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the political system contribute to the development of the current political trend. The main goal of this article is to identify the factors that have led to the emergence and development of the tendency and assess the prospects of its further evolution, considering that both leading parties face multiple difficulties. The article concludes by pointing out that Poland is unlikely to continue strengthening its two-party tendency, and could instead return to the multiparty system with many influential parties which is more characteristic of the country historically. However, in recent years the leading role of two parties in the political system has had more positive effects rather than negative ones.

Keywords:
Poland, party system, Law and Justice, Civic Platform, two-party system, two-and-a-half party system, two-party tendency

Introduction

Poland's party system has changed considerably in the first two decades of the 21st century. Chaotic rotation of several unstable parties has been replaced by a much more well-structured model with two new parties — Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO) — as its key elements. Each president and prime-minister who has assumed office in the country since 2005 is a member of either PiS or PO. The polarisation of political life has also increased with the two-party rivalry growing into the nerve centre of Polish politics. Its intensity is succinctly captured in the widely used expression 'Polish-Polish war'. The rivalry between

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PiS and PO often becomes the focus of international interest, as was the case with the air crash near Smolensk in 2010 or the increasing tensions between the Polish government and the EU institutions observed in recent years.

Despite the dominance of PiS and PO in the political life of Poland, hardly ever is the country's political system referred to as two-party. In a strict sense, a two-party system suggests that no political party but for two has any political influence, a prime example being the USA. Yet, this is not the case in Poland. Since 2005, there have been from two to four other parties and blocks in the Sejm along with PiS and PO. As parts of the governing coalition, those parties ensure parliamentary majority. The current type of Poland's multiparty system differs from that that existed in the 1990s. Using the term introduced by Maurice Duverger [1, p. 298], we may say that Poland's multiparty system is demonstrating a 'two-party tendency'. It may also be called a two-and-a-half party system, as defined in Alan Siaroff's classification: the term is applicable when two political forces control from 80 to 95 % of the parliamentary seats by [2, p. 272].

In recent years, several researchers have come to a conclusion that an embryonic two-party system emerged in Poland in the mid-2000s [3, p. 592]. Yet, at first, such an idea seemed premature and lacking evidence. The then experience of party formation and the historical traditions of Polish political culture cast doubt on the thesis about the establishment of an institutionally sustainable party system, not to mention its two-party version. The conclusion was made that it was early to speak about a bipolar system and that the trends observed at the time were attributed to the polarisation of public opinion and protest voting [4, p. 435]. It was argued either that Poland was destined to have a multiparty system in the future [5, s. 82] or that the transition to such a system would take a lot of time and require strengthening the inner stability of the main political forces [6, s. 199]. Claims were made about the theoretical impossibility of classifying Poland's political system as belonging to one or another commonly acknowledged type [7, s. 51].

What can be stated with acceptable certainty is that the Polish party system has stabilised in the past 15—20 years, with two political forces assuming the leading role. Below, I will attempt to describe the manifestations of this leading role and the reasons behind the formation of country's party system. I will also analyse the current trends to understand whether the 'two-party tendency' is a temporary phenomenon or its further development can be expected.

Manifestations of the 'two-party tendency' in Poland's political system

I will begin by analysing some examples to demonstrate why Poland's party system can be classified as a two-and-a-half rather than multiparty one. Firstly, the election results generally meet the necessary quantitative criteria. As was mentioned above, such a system is present if two main parties jointly control at least 80 % of the parliamentary seats. In case of Poland, of major importance is the distribution of seats in the Sejm, which is invested with the powers to legislate and form the cabinet. Since 2007, PO, PiS and the electoral blocs led by these parties have won from 79 to 82 % of the Sejm seats in four elections in a row (Table 1). Usually, their results lie at the lower values of the criterion. Not only the figures and rates are important but so is their stability through time. Given this distribution of seats in the Sejm, only PO and PiS members can become the head of government. The other parties can take on the role of junior partners in a coalition, in a best-case scenario. In the Senate, the dominance of the two parties is absolute: since 2007 they have controlled more than 90 % of the seats (however, the Senate of Poland does not have broad powers). The difference in the number of seats won by the two parties in the Sejm and in the Senate is mainly explained by the use of different voting systems: proportional and majoritarian, respectively. As for the European Parliament elections, since 2009 deputies from PiS and PO have traditionally won from 75 to 80 % of the Polish quota.

Table 1

The results of PiS and PO[1] in national elections since 2005, %

Year	% of seats		% of votes in the first round of presidential elections
	Sejm	Senate	
2005	63	83	66
2007	82	99	—
2010	—	—	78
2011	79	94	—
2015	81	95	69
2019	80	91	—
2020	—	—	74

Note: the m-dash means that no elections were held in the year in question.

The Polish party system has been strengthened by that since 2005 only members of the two major parties have been elected presidents. It matters little that the President becomes non-partisan after having been elected. In fact, he or she is indissociable with the political force supporting him or her, the more so as the existing limitations, established in 1995 by President Kwaśniewski, have never been turned into a clear cut legal norm.[2] All the presidential elections held in

[1] Taking into account the blocs headed by these parties, i.e. the United Right coalition formed around PiS in 2015 and the Civic Coalition formed around PO in 2019.

[2] L. Kaczyński: konstytucyjnie dyskusyjne czy prezydent może być szefem partii, *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna,* 15.06.2009, URL: https://prawo.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/324893,lkaczynski-konstytucyjnie-dyskusyjne-czy-prezydent-moze-byc-szefem-partii.html (accessed 26.07.2022).

the past 20 years were a struggle between opponents from PiS and PO, each vote going into the second round. This standard scenario of presidential race has a marked effect on public expectations, the actions of parties and the political strategies they use. Despite the limited powers, the President plays an important role in Polish politics. For instance, he or she has the veto power which can be overridden by no fewer than 60 % of votes in the Sejm (usually the ruling forces cannot obtain such a majority).

The tendency towards stronger influence of two parties is visible in both the national and regional politics. Between 2006 and 2014 PiS and PO gained from 63 to 66 % of seats in voivodeship sejmiks across the country; in the 2018 election this share rose to 80 %.[3] In 7 out of 16 voivodeships one of the two parties managed to gain the absolute majority of sejmik seats: PiS in six regions, PO in one.

Of large importance is the two parties' visible, albeit asymmetric, participation in local governance. PiS traditionally underperforms in local elections, while PO enjoys huge support in big cities. Six of Poland's ten largest cities have been governed by PO mayors: Gdańsk uninterruptedly for twenty years; Warsaw and Lublin since 2006; Łódź and Bydgoszcz since 2010; Poznań since 2014. The capital is a special case: PO has been in power in the city ever since a short period in the first half of 2000s when PiS prevailed (future President Kaczyński was mayor at the time).

Another factor in the party system stabilisation, which was brought about by the growing dominance of the two parties, was the tightening of party discipline observed in the parliament since 2005. Mass abandonment of factions by members of the ruling parties ceased to be a common occurrence in the second half of the 2000s [8, p. 359]. The discrete attempts to split PiS and PO from inside, some of them involving high-ranking politicians (see, for instance [9, p. 74—75, 78—79]), yielded an opposite result. They led to a further consolidation of the parties without threatening their influence [10, p. 190].

The dominant role of the two parties is made evident by not only election results and other quantitative measures, but also the high polarisation of the Polish political life. As newly established parties, PiS and PO were not antagonistic to each other; on the contrary, pursuing right wing policies, they were considered as potential partners. The tongue-in-cheek abbreviation POPiS, a blend of the Polish names of the two parties that translates as 'performance' or 'show', hinted at the political and ideological kinship of these forces. In the 2002 local election, the parties even submitted common lists of candidates all over the country but for the capital voivodeship. After the 2005 parliamentary election, the first one in which PiS and PO came first and second, the parties were confidently expected to establish a wide coalition. The deal between PiS

[3] The author's calculations based on the official election results; the number of seats in each of 16 voivodeships was considered as having equal weight.

and right wing populists to form a coalition government and the contentious presidential election of 2005 marked the beginning of political and ideological division between the two parties.

Later, this division grew even deeper. The Smolensk air disaster, which killed President Lech Kaczyński and members of his team, drew a wedge between the new leader of PiS Jarosław Kaczyński, the brother of the late president, and the leader of PO Donald Tusk, whom his opponents tried to hold responsible for the catastrophe. By 2015, when PiS got back to power, Tusk had already been elected President of the European Council, thus personifying the EU-oriented forces, and the new Polish government had started a lengthy conflict with Brussels. (Ironically, Poland was the only EU member who voted against Tusk's re-election in 2017). Inside the country, PiS declared itself a champion of traditional Polish values and sovereignty, while PO was making a stand for democracy, civil rights and a united Europe. The personal differences between Jarosław Kaczyński and Tusk are also substantial: the former is a 'conservative revolutionary' often compared to Viktor Orbán and Recep Tayyip Erdogan [11, p. 89], the latter is a flexible pragmatist committed to technocratic solutions rather than ideology (the policy of 'warm water in the tap') [10, p. 185].

The polarisation has turned the relations between the two parties into a zero sum game: what is good for PiS is bad for PO and vice versa. In the shadow of these two parties (and to some extent in their orbit), there are other less influential political forces, which, however, do not unduly affect the agenda. The choice between PiS and PO is the central issue of Polish politics and the main factor in political self-identification for the majority of voters; it largely determines the tenor of public and political debate. The parties have diverged even more widely: in 2005, 45 % of PO supporters considered PiS the main electoral alternative; by 2011, this share reduced to 3 %; among PiS supporters, it dropped from 37 to 6 % [12, p. 493].

Polish political journalism has responded to the division with stereotyped images of PiS and PO partisans. The supporters of the former — senior residents of smaller towns, most of them ardent Catholics with secondary education and a below-average income — are commonly called 'mohair berets'. The latter's voters — cosmopolitan youngsters from big cities, having a good education, a large income and a high level of social mobility – have been dubbed 'lemmings' [13, p. 55]. Territorial division in support for PiS and PO is also explicit: the former is more often voted for in the central and south-east regions, and while the latter in big cities and so-called Recovered Territories, which became part of Poland in 1945.

Yet, these images do not give a full picture of the electorate division. Contrary to the stereotypes, both parties have supporters across all social strata all over the country; this comprehensiveness is a characteristic feature of a sustainable political system dominated by two parties, which enjoy greater support than any other political force in virtually every electoral group stratified either by age, education, place of residence or profession. Since the mid-2010s, PiS has secured support across all electorate groups: youngsters, students, residents of big cities and people with higher education except managers [14, p. 104].

The two-party tendency apparent in Poland since the mid-2000s has contributed to the stability of the party system. The 2007 election was the first one where no new parties entered the parliament. In 2011, the ruling coalition was successfully re-elected for the second term, having broken the tradition of the opposition always winning parliamentary elections. In 2015, for the first time, there was no need to form a coalition in the Sejm, because one political force took the absolute majority of seats. The situation repeated itself in 2019. Both major parties have been in government and opposition: PiS has won three elections (in 2005, 2015 and 2019); PO two (2007 and 2011). The Polish party system remained stable amid external and internal disturbances: the 2008 financial crisis, the Smolensk air disaster, the military conflicts in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic. The weighted average data from the survey conducted from January to October 2022 shows that PiS is consistently supported by from 36 to 38 % of voters and the approval rating of the Civic Coalition formed around PO has ranged between 27 and 29 %.[4]

The above indicates that the alternation in power of PiS and PO made Poland's party system better structured, causing it to assume 'two-and-a-half party' characteristics. Up until now, it has withstood the test of time. Thus, it is necessary to analyse what led to the formation of the present-day party system.

The origins of the 'two-party tendency'

The key to understanding the origins of the 'two-party tendency' is the time of its genesis. Having emerged in the early 2000s as second-tier Polish parties, PiS and PO became leaders by the end of the decade. A vital prerequisite for their ascent was the deep ideological crisis of Polish left-wing forces (traditionally called *Lewica* as opposed to the right-wing *Prawica*).

The core of *Lewica*, which has a rich historical tradition, was composed of 'turncoat' communists. In the 1990s and in the first half of the 2000s, it was one of the poles of the Polish politics: its member Aleksander Kwaśniewski was twice elected President; social democrats played the key role in the ruling coalition during two parliamentary terms. Despite the importance of support from the citizens who resented dwindling social protection and the consequences of the 'Shock Therapy', the party took a right turn. In the second half of the 1990s, it

[4] Poll of Polls — Polish polls, trends and election news for Poland, 2022, *Politico,* URL: https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/poland/ (accessed 29.10.2022).

abandoned its cautious view of the socialist past, condemned totalitarianism [15, p. 56] and fully supported the country's accession to NATO and the EU. Under Prime Minister Leszek Miller (2001—2004), *Lewica* became indistinguishable from right-wing parties as regards socio-economic policy. As Roman Savenkov notes, the liberal economic policy pursued by the left-wing forces in the first half of the 2000s 'led to a shift away from the values of social democracy and the loss of ideological identity" [16, p. 179].

The main beneficiaries were the two parties that could grow rapidly by attracting the now disappointed supporters of social democrats. Each party had something to offer them: PiS promoted leftist paternalistic views of the economy and social problems, while PO attracted people of secular thinking who opposed the intensification of clerical trends — a burning issue in Poland. A product of historical contingency and a focus on Poland's history and ideology, the right-wing sentiment of the two parties gave them an opportunity to expand beyond their initially narrow groups of supporters and assert themselves as parties with a broad political agenda capable of engaging all social strata.

This change necessitated a more explicit ideological positioning and an emphasis on the program differences between the two parties. Under the rule of ideologically catch-all social democrats in the first half of the 2000s, the differences in the political programs of Polish parties were insignificant. Voters struggled to choose from a limited number of alternatives [17, p. 594]. This situation, which led to a drastic decay of left-wing forces and a fast rise of right-wing populist parties, indicated the need for a clear-cut political division. The ensuing crystallisation of views, political narratives and ideological self-identification facilitated the institutionalisation of the party system on a new basis [18, s. 85]. The support for the two parties increased, inter alia, owing to the extreme segments of the political spectrum: in 2007, PiS drew 60 % of voters from the right-wing populist League of Polish Families [19, s. 589], which lost its seats in the parliament. At the same time, PO at that moment started recruiting supporters from across the liberal wing. The right-wing populist Self-Defence, whose leader Andrzej Lepper was dubbed 'the third twin' for his likeness to the Kaczyński brothers [20, p. 897], found itself in a much complicated predicament: half of its supporters absented themselves from the 2007 election [19, s. 589], and in the 2010s, they started voting for PiS.

Remarkably, this ideological division did not follow the standard *Prawica—Lewica* (right wing–left wing) model, which was typical of Poland. Although the two parties combined in their programmes elements of both ideologies, they were still considered right-wing. The analysis of their programme goals shows that the political views of PiS are 70 % right-wing and socioeconomic ones 100 % left-wing. PO has adopted a leftist perspective on political issues and right-wing on the economy [21, s. 168]. Polish politics became unbalanced as a result: although about 25 % of voters support leftist ideas [22, p. 64], the left-wing forces gain from 7.5 to 13 % of votes in elections (in 2015, they did not even win any seats in the Sejm), and the rest of the votes usually strengthens the two major parties. The best asset of PiS is its proactive and consistent social policy. The 500+ state program launched under its rule (500 zlotys paid monthly for each child) was supported by 77 % of people, which fully blocked the opportunities of other parties to oppose it [23, p. 186]. An important role was played by the annulment of the pension reform carried out under the rule of PO and the reduction of retirement age. The PiS programme stated as its main goal 'a Polish model of a modern welfare state'.[5] At the high of its popularity in the early 2020, PiS enjoyed the record level of support in the region of 50 %.[6] In its turn, PO benefits from the evident discontent of many Poles with the authoritarian and clerical trends associated with PiS: the attacks on the judiciary system, the tightening of abortion rules, Sunday trading ban etc. That is why PO has shifted its main ideological emphasis from the economy to politics, standing up for democratic institutions, women's rights, legalisation of same-gender partnerships and avoiding references to the Christian ideology and the Catholic cultural tradition characteristic of the right-wing parties.[7] So, both parties have adopted important elements of the leftist agenda, thus dividing most of the political landscape between them.

The EU factor has had a profound influence on the formation of the bipolar party system in Poland. Before the accession to the EU in 2004, Polish parties were generally euro-optimistic; since the mid-2000s, the rise of euro-sceptic attitudes has pulled them apart. Interestingly, PO which had wooed the corresponding segment of voters before the accession to the EU, started to define itself afterwards as a force uniting the supporters of a united Europe – by contrast with PiS, which included the principle of 'euro-realism' in its program[8] and explicitly drifted towards euro-scepticism. The debates about European integration reflect the rigid attitude towards preservation of national sovereignty specific to Polish society. The right-wing politicians see Brussels as a new imperial centre striving to lay down the law and impose cosmopolitan values far removed from the national traditions [17, p. 597]. But because the idea of Poland as part of Europe

[5] Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2019, Polski model państwa dobrobytu, 2019, S.22, URL: https://pis.org.pl/files/Program_PIS_2019.pdf (accessed 28.10.2022).

[6] Polish Public Opinion, *CBOS — Public Opinion Research Center*, November 2021, P. 3, URL: https://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/public_opinion/2021/11_2021.pdf (accessed 29.10.2022).

[7] Twoja Polska. Program Koalicji Obywatelskiej, 2019, S. 9–10, 16, 23, URL: https://platforma.org/upload/document/86/attachments/121/KO %20Program.pdf (accessed 28.10.2022).

[8] Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2019, Polski model państwa dobrobytu, 2019, S. 20, URL: https://pis.org.pl/files/Program_PIS_2019.pdf (accessed 28.10.2022).

and the catholic world is the basis of the country's national ideology, PiS does not question its EU membership, insisting instead on the Union's fundamental transformation in conformity with Christian values, following the 'Europe of nations' model [24, p. 20]. Poland's search for its place in the EU has sparked off the never-ending public debate overlapping with the struggle between the two parties.

The 'two-party tendency' is largely a produce of the peculiarities of the country's election laws. After the explosive growth in the number of parliamentary parties in the early 1990s, a number of legal mechanisms were created curbing the potential of small parties. A rather high electoral threshold was set: 5 % for parties and 8 % for coalitions. This, for instance, skewed the election results in 2015, when PiS and PO gained much fewer votes than before, but their factions in the Sejm increased significantly (see Table 2). Since 2005, the distribution of seats in the Sejm has followed the d'Hondt method, which slightly diminishes the representation of small parties. Moreover, the seats are allocated separately in every electoral district (on average 11 seats in each). To be elected to the Sejm, it is necessary to pass the threshold set in the district. In smaller districts, this mechanism favours big parties [25, s. 77]. Combined with the d'Hondt method, this creates quite noticeable disproportions in the allocation of mandates in Poland. But for the influence of those disproportions, the ruling coalition could not have retained majority in 2011 or created the single-party PiS government in 2015 and 2019. In the Senate elections, the majority voting system is employed minimising the chances of the other parties. None of this confirms the thesis that the role of election laws has diminished since the beginning of the 21st century [26, s. 345]. These legislative mechanisms stay an important limitation for small parties, as it was envisaged in the turbulent 1990s.

Table 2

Disproportions in seat allocation in the Sejm since 2005, %

Year	Share of votes for PiS and PO[9]	Share of seats of PiS and PO	Share of votes for other parliamentary forces	Share of seats of other parliamentary forces
2005	51	63	38	37
2007	74	82	22	18
2011	69	79	27	21
2015	62	81	22	19
2019	71	80	28	20

[9] Taking into account the blocs headed by these parties, i.e. the United Right coalition based on PiS in 2015 and the Civic Coalition based on PO in 2019.

Prospects for transition to a two-party system

Let us consider the prospects of Poland's two-and-a-half party system. Here, it is necessary to consider what factors prevent it from transforming into a full-fledged two-party system and may cause Poland to revert to the more traditional multi-party system.

The Polish model cannot become two-party in its classic form as long as the Sejm elections are held according to the proportional system, which is not likely to be abandoned in the near future: today's polarisation does not encourage PiS and PO to cooperate, let alone create a 'party cartel' capable of changing the rules of Polish politics at its own discretion at the expense of the interests of small forces [27, s. 103]. An attempt to do so using the votes of a single-party majority would explode the situation in society and urge the opposition forces to rally to support for the rival party. The tradition inherent in the national ideology holds that all important public groups should have a right to political representation.

The phenomenon, termed the 'party fad' [28, p. 158], is another characteristic feature of the Polish political system. Since the beginning of the 2010s, each parliamentary and presidential election has brought relative success to new political forces and candidates positioning themselves as anti-system ones. In the 2011 parliamentary election, that was the acutely anticlerical Palikot movement; in the 2015 presidential and parliamentary election, the right-wing populist politician and rock-musician Paweł Kukiz and his movement; in the 2019 Sejm election, the Confederation far-right bloc passed the electoral threshold in several districts; in 2020, the independent candidate showman Szymon Hołownia finished third. These politicians and movement managed to gain from 7 to 21 % of votes, investing much less than the traditional parties with their solid organisational structures and state funding. To a great extent, the success of anti-system forces is the result of protest voting. For instance, 25 % of Kukiz's supporters voted for Janusz Palikot in the previous election, albeit the two candidates had virtually nothing in common [29, p. 242]. Traditionally, from 20 to 32 % of Polish voters think that none of the existing parties advocates their interests [30, s. 52]. As Jerzy Jaskiernia writes, 'forming a "successful" political party in Poland is a matter of months' [29, p. 240].

Besides the unstable populist parties, there are more resilient parliamentary forces with rich historic traditions and certain influence in real politics. These are social democrats and the agrarian parties,[10] such as the Polish People's Party, which is the most stable in the Polish politics and the only one that has been represented in all the consecutive Sejms. Advocating a most eclectic set of views, it has the largest coalition potential among all the Polish parties [21, s. 168—169]. Its traditional role is making attempts towards a coalition with a more powerful

[10] In Poland, they are called *ludovcy,* i.e. agrarians.

parliamentary force [31, p. 94]. Within such coalitions formed both at the national and regional levels. the party often becomes more influential than it would be expected based on its approval rating of about 8—9%.

It is interesting to compare Polish parties in terms of membership. Paradoxically, the two major Polish parties are not leaders in this respect. In the early 2010s, the Polish People's Party had, on average, 100,000 members; social democrats, 59,000 [12, p. 492]. PO and PiS were inferior to these parties in terms of membership: each had only 34,000 members in 2018 [10, p. 191].

Except for some big cities where PO prevails, Poland's local governments are rarely led by either of the two major parties. Poland's local authorities are among the strongest and their self-reliance among the greatest in Europe [32, p. 512]: not only are they financially independent of the national government or voivodeships, they can also receive direct subsidies from EU funds [33, p. 151]. Many big cities have been governed by independent politicians for decades, even those generally considered the electoral strongholds of PiS, such as Kraków and Rzeszów, or PO, such as Szczecin and Gdynia. Local politicians prevail in small cities and rural areas. Parties do not play an important role there. For example, in the early 2010s, the agrarians had a wider representation in local governments than PO and PiS combined [12, p. 491].

The two major parties' strong personalisation is another potential factor of their weakness. As Anna Materska-Sosnowska points out, according to the classic scheme, parties create their leaders, while in Poland, as well as other Central and Eastern European countries, quite the opposite, parties are formed around leaders [34, s. 75]. Both PO and PiS have been called leaderist or even 'authorial', which means that their leaders are also their founders [6, s. 197]. PiS is the brainchild of Jarosław Kaczyński who is widely believed to have more political influence as the party leader than PiS presidents and prime ministers. PO is the patrimony of Tusk: all the attempts to promote new leaders after his moving to Brussels had consistently failed; in 2021, he retook the reins of the party. Both politicians are advanced in years (in 2022, Kaczyński was 73 and Tusk 65), having scaled the political heights more than 20 years ago. For Poland this is a very long period in power. It is uncertain whether the parties will survive their leaders: the experience of PO suggests that when the leader steps away, the party can plunge into crisis.

Yet, the two parties are not mirror images of each other [19, s. 599]. Ideologically, PiS is much more integrated: it is the only Polish party having a base of supporters who are permanently ready to vote for it and do not consider other political forces as an alternative [14, p. 108—109]. Despite the criticism of its ideological palette (see, for instance, [35, p. 58]). it should not go unmentioned that PiS is a party of explicit ideological positioning, and the electoral effect of the pursued policy is secondary to its ideology [36, p. 196]. PO, however, has faced problems with retaining the loyalty of its voters since the early 2010s: this lack of commitment may be due to the party's growing pragmatism and ideological eclecticism. A considerable part of PO's supporters vote for new parliamentary forces: former PO supporters accounted for 43 % of the Palikot Movement electorate in 2011 [12, p. 492] and 71 % of Modern in 2015 [29, p. 238]. Since the mid-2010s, PO has plummeted in opinion polls, being outstripped by not only PiS but also other political forces. In 2015, it was losing to Kukiz'15 [37, p. 152—153]; in 2016, to Modern, a recently formed liberal party [38, p. 67]. In 2020, PO nearly lost the first round of presidential elections; only changing the candidate allowed the party to make it into the second round. In 2021, PO was for a short time outrun in the polls by Szymon Hołownia's anti-system party Poland 2050.[11] These problems are a result of the party's failure to articulate its stance on such burning issues as reducing clerical influence or granting of abortion rights to women, which discourages potential liberal supporters. PO's programme contains some vague indications that may encourage opposition-minded voters but does not make the position of the party clear (the document speaks of 'the rights of Polish women' instead of the abortion right[12], avoids naming the Church when addressing the principles of the secular state etc.). Unlike PiS, it is often hesitant to go beyond its habitual compromise policy, which, in the conditions of social polarisation, cannot satisfy a considerable part of the intended electorate.

The problems PO and PiS are facing lead one to the conclusion that the two-party tendency is not likely to intensify in Poland in the near future. The two parties have dominated the political arena for 15 years; support for PiS has skyrocketed all over the country; the influence of PO on local politics has gradually expanded; the drastic growth in voter turnout in 2019 and 2020 did not undermine the leading role of the two parties in Polish politics. Yet, these facts and trends do not outweigh the problems that PiS and PO are facing in their attempts to minimise the influence of third parties. The widespread opinion that PiS's authoritarian tendencies may lead to a the emergence in Poland of a 'Hungarian' political system dominated by one party is also ungrounded. There are no prerequisites for such a development: PiS is incapable of securing the constitutional majority without PO votes.

Conclusion

The party system that has existed in Poland over the past 15 years can be characterised as two-and-a-half party. It meets the main criterion (party standings in the Sejm), and the other factors are also in place: the role of the President and the Senate, the substantial influence of the two parties in regional elections, sup-

[11] Poll of Polls — Polish polls, trends and election news for Poland, 2022, *Politico,* URL: https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/poland/ (accessed 29.10.2022).

[12] Twoja Polska. Program Koalicji Obywatelskiej, 2019, S. 16, URL: https://platforma.org/upload/document/86/attachments/121/KO%20Program.pdf (accessed 28.10.2022).

port for the two parties from almost all social groups, ideological polarisation, stereotype scenarios of electoral campaigns involving struggle between the two parties. The genesis of the party system in its new version has been facilitated by the deep crisis of leftist forces, the programme divergence of the two parties, the increase in the EU influence on Polish politics, the capability (especially in the PiS case) to attract voters with different ideological views and the peculiarities of the election laws. The new party model, which appeared in the late 2000s, has been characterised by inner stability despite the considerable number of problems PiS and PO have faced on their way to expanding their influence. The multiple sceptic forecasts concerning the prospects of Poland's system with two major parties have not been confirmed so far.

Yet, the logic behind these forecasts holds up. One can hardly expect that the 'two-party tendency' will intensify in Poland: that would go against both the realities of Polish politics and the country's deep-rooted tradition. Further development of the two-party tendency is restrained by the inability of PO and PiS to join their efforts in changing the rules, the use of the proportional system in parliamentary elections, the weakness of the parties at the local level and a moderate membership of the parties. Other important factors are the 'party fad', the weak mechanisms for leadership handover in the parties and, in the case of PO, the instability of public support due to the ideological eclecticism of the 2010s.

The two-party tendency observed over the past 15 years has led to some negative consequences, such as marked social polarisation, as well as positive ones: more sustainable governments, a well-structured political process and consistent policies pursued by the Polish government when the two parties are in accord. The way the Polish party system has developed over the past 15—20 years shows that it does progress as a system proper without plunging every now and then into a chaotic change of different party combinations.

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ESTONIAN 'BALTICNESS' AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT: MEANINGS AND CONTEXTUAL SPECIFICS

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This paper explores the Estonian vision of Baltic identity. Estonia's authorities have repeatedly articulated their scepticism towards the concept of a stand-alone 'Baltic region' and the inclusion of Estonia in it, preferring to position their state as a Nordic country. Yet, in numerous cases, they have clearly labelled Estonia as a Baltic State. To identify the contexts and meanings labelling the country as a Baltic State, this contribution provides a content analysis of official speeches given by Estonia's political leadership. It is concluded that, despite the visibility of socioeconomic issues in the discourse, the most comprehensive image of Estonian 'Balticness' is constructed by interconnected narratives built around the Soviet past and the 'security threats' associated with Russia. The theoretical framework of regionalism, which allows one to consider the Baltics as a social construct rather than a set of material factors, provides an additional explanatory model.

Keywords:
Estonia, Baltic, Baltic States, identity, regionalism, constructivism

Introduction and literature review

The current literature on Baltic identity[1] offers up two main interpretations of the phenomenon. The first, *positive* one, highlights narratives such as strengthening the positioning of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as a progressive EU subregion and the inadmissibility of their marginalisation, distancing from the 'negative' image of post-soviet countries, joint efforts to increase the Baltic States' influence in the international arena and particularly within the EU, forging interregional ties, etc. [1—4]. The second, *negative* interpretation focuses on the period the countries spent as Soviet republics, which is perceived by the majority of national elites, the countries' nationals and external observers as a heavy historical legacy [5—8]. Here, the common past eclipses the meaningful differences

[1] In this paper, the term 'Baltic identity' is used to refer to the idea of belonging to the Baltics, a European sub-region comprising Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

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between the three states and precludes alternative identities from taking root. The Estonian researcher Eiki Berg described a similar dichotomy fifteen years ago: '[t]he Baltic States have obtained both the image of the post-communist reform tigers or arrogant deserters from the Soviet past with their burdensome legacies' [9, p. 49].

The negative interpretation of 'Balticness' certainly remains dominant. The Lithuanian scholar Mindaugas Jurkynas also comes to this conclusion, emphasising that today's Baltic identity is 'based on security concerns against Russia and Soviet legacies' [10, p. 328; see also 11; 12].[2] These 'concerns' are, in turn, direct derivatives of the three countries' historical relations with Russia.

The semantic associations produced by the negative interpretation of Baltic identity have serious implications for the political rhetoric in the three states. They prompt Baltic political elites towards embracing what might be called 'identity escapism', manifested in the ambition to classify the countries as part of more 'prosperous' regions. For instance, the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian leaders tend to position their states as Nordic countries [13; see also 14]. And they have achieved notable success in terms of international legitimation: in January 2017, the updated website of the UN Statistics Division categorised the three republics as Nordic states, much to the approval of Baltic politicians.[3]

Of all the three states, Estonia has the most articulated position in denying the existence of a 'Baltic identity'. That is why the country was chosen for consideration in this study. Striving to provide a rationale for excluding their state from the Baltic region, Estonian politicians pursue two main narratives. The first one stresses the cultural and linguistic proximity of Estonia and the Nordic State of Finland. Today's difference in living standards in the two countries is principally explained by Estonia having been part of the USSR for decades [15, p. 58—73; 16, p. 289]. The alternative narrative focuses on deliberate distancing from the image of a 'post-Soviet country', which might be evoked in the mind of an external observer confronted with the term 'Baltic States'. Estonian politicians also emphasise that in some respects (sometimes very specific ones, such as popular knowledge of English or internet connection quality), Estonia is not inferior to the Nordic countries. These achievements are opposed to the possible negative associations relating to 'Soviet legacies', for example, corruption [17, p. 192—193; 18, p. 356].

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[2] This conclusion is made based not only on logic and intuition but also analysis of public speeches given by the political leadership of the Baltics between 1992 and 2006 (see [11] and, particularly, presidents of the states from 2014 to 2018 (see [12]). This work employs an alternative research methodology, and the empirical evidence (statements made by Estonian presidents, prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs from between 1 March 2011 and 1 March 2021) differs markedly from the sample examined by Jurkynas.

[3] The UN classifies Estonia as a Northern European country, 2017, Estonian World, URL: https://estonianworld.com/life/un-reclassifies-estonia-northern-european-country/ (accessed 01.02.2022). Note that the UN has categorised Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as Northern European countries since 2002. But the update of the UN website encouraged Baltic politicians to jump at the chance and articulate once again the Northern European identity of their countries.

After independence, a prominent advocate of Estonia as a Northern European country was its minister of foreign affairs (1996—1998; 1999—2002) Toomas Ilves, who gave a seminal speech at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs on 14 December 1999:

> Unfortunately, most if not all people outside Estonia talk about something called 'The Baltics'.
>
> I think it is time to do away with poorly fitting, externally imposed categories. It is time that we recognize that we are dealing with three very different countries in the Baltic area, with completely different affinities. There is no Baltic identity with a common culture, language group, religious tradition.[4]

Instead of the Baltics, Ilves proposed to relate Estonia's regional identity to the so-called Yule-land, whose concept he outlined in the same speech. He saw this region as comprising all the countries where the mid-winter festival of Yule is traditionally celebrated. Besides Estonia, these are the Scandinavian states (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland) and the UK. The boundaries of Yule-land clearly coincide with some modern interpretations of the North European geographical area. In addition to the Yule tradition, Ilves saw as a unifying factor a mindset shared by Yule-land residents:

> Brits, Scandinavians, Finns, and Estonians consider themselves rational, logical, unencumbered by emotional arguments; we are business-like, stubborn and hard-working. Our southern neighbours see us as too dry and serious, workaholics, lacking passion and *joie de vivre*.[5]

It appears that this message was spread in an attempt to grope for alternative ways to reinforce the image of Estonia as part of Northern Europe: if Yule-land is viewed from the perspective of economic performance and living standards, the difference between Estonia and the other states would be too apparent. Although Ilves's concept did not gain wide currency, it did contribute to legitimating Estonia's Northern European identity. Aldis Purs notes that few observers 'register[ed] Ilves's attempts at humour within the speech', but '[h]is suggestion ... set off a long-lasting debate' [6, p. 10].

Interestingly, if one pursues a closer investigation of the Estonian leadership's political rhetoric, the identity escapism discussed above will lead them into a paradox: if the Baltics do not exist as a single entity, why does Ilves, just like many other Estonian speakers, associate his country with the correspondent region? For example, in the speech quoted above, he states: 'what the three Baltic States have in common almost completely derives from shared unhappy experiences

[4] Estonia as a Nordic Country, 1999, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia*, URL: https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-nordic-country (accessed 09.02.2022).

[5] Ibid.

imposed upon us from outside: occupations, deportations, annexation, sovietization, collectivization, russification'.[6] Later, during his term in office as president (2006—2016), Ilves spoke of the struggle of the 'three Baltic musketeers' for freedom,[7] the 'Baltic' peoples' striving for independence,[8] the intellectual and geographical proximity of the 'Baltic States',[9] not to mention many other contexts where the three republics were treated as elements of a single whole.

The present work aims to explore this paradox and identify the contextual features of the positioning of Estonia as a Baltic State by the country's leadership. The findings may contribute to a better understanding of Estonian politics by answering the question as to why, despite the repeatedly articulated desire to get rid of the Baltic 'label', the latter retains a prominent place in national discourse.

The article is composed of five sections. The first one is an introduction and literature review. The second one analyses in line with the research objective how the concept of the region evolved in academic discourse and how it is operationalised. The third section outlines the methodology of the study. The fourth one describes and interprets the findings obtained. The fifth section contains final conclusions.

The region: the evolution of the concept and the operationalisation of the notion

A possible reason behind the paradox is that the very term 'region' can be operationalised in different ways. When speaking of the absence of Baltic identity, Ilves emphasises its constituent material elements: culture, religion and language.[10] On the other hand, he mentions in the same statement the 'shared unhappy experiences' of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, acknowledging the existence of non-material unifying factors, such as episodes of a common history.

Setting the two in opposition, Ilves concludes that the Baltic States are too different in material terms to be legitimately classified as a single region. Academic

[6] Estonia as a Nordic Country, 1999, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia*, URL: https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-nordic-country (accessed 09.02.2022).

[7] Vabariigi President Eesti Vabariigi iseseisvuse taastamise 20. aastapäeva vastuvõtul Kadrioru roosiaias 19. augustil 2011, 2011, *Vabariigi President*, URL: https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/et/ametitegevus/koned/6401-vabariigi-president-eesti-vabariigi-iseseisvuse-taastamise-20-aastapaeeva-vastuvotul-kadrioru-roosiaias-19-augustil-2011/index.html (accessed 14.02.2022).

[8] 25 aastat hiljem — ikka veel ei ühtne ega vaba, 2014, *Vabariigi President,* URL: https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/et/ametitegevus/koned/10531-2014-09-09-07-14-54/index.html (accessed 14.02.2022).

[9] President Toomas Hendrik Ilves riigiõhtusöögil Vilniuses 27 mail 2013, 2013, *Vabariigi President,* URL: https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/et/ametitegevus/koned/9091-2013-05-27-16-59-54/index.html (accessed 14.02.2022).

[10] In this context, material factors are the variables that can be subject to qualitative measurement and comparison.

science, however, views this approach as obsolete. As an analytical category, the region is defined not through counterpoising material factors with non-material ones but rather through amalgamating them as operational components of the notion. Peter Katzenstein formulates this as follows:

> They [regions] are more than the flow of goods and people across physical space that we can assume to be represented directly and accurately by cartographic depictions. Regions are also social and cognitive constructs that are rooted in daily practice [19, p. 129].

A more tangible nature of material facts and the ensuing simplicity of corresponding analysis made them first-priority objects for research. Such a focus was characteristic of traditional regional geography.[11]

A prime example is the work by the British researcher Peter Hagget *Locational analysis in human geography*. He links the fact of the existence of a region to 'successive demarcation of regional cores and boundaries' [22, p. 254], which covers a range of variables subject to measurement and comparison: climate, landscape, economic development, etc.

Hagget, like other followers of the traditional school, saw regions as a part of objective reality that can be identified through analytical work.[12] Yet, they paid little attention to the regions that are 'recognized informally, almost intuitively', such as historical regions. Hagget called such regions 'instinctively appropriate', emphasising that 'they remain distinct only when viewed from a distance — on close examination they dissolve into a new series of still smaller "character areas"' [22, p. 245].

This positivistic approach was exceptionally vulnerable to criticism because of its limited heuristic value. For instance, George Kimble criticised exponents of traditional regional geography, likening their work to attempts 'to put boundaries that do not exist around areas that do not matter', stressing that 'the whole life of a given area is greater than the sum of all the measurable parts, whether dynamic or static' [22, p. 241]. Although Hagget acknowledged the problem, he never provided a substantial response to the criticism. He wrote that regions 'continue to be one of the most logical and satisfactory ways of organizing geographical information' [22, p. 241].

This thesis could be perceived only as an invitation to further debate. An important contribution was made by scholars of the Marxist school who established a direct connection between regionalisation and capital allocation.[13] A remarkable proponent of this school of thought was the founding father of the world-system

[11] For more on traditional regional geography, see [20, p. 45—46; 21, p. 2—3].

[12] For more on the region as an objective phenomenon, see [23; 24].

[13] For more on the revision of the concept of the region by the Marxist school of thought, see [26, p. 4].

theory, Immanuel Wallerstein, who proposed the division of geographical space into core, periphery and semi-periphery according to the established capitalist relations [27].

A major breakthrough in regional geography was made with the development of the constructivist approach, whose followers created a new school of regional geography.[14] It abandoned the perception of regions as elements of objective reality for exploring the driving forces behind their emergence and transformations. In other words, constructivists focused not so much on regions as on the processes affecting region building and evolution. The Belgian researcher Luk Van Langenhove describes this peculiarity as follows: 'region building is always a process. Regions are not constructed overnight: it is a step-by-step sequence with its own internal dynamics and a broad set of geopolitical and economic factors' [28, p. 318]. This approach was vastly different from the concept adopted by the traditional school, whose advocates believed that regions should be identified based on formal properties.

Nevertheless, it would not be entirely accurate to say that proponents of the new school completely denied the role of material factors and focused exclusively on issues such as the dynamics of regional discourses and social practices. On the contrary, their works demonstrated a willingness to combine material and non-material categories in a proportion such as to solve the research problems tackled. Hence the interest in creating integrated models reflecting the process of region building. The most advanced model to date is the 'institutionalisation of regions' proposed by the Finnish scholar Anssi Paasi [29; see also 30; 31].

His model depicts the process of region building as consisting of four stages: the assumption of a territorial shape, the formation of symbols, the formation of institutions and, finally, functioning. These stages do not necessarily follow in this order: the order can be random, or some of these processes may occur simultaneously. The assumption of a territorial shape means the emergence of a finite space held together by common features, which may result from a historical process or be ad hoc. In their turn, the boundaries of such a space can be either 'rigid' (established administratively) or 'blurred' (drawn according to natural or landscape features, cultural considerations, ethnic stereotypes, etc.).

Symbol formation involves the creation of meaning-laden images expressing and reinforcing regional identity. One of the central symbols is the name of the region: when pronounced, it has to summon up a certain comprehensive image in the minds of the locals and external observers alike. Another symbol is local toponymy, which may be reminiscent of a shared past or distinguish members of a group.

The formation of institutions consists in building various functional constructs merging the region into a cohesive whole. These include formal institutions, regional organisations and associations, on the one hand, and informal practices, such as habits common in the local population or some specific attitudes, on the other.

[14] For more on new regional geography, see [20, p. 47—49; 21, p. 3—6].

Finally, the functioning of a region means that it becomes part of the global space and collective consciousness. Functioning regions enter into a struggle for resources and power, and their names repeatedly occur in various discourses and social practices relating to politics, the economy, mass communications, culture and education.

According to Paasi's model, the willingness of politicians to articulate the name of a region may be sufficient evidence of its functioning as an element of the world system. This circumstance points to the presence of a Baltics-centred context, which, when evoked, seems to encourage Estonian politicians to 'abandon' their 'primal' Nordic identity and position Estonia as a Baltic State. To describe this context and the specifics of such positioning, the author proposes to employ the methodology of content analysis.

Methodology

This work applies content analysis to official statements made by the presidents, prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs of the Republic of Estonia between 1 March 2011 and 1 March 2021.[15] This choice was informed by the consideration that the politicians holding these offices convey the nuances of Estonian regional identity, on the one hand, and construct it in their capacity of agents, on the other.[16] Their official statements are important sources providing a visual picture of identity ideas held by both the Estonian national elite and, with certain reservations, Estonian society.

With a view to high-quality research and in an attempt to avoid distortions produced by translation, it was decided to use texts of official statements in the Estonian language whenever available. Otherwise, English texts were analysed. The corpus was compiled manually,[17] with three categories covered. The first

[15] Throughout this article, the term 'official statement' will refer to a public appearance by a senior political figure with a transcript uploaded to a correspondent official website (the website of the President of Estonia https://www.president.ee/; The website of the Government of Estonia https://www.valitsus.ee/; The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia https://vm.ee/en). Thus, the sample does not include documents such as joint statements, declarations and memoranda.

[16] According to the Constitution of Estonia, the president of the country is the head of state, and prime minister represents the government of the republic, in which executive authority is vested (see The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, adopted on 28.06.1992, Last Amended on 13.08.2015, *Riigiteataja,* URL: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521052015001/consolide (accessed 12.03.2022)). Therefore, by virtue of their status, politicians holding these offices are, a priori, major actors in both constructing and conveying the state's regional identity. Extending the analysis to the minister of foreign affairs is explained by the specific responsibilities associated with the post, which mean that the official has a leading role in the international (and regional) positioning of the country.

[17] Here, 'manually' means that the selection did not involve the use of automated text analysis tools. Thus, the researchers who prepared the study sample and the author of the article bear the whole responsibility for possible mistakes and inconsistencies.

category comprises the texts of official statements with at least one occurrence of a word with the root *balti,* its derivative[18] or a related form.[19] The second one includes actual episodes of usage of these lexical items, i.e. each individual occurrence in the text of an official statement. Within the text fragments (paragraphs),[20] the keywords were identified that gave insight into the context.[21] The third category was compiled by extracting from the first category text phrases, compound words and abbreviations formed from the root *balti*.

This approach to corpus formation was chosen because the Estonian words derived from this root are linked semantically to the Baltic States (Estonian *Baltimaad*). Pärtel Piirimäe of the University of Tartu notes that, in Estonian, the word *Baltimaad* is used in a very narrow sense, namely, to refer to the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, while the Estonian term for the Baltic Sea region states is *Läänemeremaad* (literally, *countries of the Western Sea*) [5, p. 67]. Presumably, the word *Baltimaad* comes from the German name for the region, *Baltikum*. This theory is supported by the fact that *Baltikum* is sometimes used in Estonian in the same sense.

In German, however, the meaning of the term *Baltikum* changed over time. At first, it was used to refer to the area populated by Baltic Germans, which is now part of Estonia and Latvia. During World War I, its meaning expanded to include all the north-western territories of the Russian Empire occupied by the troops of the German Empire. And the word acquired its current meaning only after World War II.[22]

The contexts where words derived from the root *balti* are used were divided into four categories: socioeconomic issues, politics and political history, defence and security, and science, culture and education. An occurrence was assumed to belong to a certain contextual category if the surrounding context contained correspondent keywords.

The keywords for the category 'socioeconomic problems' were as follows:

— economy (Estonian: *majandus*), human development (Estonian: *inimareng*), finance (Estonian: *finants*, *rahandus*), market (Estonian: *turg*), transport infrastructure (Estonian: *transporditaristu*), integration (Estonian: *lõimimine*), rail (meaning Rail Baltic), energy (Estonian: *energia*), innovation (Estonian: *innovatsioon*), digital (Estonian: *digitaal*), social (Estonian: *sotsiaalne*), workforce

[18] These include the forms *balto* (used, for example, in the title of the *Baltoscandia* regional concept) and *baltic* (like in the title of the Estonian-Finnish gas pipeline, *Balticconnector*).

[19] One of them is the root *baltikum,* used in the Estonian language to refer to the Baltics.

[20] In the course of the study, the authors paragraphed the original texts of official statements published on official websites.

[21] In some cases, to gain an understanding of the context, paragraphs in the speech neighbouring the one featuring a word with the root *balti* were analysed as well.

[22] On the change in the meaning of the word *Baltikum*, see [18, p. 349; 32; 33].

(Estonian: *tööjõud*), nature/environment (Estonian: *loodus*), pipeline (Estonian: *torustik*), oil shale industry (Estonian: *põlevkivitööstus*), well-being (Estonian: *heaolu*), business, investment (Estonian: *investeeringud*).

The keywords for the category 'politics and political history' included:

— Soviet (Estonian: *nõukogude*), totalitarianism (Estonian: *totalitaarsus*), freedom (Estonian: *vabadus*), independence (Estonian: *iseseisvus*), occupation (Estonian: *okupatsioon*), authoritarianism (Estonian: *autoritaarsus*), values (Estonian: *väärtused*), history (Estonian: *ajalugu*), Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Estonian: *Molotovi — Ribbentropi pakt*), communism (Estonian: *kommunism*), Cold War (Estonian: *külm sõda*), repressions (Estonian: *repressioonid*), chain (Estonian: *kett*; meaning the Baltic Chain, Estonian: *Balti kett*[23]), appeal (Estonian: *apell*; meaning the Baltic Appeal, Estonian: *Balti apell*[24]), identity (Estonian: *identiteet*).

Amongst the keywords for the category 'defence and security' were:

— defence (Estonian: *kaitse*), NATO (Estonian: *NATO*), security (Estonian: *julgeolek*), ally (Estonian: *liitlane*), attack (Estonian: *rünnak*), airspace (Estonian: *õhuruum*), armed forces (Estonian: *relvajõud)*, aggression (Estonian: *agressioon*), deterrence (Estonian: *heidutus*), invasion (Estonian: *sissetung*).

Finally, the keywords for the category 'science, culture and education were:

— education (Estonian: *haridus*), literature (Estonian: *kirjandus*), language (Estonian: *keel*), culture (Estonian: *kultuur*), theatre (Estonian: *teater*), (an) intellectual (Estonian: *intellektuaal*), festival (Estonian: *pidu*), science (Estonian: *teadus*), research (Estonian: *uuring*).

The method chosen for corpus formation has a number of limitations: some of the words coming from the root *balti* are used to refer to geographical areas beyond the Baltic States. The most obvious example in the study sample is the term *Nordic-Baltic countries* (Estonian: *Pohja-Balti ruum, Balti-Põhjala piirkond,* etc.), which denotes the three Baltic States and five Northern European countries:

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[23] The Baltic Way or Baltic Chain was a peaceful political rally that took place on 23 August 1989. On that day, residents of the Baltic republic of the USSR formed a human chain spanning 470 km between Tallinn and Vilnius. The event was timed to coincide the signing of the Soviet–German non-aggression treaty, known as the Molotov—Ribbentrop Pact. It was a major step towards cessation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from the USSR.

[24] The Baltic Appeal was a public letter from 45 Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian dissidents to the general secretary of the UN, the leadership of the Soviet Union, West and East Germany, and parties to the Atlantic Charter. The letter, sent on 23 August 1979, on the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression treaty, demanded disclosure of the complete text of the document, including the Secret Protocol, annulment of the pact and independence of the Baltic Soviet republics. The appeal was an important international declaration of the secession attitudes existing in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These demands were supported by the European Parliament in a resolution adopted in 1983.

Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. Moreover, some of these words are used to refer to physical entities located partially or even completely beyond the territory of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. For instance, the *Balticconnector* is the gas pipeline between Estonia and Finland. The railways of *Rail Baltic* are planned to run across Finland and Poland; the project also includes an undersea tunnel under the Gulf of Finland.

Nevertheless, excluding these occurrences from the study will unreasonably complicate the research methodology. Based on this consideration, no additional conditions were introduced, and the units of analysis were selected according to the above rule for the occurrences of words coming from the root *balti*.

Results

Between 1 March 2011 and 1 March 2021, Estonian presidents, prime minister and ministers of foreign affairs made 99 statements that had at least one occurrence of a word coming from the root *balti,* its derivative or a related form; there were 274 total occurrences of such words and 33 of phrases, compounds and abbreviations containing the root *balti* (Fig. 1).

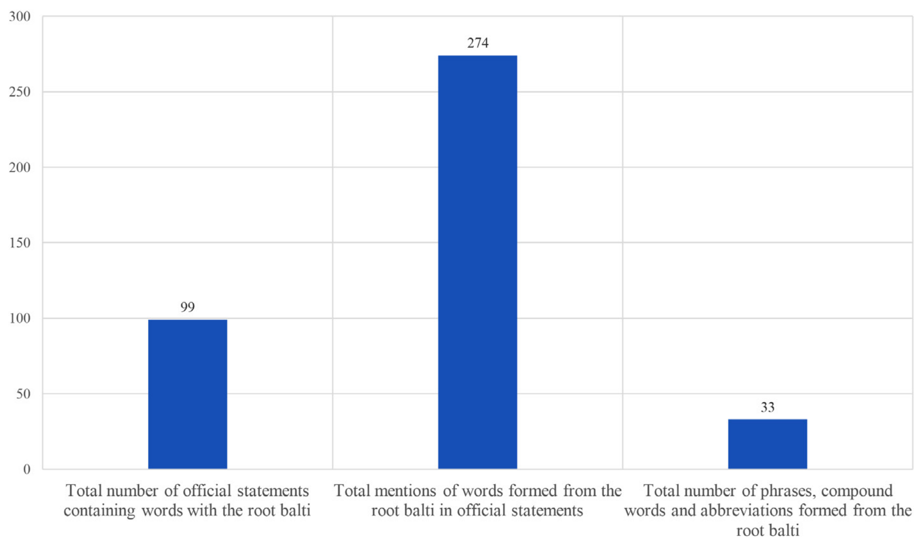

Fig. 1. Structure of the study corpus

Source: here and below, calculated by the author based on data available on the official websites of the President of Estonia, the Government of Estonia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia.[25]

Fig. 2 shows the distribution of the occurrences across contextual categories in absolute numbers; Fig. 3, in percentage terms, rounded to an integer. Since a

[25] Vabariigi President, URL: https://www.president.ee/; Vabariigi Valitsus, URL: https://www.valitsus.ee/; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Estonia, URL: https://vm.ee/en.

single paragraph may contain keywords from several contextual categories, the number of categorised occurrences was greater than the number of occurrences in the sample (Fig. 1).

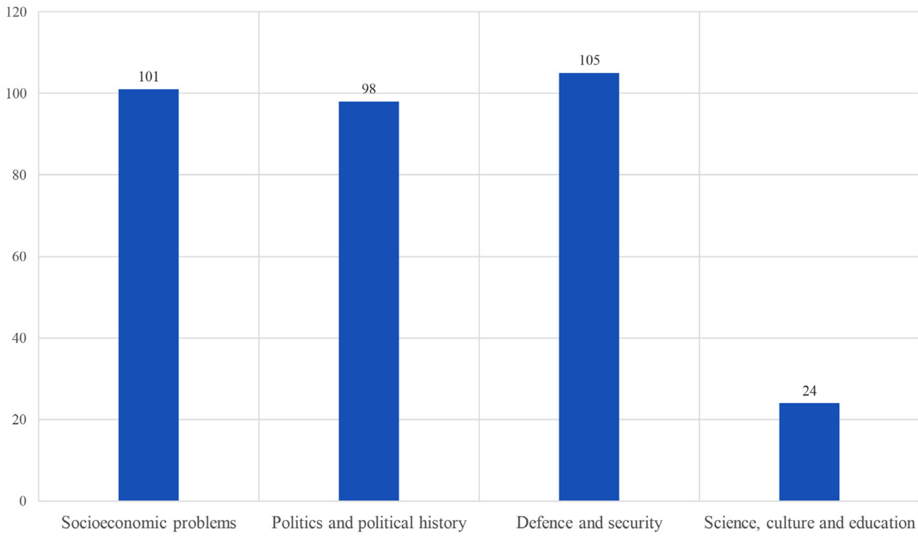

Fig. 2. Distribution of occurrences of words containing the root *balti* across contextual categories, absolute numbers

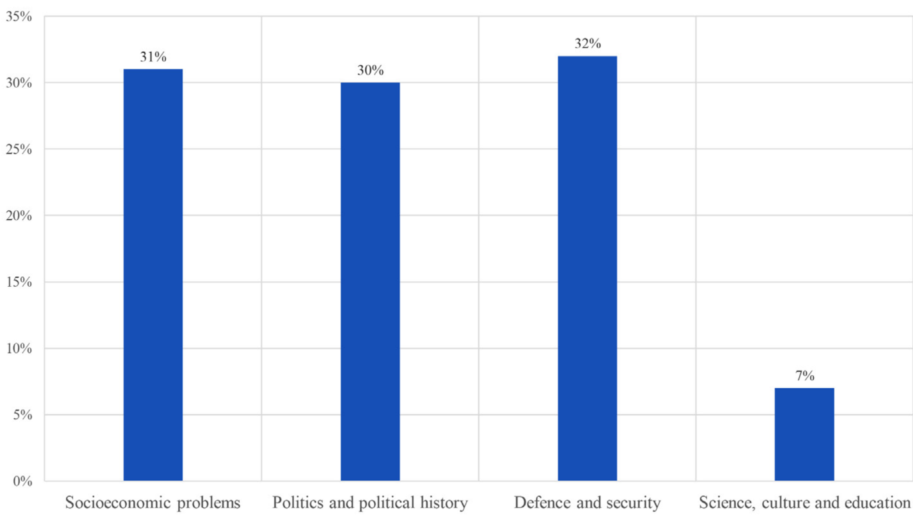

Fig. 3. Distribution of occurrences of words formed from the root *balti* across contextual categories, relative values

The table shows various phrases, compound words and abbreviations formed from the root *balti*. The number of occurrences in all the official statements made over the study period is provided for each lexical item.

A list of phrases, compound words and abbreviations formed from the root *balti* and occurring in the study corpus

Baltic States / the Baltics (Estonian: *Balti riigid/Balti piirkond*, *Baltimaad*, *Baltikum*, *Balti regioon*)	104
Baltic Chain / Baltic Way (Estonian: *Balti kett*)	26
Rail Baltic	23
Baltic cooperation/cooperation of the Baltic States (Estonian: *Balti riikide koostöö*)	17
Baltic Appeal (Estonian: *Balti apell*)	16
Nordic-Baltic region (Estonian: *Balti-Põhjala piirkond*, *Põhja- ja Baltimaad*)	15
Nordic-Baltic cooperation (Estonian: *Põhja-Balti koostöö*, *Balti- ja Põhjamaade koostöö*)	12
Baltic air-policing mission (Estonian: *Balti õhuturbemission* and similar expressions)	12
Baltic Germans (Estonian: *Baltisakslased*)	6
Baltic States' airspace (Estonian: *Balti riikide õhuruum*)	5
Balticconnector[26]	5
Baltic Defence College (Estonian: *Balti Kaitsekolledž*)	4
Baltic energy system / Baltic power grid (Estonian: *Balti energiasüsteem / Balti riikide elektrivõrgud*)	4
Baltic peoples (Estonian: *Balti rahvad)*	3
Baltic Assembly (Estonian: *Balti Assamblee*)	2
Baltic-Polish region (Estonian: *Balti-Poola regioon*)	2
Baltic Council of Ministers (Estonian: *Balti Ministrite Nõukogu*)	2
NordBalt[27]	1
Baltic–Nordic economic ties (Estonian: *Põhja-Balti majandussuhted*)	1
Stockholm Baltic Archives (Estonian: *Balti Arhiiv Stockholmis*)	1
Baltic digital sandbox (Estonian: *Balti digi-liivakast kokku*)	1
Baltic musketeers (Estonian: *Balti musketärid*)	1
Baltic neighbours (Estonian: *Balti naabrid*)	1
Baltic Teachers' Seminar (Estonian: *Balti Õpetajate Seminar*)	1
Baltic barons (Estonian: *Balti parunid*)	1
Baltic regional liquid natural gas terminal (Estonian: *Balti regionaalne veedeldatud gaasi terminal*)	1
Baltic Ghost[28]	1
Baltic units	1
Baltic Workboats[29]	1
Baltic grain processor (Estonian: *Baltimaade teraviljatöötleja*)	1
Baltoscandia (Estonian: *Baltoskandia*)	1
NATO's Baltic wing (Estonian: *NATO Balti-tiib*)	1
Nordic and Baltic neighbours (Estonian: *Põhjala ja Balti naabrid*)	1
Total occurrences	274

[26] Balticconnector is a bi-directional natural gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia.

[27] NordBalt is the submarine power cable laid across the Baltic Sea to connect the Esto-nian and Swedish power grids.

[28] Baltic Ghost is a series of cybersecurity military exercise bringing together Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and carried out by the US European Command.

[29] Baltic Workboats is an Estonian shipbuilding company.

The data obtained from content analysis lead one to several conclusions. As Figs. 2 and 3 show, the categories 'socioeconomic issues', 'politics and political history' and 'defence and security' are almost equally represented in Estonia's 'Baltic discourse'. Yet, their contribution to the construction of the Estonian vision of Baltic identity differs. There is a close narrative connection between the categories 'politics and political history' and 'defence and security'. A considerable share of statements in these groups focuses simultaneously on two narratives: the Baltics as 'victims of Soviet occupation', on the one hand, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as the 'eastern outpost of Europe, NATO and, in some cases, the entire Western civilisation protecting them from the "Russian threat"', on the other. The latter seems to follow from the former, thus constructing the single logic behind this argumentation, which may be outlined as follows: 'having had a "traumatic experience" of dealing with the USSR, the Baltic States desperately need to cooperate with the West to strengthen defence and security in the face of Russia'.

This logic supports Jurkynas's thesis cited in the first section of this article that it is the Soviet legacy and security concerns over Russia that underpin the current Baltic identity. From the Estonian perspective, this statement is absolutely justified. However, one should not overlook the fact that the category 'socioeconomic issues' is also highly visible in the study discourse. The statements by Estonia's political leadership point to considerable interest in regional cooperation towards stronger international trade in the Baltics, the region's attractiveness to investors, a modernised transport infrastructure and closer partnership in information technology. The socioeconomic category includes many elements, and none is overwhelmingly dominant. Yet, there is a sharp focus on energy security, which has a clear semantic connection to 'defence and security'. Remarkably, Estonia is often placed in opposition to Latvia and Lithuania as a state that has achieved greater socioeconomic success since independence. It is implied that this success supports Estonia's claim to the status of a Nordic country, particularly in comparison with Lithuania, which Estonian politicians sometimes classify as an Eastern European country.

The category 'science, culture and education' is the least visible within the discourse. The small number of occurrences in this contextual category disproves the thesis about the Baltics comprising a single cultural and academic space. The situation is complicated by some important aspects of cultural cooperation being left out, for obvious reasons, of the scope of the official statements (for example, collaborations between the Russian theatres in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

Finally, it is worth noting the barren institutional and symbolic landscape of the Estonian version of Baltic identity. As can be seen, phrases, compounds and abbreviations coming from the root *balti* are used by Estonian politicians mostly to refer either to episodes of the shared Baltic history of the Soviet period (Baltic Chain, Baltic Appeal) or current defence and security problems (Baltic air-policing). The only notable phrase that occurs in a different context is *Rail Baltic*. However, the project carrying this name has experienced so many delays that it can be considered discontinued and most of its positive symbolic potential nullified.

Interestingly, trilateral Baltic institutions, such as the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers, had the fewest mentions in the statements of Estonian politicians. Therefore, little significance is attached to these institutions in practical political terms, which supports Vladimir Olenchenko and Nikolai Mezhevich's conclusion that these organisations have to do more with protocol than anything else [34, p. 34] and Olga Konevskikh's definition of the Baltic Assembly as 'another venue where representatives of the three countries can meet rather than a powerhouse shaping the common policy of the member states' [35, p. 58].

Conclusion

This study has shown that Estonia's Baltic identity manifests itself most coherently in a combination of interwoven narratives relating to security and the Soviet legacy. Together, they account for most of the context where the Estonian political leadership is likely to abandon labelling their country as a Nordic state and change the focus to its Baltic identity. This shift has a value-based and instrumental motivation. On the one hand, the stigmatisation of the 'Soviet legacy' is an essential element of national identity reinforcement, readily accepted by the local population and external observers alike. On the other, it contributes to the reputation of the Baltic States as 'experts on Russia', which provides substantial benefits: the three countries are playing an increasingly important part in framing the EU's policy towards Moscow. In Estonia's 'Baltic discourse', Russia has the role of 'the other', the principal object of security concerns. The latter consideration indicates that the study discourse is highly securitised.

This research and its findings cannot be considered an exhaustive description of the Estonian vision of Baltic identity. Although the political elite actively participates in constructing the country's regional identity, it is not the only actor in the process. Further work needs to be done to analyse national media discourse, educational practices, documented political doctrines and public opinion.[30] Investigating the discourse of the Latvian and Lithuanian political elites would be

[30] See, for example, the analysis of the visual narratives seen in the products of the Baltic postal services [36].

an important contribution to a comprehensive study of Baltic identity. These discourses are expected to have much in common with their Estonian counterpart while possessing some unique characteristics.

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REPUTATION CORE OF RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES: THE CASE OF THE REGIONAL LEVEL OF EXECUTIVE POWER

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The importance of studying the reputation of authorities is connected, on the one hand, with the formation of a consolidated system of political power and, on the other hand, with the highly social orientation of the category of the 'reputation of authorities', reflecting the value-based attitude of citizens towards them. The article presents the results of research aimed at the analysis of the reputation of Russian authorities, with a special focus on the regional branch of executive power. The paper examines the reputation of Russian authorities of different levels and branches using the example of regional executive bodies. The author determines the structure and features of the reputation core of the conceptual category 'Russia's authorities' understood both as federal and municipal authorities of the Russian Federation as a whole. The article also offers a comparison of the reputation core of regional executive authorities with that of 'Russia's authorities' in general. The methods used in this research are expert assessment and population surveys conducted in six regions of Central Russia. The study has revealed the main characteristics constituting the reputation core of executive authorities and described their specificity in different regions. Based on the results of the theoretical and empirical analyses, the author proposes a novel approach to defining the structure of the reputation core characteristic of the federal and regional executive authorities. The reputation core is a multi-component conceptual construct dominated by several integrating characteristics such as honesty, responsibility, justice, concern for and protection of citizens. No differences in the structure of the reputation core of the federal and regional executive authorities have been identified. However, the degree to which these characteristics manifest themselves varies. The reputation of regional authorities is assessed based on a system of values, expectations and the results of their work with the federal centre, citizens' experience of communication with regional authorities and the assessment of their activity. The reputation of the regional executive authorities is characterised by lesser stability of the conceptual characteristics of the near periphery and greater dynamism of the outer conceptual boundaries, especially in specific regions.

Keywords:
reputation of authorities, reputation core, Russian authorities, regional executive authorities, concept, conceptual domain

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Introduction

Citizens' disengagement from the actions of authorities is a prevalent feature of the national socio-political landscape [1, p. 552]. This highlights the pressing need to improve domestic political confidence, especially in light of the current foreign policy challenges. Doing so can serve as a foundation for fostering greater unity between the state and society, closing the value gap that exists between authorities and citizens, and promoting a partnership model for their interaction. The reputation of Russia's authorities is a critical component of the national symbolic capital and an intangible resource for the development of the state and municipal system of administration. Reputation plays a vital role in determining the success of the authorities' political, economic, and social positions, as well as the overall competitiveness and efficiency of the country, ultimately leading to the development of the state. Researchers note that citizens have a request for morale in politics, which creates the potential for value-based agreement between authorities and society. Moral principles and norms ensure the cohesion of society; they prevent the alienation of people from authorities and increase their motivation to participate in social life [2, p. 44—46].

According to [3, p. 50—56], reputation reflects the population's attitudes towards authorities and serves as a source of power. A strong reputation enables authorities to exercise their authority responsibly without abusing it, allowing them to maintain mutual trust [4]. The institution of reputation in the Russian political space finds its reflection in the socio-political discourse. Practicians and experts in the field have emphasized the importance of reputation formation and social values as effective tools of power and influence, as indicated by sources such as [5; 6]. The 'Era of Reputation' defines the tasks of increased attention to its management in the system of state power. Moral and ethical principles and norms play a crucial role in ensuring social cohesion, preventing people from feeling alienated from those in power, and encouraging them to participate in social life [2, p. 44—46].

The aim of this study is to identify the key characteristics that make up the reputation of Russian authorities at the regional level, specifically focusing on regional executive bodies. In doing so, I will take into account socio-economic factors that contribute to the formation of reputation across the regions of the Russian Federation. The ultimate goal is to address a fundamental scientific problem — the development and substantiation of a methodology for studying the concept of the 'reputation of Russia's authorities'. This will make it possible to take an applied approach and determine ways of enhancing the potential for strengthening political confidence and unity between authorities and society.

This article also aims to identify the characteristics that make up the reputation core of the concept 'regional executive authorities', as part of a study of the broader concept of the 'reputation of authorities'. The concept of 'reputation of authorities' refers to the reputation of Russian authorities in general, including both state and municipal bodies across the Russian Federation. This includes the reputation of various levels and branches of Russian power, such as federal, regional, municipal, legislative, executive, and judicial. Specifically, the study focuses on the reputation of regional executive authorities, which contributes to the analysis of the 'reputation of Russia's authorities' in general.

Theoretical basis of the study

The main scientific approach adopted in this research is institutional or rather neo-institutional. This approach is regarded as the methodological paradigm of modern social science, serving as a universal integrator of various disciplines of social knowledge [8]. It involves the study of political phenomena and processes with an emphasis on the interdependence of social and political institutions [9]. In the context of this research, the concept of institutional logic is of primary importance. Specifically, the linguistic-semiotic variant of institutional logic is employed [10, p. 127], which refers to a system of cultural elements, such as values, beliefs, and expectations, that shape the direction of daily activities and allow us to comprehend, evaluate, and organize daily activities in time and space [11, p. 1—2]. It is essential to shift the research focus from analysing actors to a deeper understanding of their interests and choice preferences. The legitimization of actions is associated with justifying one's own choices and behaviour in the eyes of other individuals and the public [13, p. 126]. Irhin argues that the neo-institutional approach enables a comprehensive examination of political and other institutions from a comparative, value-based, ethical, and sociological perspective. This approach allows for the identification of the internal causes and goals of institutional activities, evaluation of the quality of institutions, and determination of the potential for their transformation [14, p. 38—39].

This study employs the (neo)institutionalist approach, specifically sociological institutionalism, which is highly relevant to our research direction [15—17]. In the realm of sociology, institutions are regarded as meta-representations, embodying not just objects within the human brain, but also representations of representations that stem from attitudes [18, p. 120]. Rationality is socially constructed, and is culturally and historically contingent, shaped by institutions that serve as norms, cognitive frameworks, and systems of meaning that guide human actions, shape identity, and cultural scenarios and schemes that serve symbolic functions, rather than merely reflecting utilitarian values [19, p. 125—126].

Sociological institutionalism, as an explanatory model, adopts more adaptable categorical frameworks that elucidate the concepts being used and create new ones to address empirical phenomena that were previously overlooked [20, p. 40]. According to Barbashin, neo-institutional analysis should reveal 'hidden institutions' and their positive potential for communities [21, p. 100]. Moreover, informal institutions play a significant role as "their presence in some societies and absence in others ultimately determine whether cooperation and coordination, as well as the growth of well-being, will be achieved... Formal institutions matter, but informal institutions rule" [22].

These informal or 'hidden institutions' also include reputation, which begins to acquire an institutional form in the country. The formation of reputation is connected with the development of business environment (e. g. [23; 24]). In civil law [25—27] and administrative law [28], reputation has been formally recognized as having legal grounds. At the same time, despite a wide range of Russian studies of reputation in the socio-political context in general and the reputation of political actors in particular (see, for example, the works by Anokhin, Vazhenina, Gallyamov, Grankin, Grishin, Kogan, Koshmarov, Mingazova, Rudakova, Timofeyeva, Trubetskoy, Ustinova, Kharlamov et al.), the reputation of Russian authorities as a multi-component institutional entity requires further study, especially in the light of the constitutional novelty of the unity of public authority [29].

I attempt to develop and substantiate the methodology of the reputational approach to the study of Russian authorities.[1] The primary goal of establishing any state institution is to guarantee political stability, represent collective social interests, and structure public relations [31, p. 139]. The perception of society towards political institutions and the power system in general not only affects political stability but also serves as a gauge of political system stability [32, p. 171]. Reputation can be considered a crucial indicator of the social efficiency of authorities, playing a pivotal role in ensuring political stability.

The reputational approach has gained considerable popularity in the analysis of political elites, where rating systems are developed to evaluate the reputation of politicians and countries worldwide. An instance of this is the reputation rating of countries, conducted by the international consulting company RepTrak, which relies on public opinion surveys and includes a separate set of criteria for assessing the government's efficacy [33, p. 63]. Floyd Hunter, an American sociologist, was the first to use the reputational method to study the ruling elite. Under this method, experts assess the reputation of individuals in positions of power, based on people's subjective opinions of their ability to influence political processes and make strategic decisions within the community. For instance, in a study to identify the key sources of the reputation of Norwegian mayors, interviews were conducted with the mayors themselves, as well as their partners and representatives from opposition parties [34]. The reputational method has also been used by Russian researchers [35]. In Russia, PRAVDASERM, a reputation measurement service, publishes a reputation rating of governors.

Various aspects of the reputation of authorities have been extensively explored in the scholarly literature. The international discourse on this topic primarily centres around approaches that encompass the entire public sector, including public agencies, organizations, and authorities. In this context, the

[1] E. g. [30].

notion of 'bureaucratic reputation' has emerged as a salient area of investigation, albeit without a clear definition, as highlighted by Edgar Bustos [36]. Sociological methods are the primary means employed to study various aspects of power's reputation [37—42]. However, there is a noted lack of empirical research in this area [43]. The literature has explored numerous facets of reputation, such as reputational strategies in the policies of individual states [44], the application of the reputational approach to the study of European Union regulators [45], the management of reputations by anti-corruption agencies [46], the influence of reputation on the implementation of administrative policy control and accountability to representative bodies [47], the relationship between the effectiveness of anti-crisis communication strategies of public administration organizations and citizens' perception of their reputation [48], and the dependence of governmental institutions' reputation on the perception not only of the external but also internal audience, i. e., civil servants [49].

The study of the reputation of authorities is also pertinent from the standpoint of historical institutionalism, which regards the 'path dependency' of institutions as one of its central tenets [19]. It is constituted by a set of institutional problems hindering the formation of the political in Russia, the emergence of a modern type of politics, including the presence of institutional traps [50, p. 20; 51]. Informal rules underlie social inertia [52, p. 97]. Acting as an informal value-based institution, the reputation of authorities allows us to judge the degree of either deepening or weakening of the 'path dependency' in the development of a particular territory [53, p. 156]. One of the reasons for the support in Russia of 'bad governance', seen as a 'rut' (a perception rooted in Russian history), is the inherited 'cultural matrix' [54, p. 96—97]. Reputation as its part is a value standard of authorities. A positive reputation determines high support for the activities of authorities and its identification by people as "my/our authority". The assessment of the reputation of Russian authorities can be done within the framework of investigating political identity and the interactions between political institutions. This process involves making decisions and comparing personal beliefs about the priorities of social development with the ideologies and objectives of political actors [55, p. 7—8]. A good reputation makes it possible to identify a subject according to values/identities with strong social legitimacy [34].

Research Methods

Conceptual analysis is the main method of building a conceptual model of the concept 'reputation of authorities' [56]. Empirical testing of this model was done in two stages. During August — November 2021, I conducted an expert questionnaire survey [57—62] (N = 15, leading scientists and practitioners in the field of political science, sociology, and public relations; a 'snowball' sample[2] was used). During the same period, a survey of the population of six regions of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation was conducted (N = 1,500 respondents, the cluster sample is quota-based by gender, age, and territory of residence;[3] the sampling error is 2.53 %).

The regions were selected based on the objectives of the study, which focused on the analysis of the correlation between the concept 'reputation of authorities' and the level of socio-economic development. Geographical identification was used to determine the regions within the same federal district, excluding the capital region. The regions were also selected based on their main parameters of development. The selection of regions was based on their primary development indicators. In particular, the Smolensk, Bryansk, and Oryol regions were selected because their average level of development in multiple parameters is relatively low, and they exhibit low rates of progress. The Belgorod, Kaluga, and Lipetsk regions, on the other hand, were selected because of their high level of development and high development dynamics.

It is important to note that the selection of regions was not an easy process, as the level of regional development is a conditional synthetic criterion. Therefore, the choice of regions was based on a comprehensive analysis of their positions in regional ratings focused on social priorities. This approach was necessary to ensure that the study effectively monitored and evaluated the success of regional policy by authorities. Overall, the selection of regions was carefully considered and based on specific research goals, ensuring that the study was focused and effective in achieving its objectives.[4]

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[2] The experts are researchers of Lomonosov Moscow State University, Higher School of Economics, RANEPA under the President of the Russian Federation, RUDN University, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Institute of Sociology of the Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, etc. (10 doctors and candidates of sciences), heads and members of professional associations, research centres, experts, political consultants, political technologists (RAPN, RAPK, INSOMAR, RASO, "International Press Club", CEC "Rating", Intermediate Research Center "Discourse", OOO "Center for Political Analysis") with an average work experience of 15—20 years.

[3] Population of the Russian Federation by gender and age as of January 1, 2021, 2021, *Statistical Bulletin,* URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Bul_chislen_naselpv_01-01-2021.pdf (accessed: 02.08.2021); The number of permanent population on average per year, *EMISS, state statistics,* URL: https://www.fedstat.ru/indicator/31556 (accessed 02.08.2021).

[4] Rating of regions of the Russian Federation on quality of life — 2021, 2022, *RIA Rating,* URL: http://vid1.rian.ru/ig/ratings/life_2021.pdf (accessed 10.04.2021); Rating of the socio-economic situation of the regions according to the results of 2020, 2021, *RIA Rating,* URL: https://riarating.ru/regions/20210531/630201367.html (accessed 05.06.2021); Rating of regions by the level of family welfare — 2020, 2021, *RIA Novosti,* URL: https://ria.ru/20210615/blagosostoyanie-1736684198.html (accessed 20.06.2021); Human Development Index in Russia: regional differences, 2021, 2021, *Analytical Center under the Government of the Russian Federation,* URL: https://ac.gov.ru/uploads/2-Publications/analitika/2022/_2021_short.pdf (accessed 10.04.2022).

Research Findings

Based on the analysis and empirical research conducted, the following findings can be presented:

1. The structure of the core of the concept 'reputation of authorities' is the same for the concepts of 'reputation of Russian authorities' and 'reputation of the regional executive authorities'. These concepts differ in their peripheral attributes, which depend on the peculiarities of the activity of a certain level/branch of power. It is important to determine the degree of similarity of these concepts by analysing their core and periphery attributes as well as integrating and differentiating attributes of these concepts. Integrating attributes form the nucleus of the concept and the differentiating ones are variable and depend on the hierarchical level and the branch of power.

2. The generic concept 'reputation of authorities' has two fundamental sets of attributes — institutional and operational. Institutional attributes are related to qualitative characteristics of the government, reflecting its main function — to serve people (which is an integrating characteristic). Operational attributes are related to functional characteristics that reflect the scope and main types of activities of authorities and their effectiveness/efficiency (an integrating characteristic). This rather tentative division, however, makes it possible to determine the degree of importance of the value-based (institutional set) or pragmatic (operational, activity-based) content of the concept of reputation. It is assumed that the content of the concepts 'reputation of Russian authorities' and 'reputation of regional executive authorities' is the same in terms of the presence of these two sets of attributes.

3. The level of development of the region of the Russian Federation determines the essential characteristics and content of concepts.

1. *The structure of the conceptual domain 'reputation of authorities'*.

In this study, a generic structure for the conceptual domain related to the concept of 'reputation of authorities' is proposed, which can be applied to both the 'reputation of Russian authorities' as a whole and the 'reputation of regional executive authorities'. This structure is determined by the general principles of the semantic-cognitive approach to the analysis of concepts, as developed by Popova and Sternin.[5] The research logic, as well as the flexibility in modeling concepts, particularly in the study of new and undefined concepts, enabled the identification of two main cores in the concept structure with a certain degree of conditionality:

— the basic core, which forms the semantic domain of the concept 'reputation' and includes the categorical attributes, defining the concept, and the near-nuclear

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[5] Three components are distinguished in the structure of the concept: a sensory image, an informational content and an interpretative field [64, p. 74—81]. We consider the information component of the concept, including the main, most important distinctive features.

zone comprising essential attributes of the concept 'reputation'. This emphasizes the two-layered nature of the phenomenon, where the near-nuclear zone could be considered a semi-periphery if viewed traditionally.

— the substantive core, which comprises its most important and meaningful attributes. It can be considered peripheral in relation to the basic core and serves to emphasize the most significant and pronounced characteristics, which contribute to the reputation of those in positions of authority. These substantive characteristics are relatively stable, as they are widely shared and form the near periphery of the basic core. Beyond the near periphery lies the distant periphery, which is less significant and more dynamic in nature. The attributes of the distant periphery are more susceptible to multifactorial influences. Finally, there is the extreme periphery, which consists of the least significant and most agile characteristics.

According to the results of the expert assessment, the conceptual domain also includes historical and cultural characteristics that which are parts of the national model of statehood and are formed under the influence of the macrodomain 'Russian authorities'. At the moment, it is a hypothesis which requires further research.

2. *The degree of similarity of the concepts 'reputation of Russia's authorities' and 'reputation of different levels and branches of Russian authorities'.*

Before demonstrating the substantive core of the concept 'regional executive authorities', let us consider the degree of the conceptual structural similarity between the aforementioned concepts. Both experts and the public were asked the question, "Can we say that the above conceptual attributes (in the public survey they were called characteristics) can equally apply to all levels and branches of Russian power?" Let us explain that experts had previously identified a number of the essential attributes and substantive characteristics of the concept 'reputation of Russian authorities'. This list of characteristics was then given to respondents in the pilot regions of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation. The list of characteristics will be presented in comparison with the content of the 'reputation of regional executive bodies and Russian authorities' (see para 5).

In the survey of the population, 82 % of respondents agreed that the characteristics of the reputation of Russian authorities that had been defined by experts generally relate to the reputation of its various levels and branches. For experts, the question was open-ended, they were asked to leave comments regarding the presence of integrating and differentiating attributes specific to different levels and branches of power.

The majority of experts unequivocally translated the attributes and characteristics of the 'reputation of Russian authorities' to its various branches and levels, with the highlighted characteristics being largely universal. However, one expert held an extreme position, stating that all levels of power have their specificity, which depends on the level of authority and the area of activity.

Experts argued that the nature of power is the same across all branches and levels, and the style of political behaviour is "transmitted from higher to lower levels of authority". Experts also noted that the essential aspect of reputation is the public perception of authorities in general at the household level ("these are the general requirements of citizens for the country's governance system at all levels of power", "citizens do not tend to differentiate the levels of power"). Furthermore, it is worth noting an expert opinion regarding the coherence of perceptions among the population, which stems from the presence of a constitutionally-established system of public authority and a strong reliance on the head of state. As one expert stated: "The term *public authority* has been introduced in the Constitution. The bottom line is that the population does not care who you are subordinate to. You speak for authorities, and you are the ones who are subordinate to Putin and that is it. For the population, what you say is what Putin says. Therefore, according to the public, there is no division into regional, federal, municipal authorities, federal divisions in the regions, state corporations, etc. By and large, they do not need it. These are the people who make decisions about their lives, and it is government."

Integrating conceptual attributes include historical and cultural characteristics (such, for example, as paternalism, personification, high distance, etc.), and a single field of activity of governmental subjects (a common system of security, finance, and foreign policy). Experts clarified the integrating features of the previously identified characteristics (for example, legitimacy, responsibility, honesty; "effectiveness and efficiency concern all levels of authorities").

Let us now turn to the differentiating features. Several experts pointed out that the manifestation of reputation characteristics, the degree of their depth, and the semantic content can vary ("the characteristics can largely apply to all authorities, but the underlying legitimacy, power, fairness are expected from the federal level"). This distinction is also related to the sphere of responsibility since "regional authorities have a stronger emphasis on local, and above all, social issues, anchored to the regional identity and local consciousness and the type of political culture supporting it". Experts also note the difference in the degree of interaction with the population ("open/closed system of interaction"), openness and responsiveness ("the closer vertically to the population, the more open and responsive authorities are"), transparency and degree of responsibility ("local authorities recognise their responsibility").

Some experts identified the difference in the factors underlying the formation of reputation ("the work of local authorities is assessed based on personal experiences of interaction"). As one expert pointed out, "there is a tendency to accord greater respect and favour to those occupying the highest (such as the president) and the lowest (such as the district or municipal levels) positions of authority, as well as those who are less visible to the public eye and those who are encountered more frequently." The study emphasizes the reputation characteristics that are shaped by the region's development specifics, including investment attractiveness, personnel reputation, business, culture, sports, and more. It also involves a system of personnel formation and methods of influencing the elite and the population. These differentiating features relate more to factors, the process of reputation formation, and evaluation, i. e. to the interpretive domain of the concept.

Empirically speaking, it can be concluded that the generic concept 'reputation of authorities' is primarily characterized by a prevalence of integrating attributes and features. At the same time, a number of differentiating attributes are associated with the characteristics of diverse levels and branches of power, suggesting that the reputation of authorities is not a monolithic concept but one that is differentiated across various contexts.

3. *The degree of similarity of the concepts 'reputation of regional executive authorities' and 'reputation of Russia's authorities'.*

Given the aforementioned findings and the study's aim to identify distinctive attributes of the reputation core of regional executive power, it is relevant to provide an expert opinion regarding the concepts analysed. Experts were asked the following question: "Are there, in your opinion, attributes, characteristics or aspects specific to the reputation of regional executive authorities?" and "Is it possible, in your opinion, to assert that the concepts of 'reputation of Russia's authorities' and 'reputation of regional executive authorities' are identical?"

It is worth noting that the majority of experts identified a high degree of similarity between the concepts, while others acknowledged both similarities and differences. Below are some examples of responses that emphasize the similarities across different levels and branches of Russian power, including the reputation of regional executive authorities: "it is all about power",[6] "both are perceived at a generalized level as power in general and the conductor of Moscow's will"; "the concepts are gradually beginning to merge in public perception due to the effects of a single vertical of power." Moreover, the similarity of concepts is based on the assumption that "reputation implies high moral characteristics of government representatives rather than professional ones."

The concept of the 'reputation of regional executive authorities' has a number of specific characteristics:

— a higher degree of personification ("everything depends on the governor, the opinion about the regional government is formed based on the personality of the governor", "by 'reputation of Russia's authorities' we mean the reputation of the President, or in general, the President's team. When we say 'the reputation of the regional government', we mean the governor's team"). At the same time, there may be some specifics in the assessment of reputation associated with the peculiarities of the historically established perception of authorities ("there is a transfer of the object of criticism to a higher level of power hierarchy, for instance, "if the porch has not been painted — the president of the country is to blame)";

[6] In this regard, we can quote Hobbes' saying, "The reputation of power is power."

— the scope of responsibility, “Russian authorities’ are responsible for the whole country whereas ‘regional authorities’ deal with our local affairs”;

— regional authorities have to face higher demands regarding the current state of affairs, such as city improvement, road works, and ensuring the proper functioning of medical institutions. This translates to greater expectations, requirements, and responsibility for the regional authorities in terms of reputational risks. However, they often lack the necessary power and resources to address all regional issues, as “the main decisions are made at the federal level in Moscow”;

— for regional executive authorities, some of the characteristics are more pronounced: “The regional government can earn a positive reputation by demonstrating a commitment to rapid action, transparency, and efficiency in their decision-making processes”, “regional authorities are more accessible”; “expectations for the regional government include high demands on its communicative characteristics”; “the governor and other representatives of the regional government are expected to be able to listen to people and be on the same wavelength”; “the perception of regional authorities can be based not only on virtual communication, but also on their real-life actions.”;

— dependence on the characteristics of a region (“related to geography, national identity, culture, including religion, socio-economic characteristics of the region”);

— the ‘friend-foe’ dichotomy: it manifests in the need for ‘our’ leader (“the governor may come from the region, ‘our’ means understandable and predictable, understanding local people and having the same values and concerns”). This dichotomy is also manifested in ‘regional patriotism’ (“locals better represent the interests of the region at the federal level and are more effective lobbyists”); as a rule, regional authorities are required to protect the interests of the region to a greater extent than federal authorities, the federal government is not perceived as ‘our’ authority;

— relations with local elites (“it is important for the regional authorities to be able to build informal relations with regional elites, primarily the business elite, not for personal gain, but rather for the public good”).

It should be noted that the above-stated differentiating attributes and characteristics are also largely related to the interpretative conceptual domain (factors, sources of reputation formation, and its assessment). Nevertheless, some of them indicate a certain degree of difference in terms of the actual features and characteristics of the basic and, especially, the substantive core of the concepts.

4. *The degree of similarity of the core of the concepts ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ and ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’.*

Based on the analysis of scientific and theoretical approaches as well as expert opinions, we have identified the core components of the concept of ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’. Its categorical basis is formed by the opinion, assessment, attitude, perception/image, and public perception of authorities. The near-nuclear zone includes the following essential attributes of the concept ‘reputation’: trust as the basic attribute, stability, time of reputation formation, personal experience of interaction, assessment based on real actions, behaviour, and authorities' actions; value-based attitude to authorities; a system of expectations, ideas about the degree of compliance of real power with its ideal variant. These features also found overwhelming support in public opinion.

We argue that the conceptual core is the same for the concept of "reputation authorities", which includes the reputation of Russian authorities in general and the reputation of its various levels and branches of power. Respectively, the content of this core fully applies to the reputation of regional executive authorities. This conclusion is drawn based on the following provisions obtained from the results of both theoretical and empirical parts of the study:

— the conceptual core is verbalized by semantic units related to the category 'reputation', which is part of both concepts. The subject incorporated in the concept 'reputation' remains unchanged, with the focus shifting only to regional executive authorities instead of the Russian authorities as a whole. Population remains the bearer of opinion about reputation in both cases;

— the study empirically substantiates the thesis about the predominance of integrating attributes and characteristics in the structure of the concept of 'reputation of authorities'. Expert opinion (see para 2 and 3) regarding the conceptual core does not reveal differentiating attributes. The differences in the essential attributes of 'reputation' are linked to their degree of manifestation at the regional level, which includes the ability to have personal interactions with local authorities, the perception of power based on actual actions, a more demanding system of expectations from authorities, and a distinct value-based relationship with authorities (which are "our" authorities).

The ideas presented in this study align with previous research on the concept of 'authorities', which is structured around five significant areas of public consciousness. Each area corresponds to a cognitive microdomain, and collectively they form the broader cognitive macro-domain of 'authority'. The core and near-core zones of each micro-concept share identical conceptual content [65, p. 123—124].

5. *The degree of similarity of the substantive core of the concepts 'reputation regional executive authorities' and 'reputation of Russia's authorities'*.

To facilitate comparison, we will provide a brief description of the substantial core of the concept "reputation of Russian authorities". Figure 1 displays the characteristics grouped into institutional and operational blocks.[7] We have identified the main conceptual attributes of this core, which include the primary characteristics of reputation, a near periphery of the basic core, and less significant,

[7] It should be noted that the identification of these blocks correlates with three measurements of reputation proposed by foreign scientists [66], while the institutional block corresponds to the social measurement, the activity relates to the functional one, however, the significance of the emotional one (by the example of the external image of authorities) both in the expert assessment and according to the results of a mass survey of the population (see Table 2) was not confirmed.

distant, and extreme peripheries. The population in the regions of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation were presented with a list of characteristics and were asked to select 5—7 of the most significant ones that they believed created the ‘reputation of Russian authorities’.

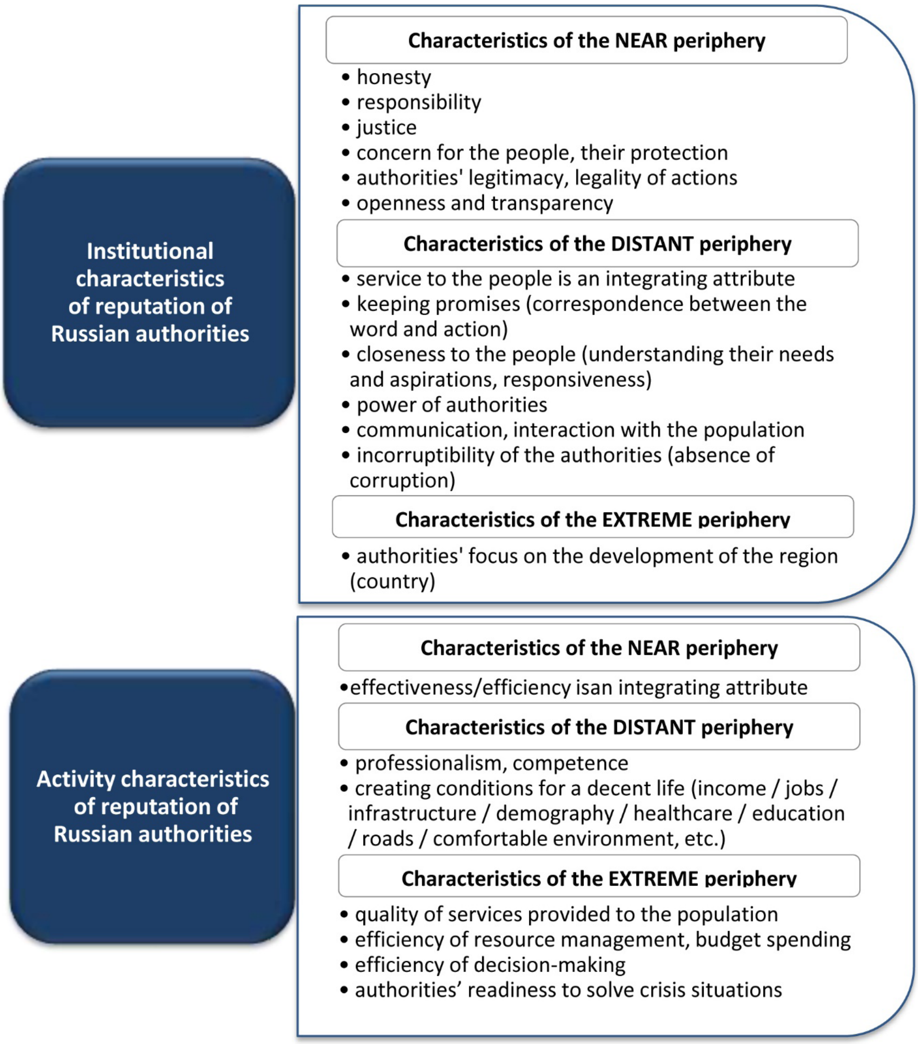

Fig. 1. The substantive core of the concept ‘reputation of Russia’s authorities’

After conducting the survey, it was found that the opinions of experts and the general public were in agreement regarding the most important characteristics of the ‘reputation of Russian authorities’. The survey results showed that four out of the seven characteristics identified by experts were also the top priorities for more than half of the respondents. These characteristics included honesty, responsibility, justice, and concern for people and their protection. In addition to these, the experts also identified the legitimacy of power, legality, openness/transparency, and effectiveness/efficiency as important characteristics. The remaining characteristics were classified as belonging to either the distant (significant for a quarter or more of the respondents) or the extreme periphery.

Let us turn to the international experience in the study of reputation. The author could not find any empirical studies of the content of reputation based on the example of large institutional subjects. The Finnish scientist Luoma-aho conducted a study of the reputation of 12 organizations under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland and identified reputational factors, which were classified into four functional groups: power and regulatory functions, legislation, research and semi-commercial functions. To evaluate the parameters of reputation, respondents were provided with a questionnaire consisting of contrasting theses, such as closeness versus openness, irresponsibility versus responsibility, etc. There was a total of 40 characteristics. A point scale was used for rating the parameters of reputation. The data processing revealed five key factors that contributed to reputation: authority, trust, service, respect, and efficiency. A subsequent study made it possible to generate reputational profiles for different groups of organizations based on these factors [37]. Trust is identified as a crucial component of the reputation of Russian authorities, located in the near-core zone of the core concept. Services, specifically the provision of services to the population, and efficiency of their provision are important characteristics found in both the near and extreme peripheries. Several of the reputation parameters evaluated in the questionnaire are also correlated with the attributes of the reputation of Russian authorities, which suggests that there are zones of reputation that share the same semantic content.

Lee and van Rizin have developed the Bureaucratic Reputation Scale (BRS), which is based on the theoretical framework proposed by Carpenter, who applied organizational reputation to public administration [38]. The BRS consists of four indicators, including the reputation of performance (ability to effectively achieve goals), moral reputation (ethical behaviour and adherence to moral obligations), the reputation of procedure (fairness of processes used for decision-making), and technical reputation (competence).

Lee and van Ryzin added a fifth indicator, shared reputation, which reflects the general feeling or attitude towards the subject. They conducted an empirical study using three US federal agencies to test the Bureaucratic Reputation Scale (BRS).[8] To assess each of the reputation indicators, respondents were asked to express the degree of their (non)agreement with six statements (for example, the moral indicator was tested by the statement “This agency seems to be corrupt”). Thirty characteristics that constitute the concept of ‘reputation’ were identified based on an expert survey, and American respondents evaluated the level of each characteristic for each federal agency [40]. The characteristics identified in the survey show a significant correlation with the reputational

[8] The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

attributes of Russian authorities identified in our study. However, it is worth noting that the survey did not aim to determine the degree to which these characteristics actually matter to the population in forming a reputation, but merely sought to assess them.

While the development of methodologies and identification of common characteristics that constitute the content of reputation is undoubtedly beneficial, it is also important to note that the results of such studies alone do not fully capture the specifics of reputation as an interdisciplinary phenomenon. While they deepen our understanding of these characteristics, they do not necessarily provide insight into the formation of public perception and citizens' opinions about reputation. Therefore, it is important to study the specifics and peculiarities of reputation in different contexts to fully comprehend its complexity.

Let us return to the content of the reputation of regional executive authorities. Based on the expert opinion presented in paragraphs 2 and 3, we can draw the following conclusions regarding the content of the reputation of regional executive authorities. There is a similarity between the core attributes of the concepts 'reputation of Russia's authorities' and 'reputation of regional executive authorities'. Both concepts prioritize characteristics such as honesty, responsibility, justice, concern for people and their protection, legitimacy of power, legality, openness, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency. These elements form the near-nuclear zone of the conceptual core, indicating their high importance in shaping the reputation of both national and regional authorities.

At the same time, we observed that various characteristics related to both the near and distant peripheries are more pronounced in the 'reputation of regional executive authorities', which increases their significance compared to the concept 'reputation of Russian authorities' in general. Specifically, such characteristics as openness, transparency, closeness to people, responsiveness, communication, interaction with the population, responsibility, and protection of the interests of the region (and residents) are pronounced and well-defined at the regional level. The greater connection with regional problems and the need for special attention to the situation 'on the ground' clearly express the integrating characteristic of the operational block and the effectiveness/efficiency of authorities. However, some characteristics, such as legitimacy, strength, and justice, have a deeper meaning at the federal level, according to the experts.

Thus, the results of the analysis of expert opinion demonstrate that the core of the 'reputation of regional executive authorities' has not changed significantly in comparison with the 'reputation of Russian authorities', but it has acquired a different meaning in the intensity of the expression of different characteristics.

Let us turn to the analysis of the results of a public opinion survey. Respondents were offered the same list of characteristics describing the reputation of regional executive authorities that is similar to the characteristics of the reputation of Russian authorities in general (Table 1). The column labeled "average % by region" presents the average percentage of respondents who chose the characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities, and for the purpose of comparison, the corresponding value for the reputation of Russian authorities is also presented in brackets.

Table 1

Characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities, significant for a quarter or more of the respondents, on average and by region, %

Characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities	Average %by region	The Belgorod region	The Kaluga region	The Lipetsk region	The Bryansk region	The Oryol region	The Smolensk region
1. Honesty	49.8 (58.3)	58.2	47.2	39.1	51.3	48.8	50.2
2. Responsibility	49.2 (52.1)	54.0	50.7	45.6	46.5	50.6	46.0
3 Concern for the people, their protection	47.7 (53.8)	49.4	47.6	44.4	45.8	56.0	45.1
4. Justice	47.5 (52.8)	54.0	44.6	44.4	49.1	45.2	43.2
5. Closeness to the people, understanding their needs and aspirations, responsiveness	43.3 (41.5)	42.7	51.1	46.0	38.5	48.2	35.2
6. Keeping promises (correspondence between the word and action)	36.8 (41.0)	33.1	45.0	31.8	37.0	35.7	40.8
7. Communication, interaction with the population	35.2 (29.4)	34.7	42.9	37.2	28.9	31.5	36.2
8. Openness, transparency	29.2 (31.2)	28.2	25.1	30.7	32.6	25.0	32.4
9. The power of authorities	27.5 (29.9)	33.6	13.4	34.5	29.7	18.5	28.6
10. Professionalism, competence	27.3 (28.7)	21.2	37.2	25.7	28.2	24.4	29.9
11. Conditions for a decent life (income / jobs / infrastructure / demography / healthcare / education / roads / comfortable environment, etc.)	27.1 (27.5)	26.6	39.0	23.8	21.6	27.4	25.7
12. Incorruptibility of authorities (absence of corruption)	25.5 (31.7)	22.9	32.5	20.3	23.4	28.6	28.5
13. Service to the people, moral values / reference points of authorities	23.8 (22.8)	22.6	19.9	26.8	24.2	26.8	23.4
14. Efficiency of resource management, budget spending	22.7 (17.8)	19.8	25.5	25.7	22.0	22.0	22.0

Source: statistics is calculated by the author on the basis of data obtained from a mass questionnaire survey of the population of the regions of the Central Federal District, 2021.

In public opinion, the distribution of the characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities indicates their division into the near, distant and extreme periphery (see also Fig. 1), which reflects the presence of a high degree of unity of the content core of the concepts under study.

At the same time, there are peculiarities in the perception of the reputation of regional executive authorities, which are manifested in the following:

— in general, this level of power indicates a great uniformity in the distribution of characteristics according to their degree of importance, which affects a certain decrease in the stability of priority characteristics and an increase in the dynamics of the characteristics of the distant and extreme periphery (Table 2);

— manifestation of the peculiarities of choice in each particular region is increasing, while there is still no dependence on the diversity of regions (the case is the reputation of Russian authorities).

Table 2

Meaningful characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities, significant for a quarter or more of the respondents, on average and by region, %

Characteristics of the reputation of regional executive authorities	Average % by region	The Belgorod region	The Kaluga region	The Lipetsk region	The Bryansk region	The Oryol region	The Smolensk region
15. Quality of services provided to the population	20.1 (17.4)	19.2	25.5	11.5	20.5	28.6	18.7
16. Authorities' focus on the development of the region (country)	18.5 (13.8)	26.6	29.4	12.3	15.0	26.8	16.8
17. Efficiency of decision-making	17.9 (10.3)	15.3	22.1	14.9	17.6	19.1	20.6
18. Productivity, achievement of goals, efficiency	17.7 (14.9)	14.1	20.8	21.1	17.6	17.9	16.4
19. Authorities' legitimacy, legality of actions	15.3 (16.7)	16.1	14.3	17.6	16.1	13.7	12.1
20. Authorities' readiness to solve crisis situations	13.4 (13.3)	14.7	15.6	12.3	13.2	16.7	7.9
21. An external image provided by authorities: appearance of employees / buildings / interior, etc.	5.3 (3.7)	4.8	6.1	4.6	5.9	6.0	4.7

Source: statistics are calculated by the author on the basis of data obtained from a mass questionnaire survey of the population of regions of the Central Federal District, 2021.

In line with the expert assessment, we observe a varying degree of significance of different characteristics in comparison with the overall reputation of

Russian authorities. Of particular interest are characteristics such as closeness to the people, understanding their needs and aspirations, and responsiveness. In three regions (Kaluga, Lipetsk, Oryol), these characteristics are more pronounced compared to the four priority regions. We believe that this observation makes it possible to prioritize these characteristics in these regions. In the visualization of the reputational core of regional executive authorities (Fig. 2), these characteristics are attributed to the transition zone between the near and distant periphery. On the other hand, the effectiveness of resource management and budget spending, chosen by a quarter of respondents (taking into account the margin of error), is placed in the distant periphery, compared to the reputation of Russian authorities as a whole.

We would like to draw attention to the most significant changes (5—7 %) in public perception regarding the importance of characteristics related to the distant and extreme periphery of the substantial core of the reputation of regional executive authorities, as compared to Russian authorities (on average across regions):

— the distant periphery includes communication, interaction with the population (more significant for the Kaluga region), fulfillment of promises and incorruptibility of authorities (less significant, especially for the Lipetsk region);

— characteristics of the extreme periphery include the quality of services provided to the population, which has increased (for the Kaluga and Oryol regions they can be attributed to the distant periphery), the focus of authorities on the development of the region (also the distant periphery for the Kaluga, Oryol and Belgorod regions), the efficiency of decision-making, effectiveness/efficiency of operation.

It should be noted that a more detailed consideration of the specifics of the choice of reputational characteristics at the level of individual regions is a task of subsequent research.

In general, changes in the degree of significance of the substantive characteristics of the ‘reputation of regional authorities’ demonstrate a fairly logical order, indicating the closeness of regional authorities in comparison with Russian authorities in general to the population, increased attention to its work to solve local problems (which is manifested in the increasing role of the characteristics of the operational block).

Thus, the findings of studying the conceptual core of the ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ and the ‘reputation of Russian authorities’ indicate a high degree of their similarity, the predominance of value-based (institutional) characteristics and increased attention to the pragmatic (the great importance of activity characteristics).

6. *Historical and cultural characteristics of the concept ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’*.

The concept of the ‘reputation of regional executive authorities’ is influenced by historical and cultural characteristics. Based on expert opinion, certain characteristics are more pronounced for regional executive authorities, such as personification, closeness to the population, protection of the region's interests and paternalism. These characteristics are considered to be part of the broader conceptual domain of the 'reputation of authorities', but require further research to determine their inclusion in the reputation core.

Based on the information presented above, we can visualize the content of the core concept of the 'reputation of regional executive authorities' (Figure 2) and compare it to the core concept of 'Russia's authorities' in general. The characteristics that have a higher or lower degree of significance or intensity compared to the reputation of Russian authorities are indicated with the symbols '>' or '<', respectively. If this dynamic is only identified by experts, an 'E' icon is displayed. The stable characteristics that remain significant at both the Russian and regional executive authority levels are highlighted in bold. To enhance visual clarity, the characteristics of the distant and extreme periphery are excluded from the figure.

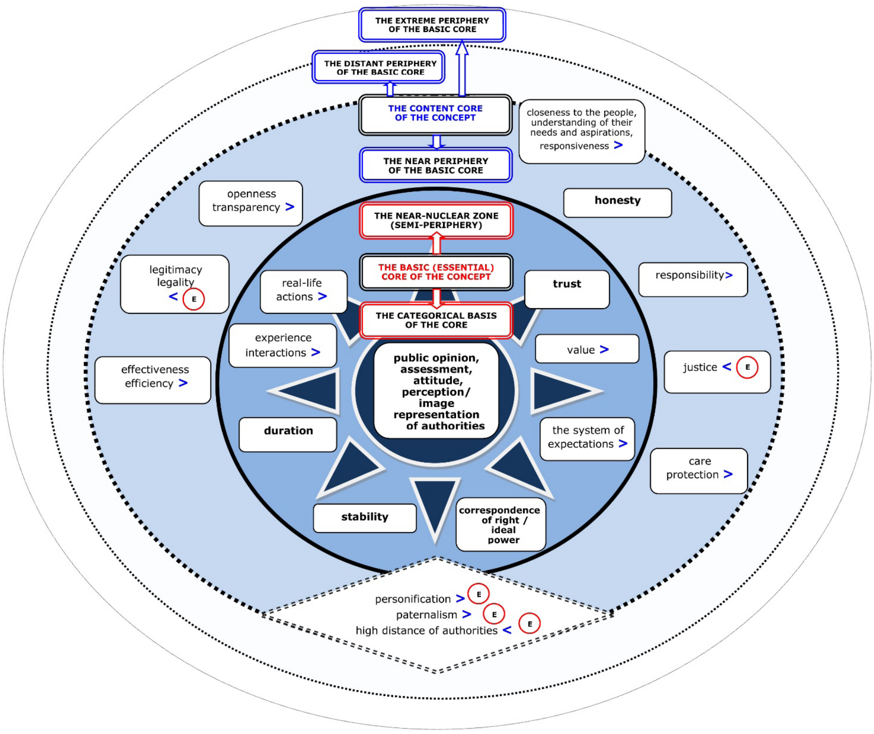

Fig. 2. Characteristics of the reputation core of regional executive authorities

Therefore, it is crucial for regional authorities to comprehend the strong interconnectedness and interdependence between the formation of their reputation and that of other public authorities. This requires the establishment of their own activities and information support, which take into account the appropriate "adjustment" or "alignment" (depending on the positive/negative agenda) of other public authorities. Secondly, it is important to place emphasis on the implementation of public policy by considering the characteristics that constitute the reputation core (bearing in mind the fact that its specificity is region-specific) as well as the priority of its value-based conceptual block. For instance, the performance of authorities should be communicated in a way that aligns with citizens' demands for honesty, fairness, and so on. Lastly, emphasis should be given to the conceptual characteristics that are in greater demand at the regional level, such as ensuring a higher level of transparency and openness.

Conclusions

Let me sum up the main findings of the study and see to what extent they support our initial hypotheses based on expert opinions and public perceptions:

1. The basic core structure is essentially the same for both concepts 'reputation of Russian authorities' and 'reputation of the regional executive authorities'. This is demonstrated by the prevalence of shared attributes in both the core and the periphery of both concepts. However, the reputation of regional executive power is characterized by less stable features in the near periphery and greater dynamism in the distant and extreme periphery (which is seen especially at the level of specific regions). This results in a higher degree of significance of certain features. Both expert and public assessment suggest that the following features are more pronounced in the conceptual core of both concepts (near-core zone or semi-periphery): a value-based attitude towards authorities, higher expectations from them, the importance of personal interaction experiences, and the perception of authorities through real actions. In the characteristics of the near and distant periphery, there are such conceptual attributes as responsibility, care for and protection of people, closeness to people, understanding of their needs and aspirations, responsiveness, communication, interaction, openness, transparency, performance/efficiency, and effectiveness of resource management and budgetary expenditures.

2. The substantive core of the 'reputation authorities' is based on two main conceptual blocks: institutional and operational (activity-related). Experts have concluded that there are no pronounced differences between the attributes of the 'reputation of regional executive authorities' and the 'reputation of Russian authorities' in general. Both experts and the public highlight the significance of the value-based approach to reputation over the pragmatic aspects, although the importance of the latter has slightly increased.

3. The volume of conceptual information encoded by the 'reputation of authorities' and the structure and content of its cores are not directly dependent on the level of regional development. Each region has its own unique characteristics of public opinion that determine the specificity of the reputation while maintaining a unified view of its content. Further research should focus on identifying the shared/peculiar content of the reputational core of the Russian and regional executive authorities, taking into account such factors as the mono/multi-ethnic and mono/multi-religious composition of the region and the 'capital — periphery' divide.

This research has developed a theoretical model for the study of the reputation of the Russian authorities, identified the peculiarities of the conceptual content of the 'reputation of the regional executive authorities', and developed a number of methodological provisions for studying the reputation of complex institutional subjects. The study of the reputation of authorities is also relevant in light of the introduction of the category of 'public authority' into the Constitution of the Russian Federation. This sets a new trend of constitutional development and requires the creation of a unified system of public authority.

Reputation management involves understanding the priorities of the desirable content of the reputation, allowing authorities to build an appropriate reputational policy, and determine priorities in their own activities and in the system of information and analytical support and promotion. This will contribute to improving the social effectiveness of government and the trust of citizens.

Finally, it is important to note that the diffuse structure of the concept of reputation means that it acquires new meanings and loses old ones over time. The presented conceptual field and structure of the reputational core of the regional executive power (as well as the reputation of the Russian authorities in general) is a hypothetical research model with the most and least significant meanings listed, features determined, and their place in the structure of the concept identified.

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ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

A TYPOLOGY OF THE BALTIC REGION STATES ACCORDING TO EXCELLENCE IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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Global manufacturing systems function in such a way that countries develop industrial specialisation, which leads to territorial disparities. The countries of the Baltic region are no exception despite their strong economic ties and developed industries. A significant element of any manufacturing system is its scientific and technological subsystem, which is described in this article for ten countries (Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia), based on an analysis of a clustered set of national characteristics: R&D financing and staffing in the scientific and technological subsystem. A total of ten indicators, absolute and relative, are investigated. The study relies on combined grouping, graphical and cluster analysis to build a typology of countries and distinguish their types according to their scientific and technological excellence As a result, a typology of the countries of the Baltic Sea region has been proposed and types of countries with similar characteristics have been identified: the two main types are traditional market economies and post-socialist countries, whose common features are observed in all sets of main characteristics. Several subtypes are described as well. The research draws on 2010—2019 (2020) statistical data from the European Statistical Office (Eurostat), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Russia's Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat).

Keywords:
scientific and technological development, country-specific assets, manufacturing system, scientific and technological subsystem, gross domestic expenditure on R&D, intramural R&D expenditures, personnel potential

Introduction

The research and technological component is an integral part of the global production systems (GPS) and its scientific and technological subsystem (STS). This subsystem comprises a complex network of economic, financial, and legal

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connections whose primary goal is to facilitate the exchange of research, development activities, and technological work. To date, there is no well-established and generally recognized system for assessing the scientific and technological development of territories. However, there are common patterns of development in scientific and technological progress across different countries [1]. The selection of these patterns will depend on the authors' interests in various aspects and subtleties of the subject.

Russian authors are mainly focused on the governmental role in scientific and technological development, describing it as a crucial factor [2; 3] or, at the very least, not insignificant [4]. In fact, the state is primarily responsible for promoting scientific and technological progress in Russia, as it is considered to be lagging behind leading countries due to an economy that is heavily reliant on exporting raw materials [1; 2; 5]. A number of papers substantiate the need for collaboration for the sake of scientific and technological development at the level of national industry and science [1], as well as at the level of the CIS member states [6] and the EAEU [7].

Having analyzed the indicators of scientific and technological space, most authors from the former USSR countries pay attention to the volume of investments in science [5; 8] and HR [3; 8], as well as some other indicators, such as a number of patents [8]. Certain studies offer complex integral indicators derived from expert assessment [9].

When discussing the causes behind territorial disparities, it is pertinent to delve into the scholarly contributions of Baburin and Zemtsov, who argue that the level of regional development is heavily dependent on the proximity of regions to the hubs that generate and disseminate innovative knowledge [10]. However, it is noted that in the post-Soviet space such centres have little impact on development [11; 12]. Furthermore, the impact of historical circumstances, commonly known as the 'rut effect' in national research [13; 14], assumes a noteworthy role in shaping regional development outcomes.

The entirety of the Western literature analyzed in this study aims to comprehend the role of businesses in the developmental process and seeks to refine corporate strategies while integrating within the sphere of international business. To date, the main generally accepted vector is neo-institutional economic theory, within which several paradigms have been developed which can be used for the study of regions:

— eclectic paradigm (OLI model);

— knowledge capital model;

— FSA-CSA matrix paradigm.

The eclectic paradigm, which has been developing for more than three decades, considers the ownership of firms (O), the advantages of their location in specific territories (L) and the advantages of internationalization (I) [15]. The study of countries within this paradigm focuses on formal and informal institutions, consumption patterns, market structure, socio-economic, natural conditions, working conditions, and the education systems development [16]. Notably, researchers have employed this paradigm to demonstrate that globalization has failed to enable the participation of less developed countries in the global production sharing (GPS) network, which would have ostensibly facilitated their development [17; 18].

Within the knowledge capital model, researchers analyze knowledge, skills and qualifications of labour resources [19], including management skills as the main development factor. The typology here is based on the cost of the geographical division of functions ('fragmentation cost') [20], concentrated on the level of training [21]. These studies assume that excessive specialization of regions leads to a reduction in the well-being of the population [22], and, consequently, to a drop in the level of development.

Within the FSA-CSA matrix paradigm, the development of GPS is influenced by investments of transnational corporations (TNCs), as well as government initiatives to create favourable conditions and develop infrastructure [16]. The recognition of this dichotomy has engendered two distinct perspectives on the unit of analysis for GPS [23]. On one hand, it encompasses the investigation of country-specific advantages that define their competitiveness. On the other hand, it focuses on firm-specific advantages, such as proprietary competencies (assets, patents, trademarks), among others. Given their interdependence, the specific advantages of countries and firms, also known as the FSA-CSA matrix, can be construed as a composite of specific country characteristics [24]. Analogously, a comparable framework can be employed to scrutinize scientific and technological progress as a component of the production system.

Developed countries and transnational corporations of the world are not able to conduct comprehensive scientific research on their own, which creates certain conditions for ever greater globalization of production systems and, as a result, leads to more intensive participation of the main actors in the global division of labour [25].

The degree of scientific and technical progress of countries is an indicator of the development of industrial relations, and other related governmental and social institutions [2]. Thus, increased investment in science has a positive efe fect on GDP [26], and the economic growth of agglomerations is promoted by knowledge-intensive industries [27].

For over a decade, the evolution of global economic relations has transpired within the framework of globalization and internationalization. The advent of GPS has inevitably resulted in a geographical reorganization, an asymmetric development of territories, and a form of "spatial fixation" [28]. The territorial dynamics of scientific and technological progress is no exception; on the contrary, the intrinsically international character of science amplifies existing trends. In this regard, there is a need to assess the level and trends in the development of the scientific and technical progress of the Russian Federation in comparison with other countries of the Baltic Sea region, to identify promising areas for its innovative development, taking into account international experience. The aim of this study is to classify countries in the Baltic Sea region according to their level of scientific and technological development and to elucidate the specific trends and patterns within this context.

Research methodology

Our analysis focuses on ten countries of the Baltic Sea region, as they offer a diverse range of study material for our investigation. In addition to the fact that one of the world's leading economies (the Federal Republic of Germany) is located on the territory of the Baltic Sea region, this territory is special for a number of other reasons. Firstly, the region is characterized by a developed industry and a high level of human capital potential, making it one of the most developed international areas [29]. Secondly, five out of the ten countries in the region were previously part of the "people's democracy" or the Soviet Union, and therefore share similarities in their development paths with the Russian Federation. Thirdly, the countries in the region have a long history of economic ties and relations that extend beyond the four freedoms of the European Union. R&D funding and the state of labour resources are the key factors in the analysis of scientific, technological and innovative development of territories [8; 10; 30]. Therefore, the specific advantages of the countries used to compile the typology are divided into two groups: R&D funding and the state of the STS workforce.

R&D funding is considered one of the key components of science, technology, and innovation systems (STS). The measurement of R&D funding is typically done by analyzing the gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD). This indicator provides information on the research and development expenditures of commercial enterprises, higher education institutions, government agencies, and private non-profit organizations. GERD is usually expressed as a percentage of the gross domestic product or in absolute values.[1]

The state of the labour force in relation to scientific and technical progress is assessed through the use of the statistical indicator known as the 'total number of researchers' (R&D personnel). This indicator encompasses individuals who are either fully or partially employed in R&D, in full-time equivalent roles, and are engaged in the development of new knowledge, products, processes, methods, and systems, as well as the management of research projects. To provide context for the importance of scientific personnel in the context of a country's scientific and technical progress, it is also necessary to consider the "population size" indicator, which represents the number of people who permanently reside in a given country.[2]

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[1] Gross domestic expenditure on R & D (GERD), 2022, *Eurostat*, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary: Gross_domestic_expenditure_on_R_%26_D_(GERD) (accessed 17.07.2022).

[2] Demography — Population — OECD Data, 2022, *OECD*, URL: https://data.oecd.org/pop/population.htm#indicator-chart (accessed 17.07.2022).

R&D funding, as well as employment of the personnel, engages several sectors, which are to be analyzed:

— Government sector — R&D (GOV), which includes state and non-profit organizations under governmental control;

— business enterprise sector — R&D (BES), which includes organisations and institutions whose main activity is market production of goods and services (except for higher education);

— higher education sector (R&D (HES)), which, in addition to universities, colleges and other higher education organisations, includes research institutes, experimental stations and other organizations operating under the direct control or management of higher education institutions or any other associated with them;

— private non-profit sector (R&D (PNP)) includes private non-profit organisations such as professional, research societies, charitable organizations, charitable foundations, trade unions, etc.;

— foreign (international) sector — (foreign R&D)[3] includes all legal entities and individuals located outside the political borders of the state, excluding vehicles, ships, aerospace equipment, test sites operated by these organizations, as well as all international organizations (with the exception of commercial enterprises [4]).

The data source is the databases of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (Rosstat), the Statistical Service of the European Union (Eurostat) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The study conducted a comprehensive analysis of a large time series of statistical indicators, employing combined grouping to categorize the selected countries based on two or more criteria. The analysis also identified quantitative dependencies between related indicators using graph-analytical methods and utilized cluster analysis to identify patterns and groupings within the data set.

To form the groups, a set of interval discrete features was identified, which were related to the growth rate of absolute R&D costs, the structure of R&D financing, the growth rate of the absolute number of researchers, and the structure of researchers' employment. The following indicators were selected as variables for conducting graph-analytical and cluster analyses: gross domestic expenditure on R&D (% of GDP) and the number of researchers per 1000 inhabitants. These indicators were considered the most important characteristics of each group that could help to characterize scientific and technological development. The cluster analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics ver.22 software, applying the hierarchical clustering method with squared Euclidean distance and Ward's connection method.

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[3] When analyzing the condition of labour resources of scientific and technological progress, this sector is not used.

[4] Science and technology glossary — Statistics Explained, 2022, *Eurostat*, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Category:Science_and_technology_glossary (accessed 17.04.2022).

Results

R&D Funding

The Baltic Sea region countries can be differentiated based on their level of R&D funding in absolute terms. In 2020, the leader was Germany, whose total R&D spending amounted to about 105 billion euros, or 63 % of the total R&D spending of all the analyzed countries in the region. Sweden ranks second with about 16.5 billion euros (9.9 %), and third place — Russia with 14.2 billion euros, or 8.3 % (Table 1).

Table 1

R&D Funding, billion euros

Country	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Market economy countries								
Germany	70.01	84.25	88.78	92.17	99.55	104.67	110.02	105.55
Sweden	11.87	13.61	14.66	15.14	16.14	15.63	16.15	16.77
Denmark	7.09	7.74	8.34	8.76	8.61	8.97	9.1	9.46
Norway	5.34	6.45	6.73	6.82	7.42	7.58	7.8	7.25
Finland	6.97	6.51	6.07	5.93	6.17	6.44	6.72	6.93
Post-socialist countries								
Russia	13.00	16.63	13.44	14.45	15.46	13.89	15.66	14.04
Poland	2.61	3.86	4.32	4.11	4.83	6.02	7.05	7.3
Estonia	0.23	0.29	0.30	0.27	0.30	0.37	0.45	0.48
Latvia	0.11	0.16	0.15	0.11	0.14	0.19	0.20	0.21
Lithuania	0.22	0.38	0.39	0.33	0.38	0.43	0.48	0.57

Source: GERD by sector of performance and source of funds, 2022, *Eurostat,* URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/RD_E_GERDTOT__custom_2252073/default/table?lang=en (accessed 10.05.2022) ; Expenditure on science, 2022, *Science, technologies, innovations,* URL: https://issek.hse.ru/mirror/pubs/share/504081839.pdf (accessed 12.07.2022) ; Russia and the countries of the world, 2021, *Federal State Satistics Service*, URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/210/document/13241 (accessed 26.06.2022).

Over the past 20 years, gross domestic spending on R&D in Russia has remained virtually unchanged and amounts to about 1 % of GDP. Based on this particular indicator, the Russian Federation falls behind the developed countries in the region by a factor of two. By analyzing the data, it is possible to classify the countries into two distinct groups, as shown in Table 2. On the one hand, these are countries having a traditional market economy, on the other — post-socialist countries (countries of the former USSR and people's democracy).

Table 2

Gross domestic expenditure on R&D, % of GDP

Country	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Market economy countries								
Sweden	3.17	3.1	3.22	3.25	3.36	3.32	3.39	3.51
Germany	2.73	2.88	2.93	2.94	3.05	3.12	3.17	3.14
Denmark	2.92	2.91	3.06	3.09	3.03	3.02	2.93	3.03
Finland	3.71	3.15	2.87	2.72	2.73	2.76	2.8	2.94
Norway	1.65	1.72	1.94	2.04	2.1	2.06	2.15	2.3
Post-socialist countries								
Estonia	1.57	1.42	1.46	1.23	1.28	1.41	1.63	1.79
Poland	0.72	0.94	1	0.96	1.03	1.21	1.32	1.39
Lithuania	0.78	1.03	1.04	0.84	0.9	0.94	1.0	1.17
Russia	1.05	1.07	1.1	1.1	1.11	0.98	1.04	1.1
Latvia	0.61	0.69	0.62	0.44	0.51	0.64	0.64	0.7

Source: GERD by sector of performance and source of funds, 2022, *Eurostat,* URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/RD_E_GERDTOT__custom_2252073/default/table?lang=en (accessed 10.05.2022) ; Expenditure on science, 2022*, Science, technologies, innovations*, URL: https://issek.hse.ru/mirror/pubs/share/504081839.pdf accessed 12.07.2022) ; Russia and the countries of the world, 2021*, Federal State Statistics Service*, URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/210/document/13241 (accessed 26.06.2022).

The countries in the first group receive substantial funds from the commercial sector of their economies, with more than 50 % of funding coming from the Business Enterprise Sector — Research and Development (BES-R&D), except for Norway. This allocation of funds reflects the modern economic model, which emphasizes the importance of research to the national economy and shows the private sector's interest in long-term development. Moreover, it highlights the readiness of businesses to finance high-risk long-term development programs. It also shows the stability of the financing structure. The case is different for Finland, where the rate of R&D funding by the commercial sector of the economy (Business enterprise sector — R&D (BES)) was the highest among the countries of the Baltic region at the beginning of the reviewed period, but from 2010 to 2019 it decreased from 66.1 to 54.3 %. Norway is also characterized by a fairly high rate of R&D funding by the government sector (R&D (GOV).

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland) when compared to other ones are characterized by a large (more than 1 %) and increasing rate of R&D funding by the private non-profit sector (R&D (PNP)). In other countries with a high level of R&D funding, this figure is negligible.

Post-socialist countries have a fairly high indicator of R&D funding by the government sector (R&D (GOV)) — above 30 %. Unlike other countries in its group, Russia demonstrates stability in the structure of funding for scientific and technical progress with a high predominance of the public sector. Poland underwent a remarkable transformation during the analyzed period. While its public funding for research and development (R&D) remains comparatively high when compared to traditional market economies, it decreased from 60.9 % in 2010 to 38.8 % in 2019. As for the indicator of R&D funding from abroad (foreign sector — R&D), it is significant for the Baltic countries and Finland. In Russia, this indicator is low and tends to decrease even more: from 3.5 % in 2010 to 2.5 % in 2019. The Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are characterized by the absence of a stable structure of gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD). The reasons are the low level of absolute financing costs compared to neighbours. In such a situation, the implementation of any science-intensive project has a significant impact on the structure of gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) [31].[5]

An analysis of R&D financing in the higher education sector (R&D (HES)) did not reveal any significant patterns.

In terms of the growth rate of absolute R&D expenditure since 2010, Russia has ranked penultimate among the Baltic Sea countries — in 2020 it amounted to only 8 %. Finland experienced a negative growth rate of its Gross Domestic Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) in 2020, which fell by 0.5 % compared to 2010. However, since 2016, there has been a gradual increase in the indicator. In contrast, Poland leads the region with a significant growth rate of 179.7 %, followed by Lithuania at 160.4 %, Estonia at 106.6 %, Latvia at 91.6 %, Germany at 51.2 %, Sweden at 41 %, Norway at 35.5 %, and Denmark at 33.3 % (see Table 1).

When analyzing the countries of the Baltic region in terms of their level of research and development (R&D) funding, significant diversity can be observed. As of 2020, the total population of the ten countries analyzed stood at approximately 300 million people, with this number remaining relatively stable over the past ten years and experiencing only a slight increase.

Labour resources of STP

In 2020, the population of Russia accounted for 146.5 million people or 48.7 %, which makes it an absolute leader, while Germany with 83.2 million, or 28 % ranked second, and Poland was third with 38 million, or 12.6 %.[6, 7]

[5] GERD by sector of performance and source of funds, 2022, *Eurostat*, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/RD_E_GERDTOT__custom_2252073/default/table?lang=en (accessed 13.03.2022).

[6] Population, 2022, *OECD Data,* URL: https://data.oecd.org/pop/population.htm#indicator-chart (accessed 08.07.2022).

[7] Russia and the countries of the world, 2020*, Federal State Statistics Service,* URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/210/document/13241 (accessed 04.04.2022).

A similar situation is observed when considering the total number of researchers, but in 2019 Russia was second in the ranking — 400,663 people employed in R&D, Germany was the first — 450,697 people, and Poland was third — 120,780 people.[8]

For an objective comparison, we will consider the total number of researchers per 1,000 inhabitants. The analysis of this indicator reveals that the countries can be divided into two groups: countries with a market economy and post-socialist countries (Table 3).

Table 3

Number of researchers per 1,000 residents

Country	2010	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Market economy countries							
Sweden	5.3	6.9	6.8	7.1	7.3	7.4	7.7
Denmark	6.8	7.3	7.5	7.8	7.6	7.6	7.7
Finland	7.7	7	6.8	6.5	6.7	6.9	7.2
Norway	5.4	5.7	5.9	6.1	6.4	6.5	6.7
Germany	4	4.3	4.7	4.9	5.1	5.2	5.4
Post-socialist countries							
Estonia	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.8	3.8
Lithuania	2.8	3.1	2.8	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.4
Poland	1.7	2.0	2.1	2.3	3.0	3.1	3.2
Russia	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.7
Latvia	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.8	1.8	1.9

Source: R&D personnel by sector of performance, professional position and sex, 2022, *Eurostat,* URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/RD_P_PERSOCC/default/table?lang=en (accessed 07.02.2022).

The indicator of the human resources structure of those employed in the scientific and technical field can demonstrate a number of features. Thus, for Russia, it is traditional to have a larger number of researchers (>30 %) employed in enterprises and institutions of the government sector (R&D (GOV)) than in other countries. All countries are characterized by a decrease in the employment of researchers in this sector, especially Poland (from 21 % in 2010 to 1.8 % in 2019), mainly due to an increase in the indicators of the business enterprise sector (R&D (BES)).

Science funding by the Higher Education Sector (R&D (HES)) is insignificant, but higher education institutions have traditionally employed a large number of researchers. This indicator divides countries into two groups: the ones

[8] Total number of researchers by sectors of performance, 2022, *Eurostat*, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tsc00003 (accessed 17.06.2022).

with a high influence of the higher education sector — the share of employment in the sector is about 50 % or more, and the others with less influence — the share of employment in the sector is less than 40 %. The first group includes the post-socialist countries of the EU: Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, while the countries of the second group include Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Russia[9].

An analysis of employment in the private non-profit sector (Private non-profit sector — R&D (PNP)) did not reveal any significant patterns [31].

Among other things, all countries considered for the analysis of the labour resources of the STP sector can be divided according to the presence of two large groups: on the one hand, these are commercial structures, on the other hand, structures that carry out research and development not for profit (this is the public sector, the sector higher education and the non-profit sector) (Fig. 1). Thus, according to the structure of employment, the states of the Baltic region are also divided into two groups: countries having a market economy and post-socialist countries.

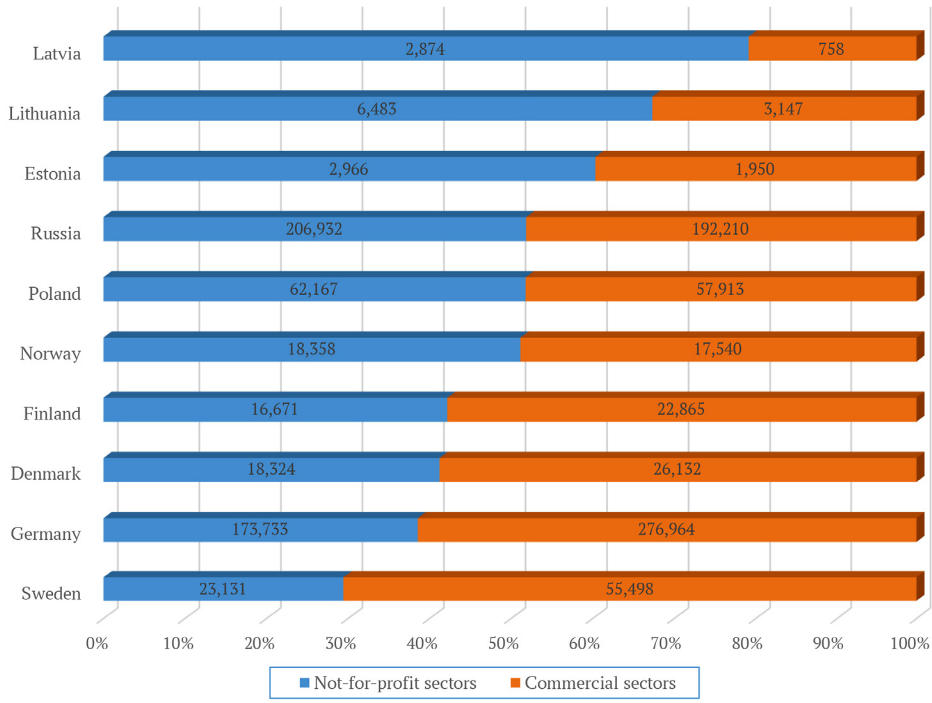

Fig. 1. The structure of employment in the commercial and not-for-profit sectors of science in 2019, people

[9] R&D personnel by sector of performance, professional position and sex, 2022, *Eurostat*, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/RD_P_PERSOCC/default/table?lang=en (accessed 07.02.2022).

Results

The quantitative analysis of the scientific and technological landscape in the Baltic region has revealed two distinct groups of countries based on their fundamental characteristics. The first group, which comprises countries with a traditional market economy, exhibits a higher level of scientific and technological development. The second group, comprised of post-socialist countries, is characterized by a relatively lower level of scientific and technological development. This classification, though unsurprising, provides valuable insight into the scientific and technological landscape of the region.

Countries with market economies are distinguished by:

— high gross domestic spending on R&D (more than 2 % of GDP);

— a large number of researchers per 1000 people (more than five).

Post-socialist countries are characterized by:

— lower (less than 2 % of GDP) gross domestic expenditure on R&D;

— fewer researchers per 1,000 people (fewer than four) than in countries with a high level of scientific and technical development.

The analysis results of R&D funding and the state of labour resources can be subject to a more comprehensive interpretation by utilizing the graphic-analytical method (Fig. 2) and cluster analysis (Fig. 3), which allow us to distinguish the following two types — countries with traditional market economies and post-socialist countries.

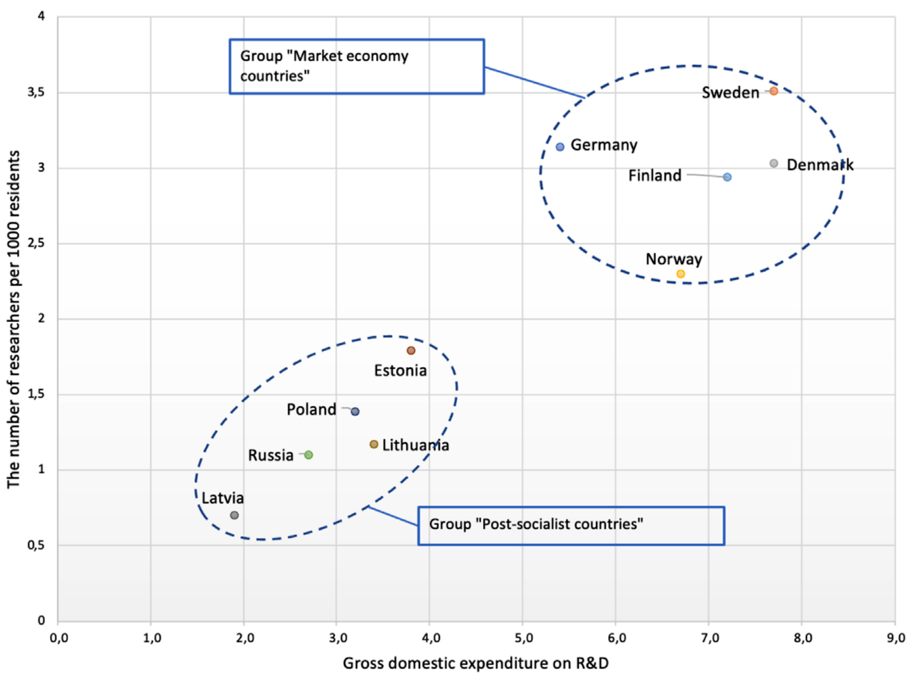

Fig. 2. Gross domestic expenditure on R&D and the number of researchers per 1,000 residents in the countries of the Baltic Sea region

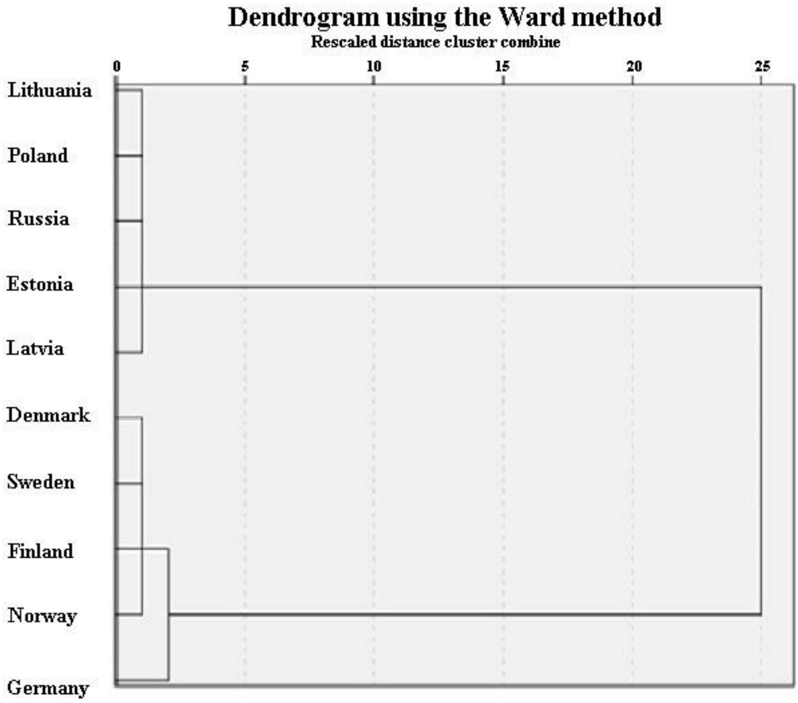

Fig. 3. Dendrogram of the classification of the countries of the Baltic Sea region by gross domestic expenditure on R&D, % of GDP, and the number of researchers per 1,000 residents

The application of the combined grouping method further enables the identification of subtypes within the selected countries. A detailed analysis of the growth rates of absolute R&D expenditures leads to the identification of three country subtypes: countries with high growth rates, including post-socialist EU countries such as Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia; countries with moderate growth rates, including Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark; and countries with low or negative growth rates, such as Russia and Finland (Table 4).

Table 4

Growth rates of absolute R&D expenditure in 2010—2020, %

90—180	30—55	>10
Poland (179.7)	Germany (51.2)	Russia (8)
Lithuania (160.5)	Sweden (40.9)	Finland (−0.5)
Estonia (106.7)	Norway (35.5)	—
Latvia (91.6)	Denmark (33.3)	—

Note: Bold type indicates market economy countries.

An analysis of the funding structure for research and development (R&D) allows for the identification of several subtypes based on the number of researchers employed in various sectors. The business enterprise sector (R&D (BES)) accounts for more than 50 % of R&D funding in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Poland, and Estonia. On the other hand, the public sector, particularly the government sector (R&D (GOV)), is the leading investor in science in Norway and Russia, with more than 40 % of funding originating from this sector. In countries with a traditional market economy other than Norway and Russia, this figure is less than 30 %, whereas for the post-socialist EU countries (Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia), this indicator is significant and ranges from 30 % to 40 %.

An important role in R&D funding is played by the foreign sector (FOR R&D) in the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Finland — more than 10 %, in Poland, Sweden, Norway, Germany and Denmark it varies between 5—10 % and is completely insignificant for Russia. The indicator of R&D funding by the private non-profit sector (R&D (PNP)) is low. However, in the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland) it is more than 1 % with a tendency to slowly increase (Table 5).

Table 5

Typology of the countries of the Baltic region according to the structure of R&D funding, %

Business enterprise sector — R&D (BES)		Government sector — R&D (GOV)			Foreign sector — R&D			Private non-for-profit sector — R&D (PNP)	
> 50	< 50	> 40	30—40	< 30	> 10	5—10	< 5	> 1	< 1
Germany	**Norway**	**Norway**	Poland	**Denmark**	Lithuania	Poland	Russia	**Denmark**	Germany
Sweden	Lithuania	Russia	Estonia	**Germany**	Latvia	**Sweden**	—	**Sweden**	Russia
Denmark	Latvia	—	Lithuania	**Finland**	Estonia	**Norway**	—	**Finland**	Poland
Finland	Russia	—	Latvia	**Sweden**	**Finland**	**Germany**	—	**Norway**	Estonia
Poland	—	—	—	—	—	**Denmark**	—	—	Latvia
Estonia	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Lithuania

Note: Bold type indicates market economy countries.

An analysis of STP labour resources reveals that, with the exception of Latvia, Russia, and Finland, all countries are experiencing growth in the number of employed researchers. Particularly noteworthy is the substantial growth rates demonstrated by Poland, while significant growth is observed in Sweden, Germany, and Norway. Estonia, Denmark, and Lithuania are experiencing moderate growth in the number of researchers (Table 6).

Table 6

Growth rate of the total number of researchers in 2010—2019, %

> 85	60—35	25—10	> 0
Poland (87.2)	**Sweden** (59.5)	Estonia (22.5)	**Finland** (– 3.5)
—	**Germany** (37.7)	**Denmark** (19.3)	Latvia (– 6.8)
—	**Norway** (35.7)	Lithuania (12)	Russia (– 9.4)

Note: Bold type indicates market economy countries.

Source: Total researchers by sectors of performance, 2022, *Eurostat,* URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tsc00003 (accessed 17.06.2022).

In post-socialist countries, the number of people who are employed in the commercial sector is smaller than in countries with traditional market economies. Russia is characterized by a high percentage of researchers employed in the government sector (R&D (GOV)), and a low percentage of those employed in the higher education sector (R&D (HES)). The states with high employment of researchers in the higher education sector include the post-socialist countries of the EU: Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia (Table 7).

Table 7

Typology of the countries of the Baltic Sea region according to the structure of employment of researchers, %

Business enterprise sector — R&D (BES)			Government sector — R&D (GOV)			Higher education sector — R&D (HES)		
> 50	~ 50	< 50	> 30	10—20	< 10	> 40	30—40	< 30
Germany	**Norway**	Lithuania	Russia	Estonia	Poland	Poland	**Norway**	**Germany**
Sweden	Russia	Latvia	—	**Norway**	**Denmark**	Lithuania	**Denmark**	**Sweden**
Denmark	Poland	Estonia	—	**Germany**	**Sweden**	Latvia	**Finland**	Russia
Finland	—	—	—	Latvia	**Finland**	Estonia	—	—
—	—	—	—	Lithuania	—	—	—	—

Note: Bold type indicates market economy countries.

Conclusion

The present study conducted an analysis of scientific and technological progress (STP) in various countries, with a particular focus on the Baltic Sea region. The study aimed to classify countries based on their level of STP development, taking into account a set of indicators that reflect different components of STP progress and sectors of activity. The results show that the Baltic Sea region has exhibited an upward trend in STP, with Poland being the only exception as it has undergone significant structural changes in this area.

Despite differences in dimensions, the studied countries can be grouped into two types based on their R&D funding and the condition of their STP labour force: countries with traditional market economies and post-socialist countries. The latter group is characterized by insufficient funding for STP and a lower level of research personnel development, which hampers their ability to compete on equal terms with the developed countries of the former type. It is worth noting that several decades have passed since the collapse of the socialist bloc, and yet, the identified types of countries have not reached a level playing field. Post-socialist countries went through economic and social upheaval following the fall of the 'people's democracy' regimes and the demise of the Soviet Union, which negatively impacted their STP progress.

Nevertheless, a closer examination of the data on funding structures and labour force revealed some differences. The post-socialist countries of the EU, namely Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, have shown high growth rates in absolute R&D expenses over the past decade. This trend can be attributed to their low initial levels of R&D funding and the significant weight of foreign funds in the general structure of R&D financing, which is especially characteristic of the Baltic States. On the other hand, traditional market economies (excluding Finland) have shown steady growth in absolute R&D spending. In contrast, Russia exhibits the lowest rate of growth in absolute R&D spending over the past decade, while Finland has experienced a slight decline.

The study also emphasizes the relationship between funding and labour resources in the STP sector, as increased investment in STP can improve the prestige of the researcher's profession and enhance the quality and efficiency of their work. The results indicate that Poland has maintained a consistent upward trend, whereas Sweden, Germany, and Norway have experienced substantial growth. On the other hand, Estonia, Denmark, and Lithuania have demonstrated a moderate level of progress. In contrast, Finland, Latvia, and Russia have experienced a decline.

Regarding funding structures and employment, Russia is notable for its high reliance on state funding, with the Higher Education Sector's role in employment for R&D being the lowest among the countries studied. To improve this situation, it is crucial to increase R&D funding by stimulating investments in the commercial sector (R&D (BES)), beyond public investment. Moreover, it is imperative to enhance the image of the research profession, with Germany serving as a good role model country that is comparable in size and past experience in overcoming the consequences of the socialist economy collapse.

Given the current geopolitical situation, Russia's effective participation in international cooperation and the international division of labour has temporarily slowed down. Therefore, interregional collaboration and closer ties with countries of the EAEU, SCO, and BRICS can become essential instruments for scientific and technological development.

Finally, the study will be further complemented by expert surveys and an analysis of the Baltic region's exports/imports traffic and patent activity. This approach will enable a characterization of the demand for the scientific and technological subsystem and the forecasting of its further development.

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THE SPREAD OF THE COVID-19 INFECTION IN RUSSIA'S BALTIC MACRO-REGION: INTERNAL DIFFERENCES

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This article explores the spread of the COVID-19 infection in Russia's Baltic macro-region. The monthly excess mortality rate in the Baltic region is analysed along with regional and municipal COVID-19 response acts to identify regional features affecting the spread of the disease. The spatial characteristics of Russia's Baltic regions, germane to the propagation of COVID-19, were distinguished by examining selected social and economic statistical indicators. Based on the space of places/space of flows dichotomy, Russia's Baltic regions can be divided into three spaces: 1) St. Petersburg, the Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions (dominated by spaces of flows; highly permeable space); 2) the Republic of Karelia and the Murmansk region (the key factors are rotational employment and the introduction of the virus from without); 3) the Novgorod and Pskov regions (lowly permeable spaces of places; the central role of local foci of the disease). The principal risk factor for the space of flows is the rapid spread of COVID-19 along transport arteries, whilst, within the space of places, the coronavirus spreads through spatial diffusion from isolated foci along short radii. In the former case, local authorities counteracted spatial diffusion by restricting movement in the local labour market; in the latter, by limiting travel between the centre and the periphery. The traditional ideas about positive (openness, centrality) and negative (closedness, peripherality) characteristics of space are reversed in the context of the pandemic: periphery gains the benefit of natural protection from the pandemic, whilst centres become acutely vulnerable.

Keywords:
Baltic macro-region; horizontal, hierarchical spatial diffusion of coronavirus; space of flows and space of places; monthly excess mortality; regional COVID-19 response legislation

Introduction and problem setting

The COVID-19 pandemic presented Russian economic geographers with new challenges relating to the study of infection spread across regions and municipalities. For the first time in recent history, the country was confronted with a global

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phenomenon affecting all aspects of life and thus all sectors of the economy. Yet, the reaction of space and society to the pandemic varied from region to region and from town to town.

Russian economic geographers responded to the challenge of the pandemic with copious research publications. Some works explore the course of the pandemic in selected territories; others look at how the virus spread across Russian regions on a national scale. Stepan Zemtsov and Vyacheslav Baburin conclude that, at early stages, i. e. during the first two waves, the pandemic spread across Russia according to the diffusion of innovations principle [1; 2]. Natalya Zubarevich and Sergey Safronov link specialisation in car production and exporting industries (oil extraction, diamond mining, non-ferrous metallurgy) to maximum economic damage suffered by Russian regions [3]. Similar results have been reported for the Kaliningrad region by Larisa Yemelyanova and Anna Lyalina [4]. At the same time, a regional specialisation in medical supply manufacturing gave an impetus to international trade [5].

The data collected nationwide require refinement, which, for some regions has been carried out by local researchers [6—8]. Little effort has been made so far to analyse the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across Russian macro-regions. Such an analysis is particularly important for the Baltic region, one of Russia's most export-oriented territories. The automotive industry, whose vulnerability to the pandemic crisis has been repeatedly noted in the literature, is key to the economies of St. Petersburg, as well as the Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions.

In exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that research not only considers the economic and geographical factors of a region, but also takes into account its physical and environmental conditions. Evidence from Vicent Rios and Lisa Gianmoena's work on Italy suggests that temperature and humidity are crucial factors in the spread of the virus, alongside social ties and contacts [9]. Thus, a comprehensive approach would involve examining the influence of the Baltic Sea, which extends to varying degrees across several regions, including St. Petersburg, Leningrad, Kaliningrad, Novgorod, Pskov, Murmansk, and the Republic of Karelia, as highlighted by Klemeshev et al.

Defining the Baltic macro-region as a geographical area having a common economic specialisation and similar physical and geographical conditions makes it possible to pose the question explored in this study: what were the specific characteristics of the spread of the COVID-19 infection in the Baltic region? Finding an answer to this question requires examining the internal differential of the spatial diffusion of the pandemic and investigating the processes taking place in the Baltic macro-region in the Russian context. This approach seems to be relevant and reasonable against the background of insufficient scholarly attention paid to the Covid-related properties of the spaces of regions facing the inevitable challenges of new viral infections [11]. It is vital to understand how the space of the Russian Baltic region responded to COVID-19 and put forward recommendations based on an analysis of this unintended hands-on training.

Methodology

Our methodology for studying the spatial spread of COVID-19 in the Baltic macro-region is a product of summarising the methodological groundwork laid by Russian and international scholars and adapting it to the limitations imposed by the object of the study. Many authors believe the excess death measure to be the most suitable for analysing the situation in the vast spaces of Russia [12—14]. In some other countries, demographers support its use as a tool to track the course of the pandemic and assess the damage it inflicted [15—18]. Excess mortality was an important medical-demographic indicator of the spread of the pandemic across regions and municipalities.

Other indicators are less accurate as deaths from COVID-19 are not always recorded as such, and the symptoms of the infection often resemble those of other viral illnesses and may be statistically associated with them (e. g. acute respiratory infections). Regional hospitalisation rates do not always correlate with COVID-19 morbidity and mortality.

Amongst quantitative methods, regression analysis was employed most frequently to analyse the factors affecting the national and regional patterns of coronavirus spread. For example, Aleksandr Pilyasov, Natalya Zamyatina and Yegor Kotov proposed a regression model for all Russian regions to explain the dependence of excess deaths rate on the share of people employed in contact-intensive wholesale and retail, manufacturing (large teams working at continuous production facilities), as well as on the proportion of the population over 65 and the number of retail outlets per 1,000 population [19].

The description of the situation in Russia differs significantly from, for example, that in the United States, where excess mortality was associated more with racial composition and political preferences [20]. However, the same strong correlations exist in EU countries and Russian regions: those with the share of senior citizens and the intensity of international trade [21]. Russia differs from some European states, particularly, Italy, in that the traditional core-periphery virus spread models are not fully applicable there, with local sociocultural and institutional factors having a much greater role [19; 22]. Institutional factors seem to be crucial to the investigation of the pandemic in the Russian domestic context.

Some works looking at institutional factors affecting virus spread do not use regression analysis and focus on governmental response to the pandemic instead. Studying EU policy responses to the pandemic has revealed a tendency to abandon reactive measures for long-term strategic solutions: increasing vaccine availability and developing a European framework to control the spread of infections [23]. The response of the UK authorities as regards risk management and political communication, such as awareness campaigns, has been shown to have a number of deficiencies: inconsistency of the decisions made and excessive politicisation [24]. Spanish researchers have proposed an original quantitative model for assessing the lockdown effectiveness, which made it possible to determine the amount of GDP that would have been saved had the lockdown been imposed earlier [25]. Southeast Asia's Covid response policy has been examined by Singaporean experts by analysing local coronavirus regulations [26]. The authors of the study have concluded that the nature of government response was as important in the context of pandemic control as national geographical and economic parameters.

The focus of this research on the Baltic macro-region comprising seven Russian territories complicates the application of regression analysis, which is well suited for larger universes (dozens or hundreds of objects). It would be ill-considered to draw on municipal statistics, such as total and major-cause mortality, when analysing the spatial spread of the pandemic in the Baltic regions of Russia because data on COVID-19 mortality, especially in the first year of the pandemic, are generally recognised as insufficiently reliable due to inaccurate cause of death records, problems with locating COVID-19 deaths, etc.

Thus, we used monthly excess mortality data to track the spread of the pandemic, relying on a qualitative analysis of policy responses to the pandemic instead of conducting a quantitative regression-based analysis. The properties causing the vulnerability of the space of Russia's Baltic region to the spread of COVID-19 have been identified by analysing selected social and economic statistical indicators. Special attention was paid to the extreme values: regional minima and maxima within the universe of Russia's seven Baltic regions under consideration.

An effective way to describe the COVID-related features of the Baltic region's space is by utilizing Manuel Castells' distinction between spaces of places and spaces of flows [27]. The space of places is the conventional form of spatial organization, which governs the interactions between people. In contrast, the space of flows, a novel spatial paradigm that emerged with the rise of information technology, allows social practices to be systematically structured, making exchanges and interactions between actors more predictable and measurable.

The coronavirus pandemic undermines the traditional idea about the virtues and deficiencies of the two types of spaces. Today's global economy gives an advantage to the space of flows as they are more receptive to new information and capital. The spaces of places are inertial and less adaptable to current economic conditions. In a situation where the intensity of human interactions has a substantial impact on the spread of COVID-19, the hermetic spaces of places find themselves in a less vulnerable position than the spaces of flows, which are open to innovations, including harmful (viral) ones.

Methods

The algorithm we developed for the analysis of the spatial diffusion of the pandemic in Russia's Baltic regions draws on the international experience of national and regional studies and includes three stages.

Firstly, the characteristic pattern was identified of changes in excess mortality in Russia's Baltic regions of Russia. The calculation was based on the Rosstat data on excess deaths registered between April 2020 and December 2021 compared to the average for the same months of 2015—2019, weighted per capita without regard to the mortality trend. The weighted indicator was applied to eliminate the effect of the initial low base effect present when the traditional measure of percentage excess of the 2020 absolute mortality rates over the 2015—2019 average.

Secondly, regional and, in some cases, municipal statutory instruments laid in response to the pandemic were analysed, which made it possible to describe the institutional differentiation in the COVID-19 response of Russia's Baltic regions. To this end, the number of the statutory instruments was examined alongside the time of their approval and their stringency; content analysis was conducted to identify what type of spatial diffusion of the virus was targeted by the study measures.

Thirdly, the findings were integrated with the spatial characteristics of concrete Baltic regions, which were determined based on statistical extremes (regional minima and maxima).

Results

An analysis of excess mortality data (Fig. 1) made it possible to distinguish four types of regions with similar monthly changes in the indicator:

a) St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region: excess mortality peaks occur earlier than on average across the country; the peaks are more pronounced in St. Petersburg;

b) the Kaliningrad region and the Republic of Karelia: sharp fluctuations in monthly excess mortality; the peaks coincided with the national average;

c) the Novgorod and Pskov regions: monthly changes and peaks were similar to those observed across the country with the number of excess deaths below the national average;

d) the Murmansk region, an Arctic territory, is a special case: camps of rotational workforce, the region's many closed towns and manufacturing facilities where personnel work in isolated conditions often became COVID-19 hotbeds. Excess mortality had peaks unique to the Baltic region.

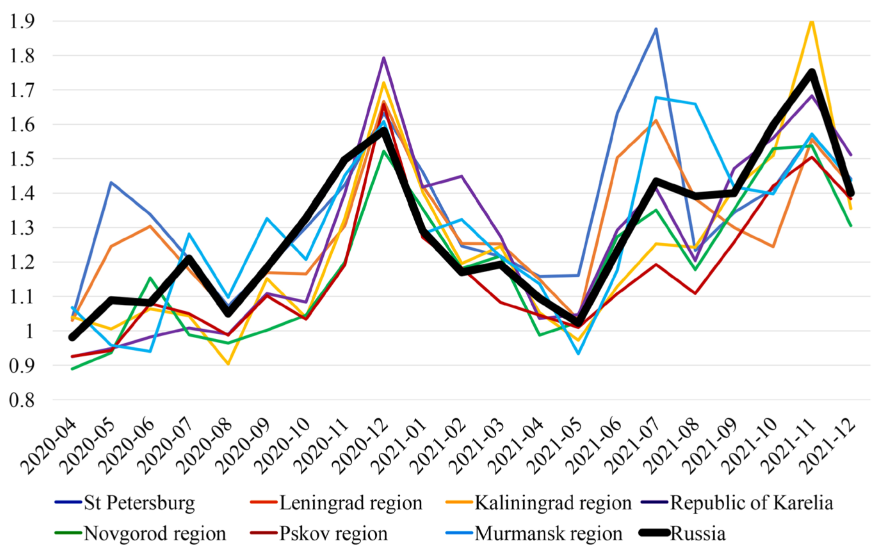

Fig. 1. Ratio of excess deaths in the Baltic region and across Russia

Calculated by B. V. Nikitin, a PhD student at the Faculty of Geography of Lomonosov Moscow State University

To stop the spatial diffusion of COVID-19, some Baltic regions (the spaces of places) imposed restrictions on movement in the local labour market, whilst others (the spaces of flows) tried to limit both horizontal movements in the local labour market and hierarchical ones between the city centre and rural district periphery, a core town and a core town of a lower order.

To find local factors differentiating the course of the pandemic, we examined a set of statutory instruments introducing COVID-19 restrictions (Table 1) and media reports on local outbreaks.

Table 1

A summary of COVID-19 response laws in Russia's Baltic regions (01.01.2020—18.12.2021)

Region	Total number of statutory instruments (SI)	including municipal ones	including cities	SIs mentioning rotational employment	SIs mentioning lockdown and related measures
St. Petersburg	803	None	None	0	9
Leningrad region	797	Over 550	Over 50	0	69
Kaliningrad region	572	Over 200	Over 200	0	82
Republic of Karelia	389	None	None	4	10
Pskov region	710	Over 200	Over 75	10	107
Novgorod region	489	Over 50	Over 30	6	6
Murmansk region	1098	Over 450	Over 350 (including 155 in closed towns)	4	37

Source: calculated by the authors using the ConsultantPlus legal research database.

The largest body of COVID-19 response legislation was introduced in the Murmansk region, whose unique spatial features produced a specific COVID-19 situation. The region's closed towns were mentioned in 155 municipal and regional regulations adopting regional and federal measures to the peculiarities of the local economy, lifestyle of the communities residing in the region, and the Arctic climate, geography and transport arrangements. Municipalities of the Leningrad region were most prolific in terms of Covid response legislation, having issued more statutory instruments than their counterparts in other regions. Most of these instruments governed measures introduced in the municipalities whose relationship with the core-centre of St. Petersburg can be described by the von Thünen's model. The Kaliningrad region was the leader in the number of COVID-19 regulations brought in by city districts, which points to the largely urban system of settlement in the territory. The Republic of Karelia adopted an extremely centralised approach to COVID-19 responses with few regulations adopted at the municipal level: the regional authorities made decisions applicable to all the municipalities. The Pskov region was exceptionally active in introducing lockdown measures, such as sweeping travel restrictions, to combat the pandemic. It adopted the largest number of regulations pertaining to rotational employment, albeit the latter is practised in the region only at construction sites and to a much lesser degree than in the Murmansk region. The Novgorod region sought a more centralised COVID-19 response with most statutory instruments adopted at the regional level and very few at the level of city and municipal districts.

To determine the timeline of COVID-19 legislation in the Baltic region, we analysed the evolution of the principal regional response act, focusing on the months when amendments were made and new versions produced and tracked legislation activity by month (Tables 2, 3).

The intensity of making amendments and producing a new version of the law follows the pandemic waves as seen in the chart showing monthly changes in excess mortality. In most of the regions, the peak in rule-making coincided with the first wave of the pandemic, which took place between March and June (July) 2020. The second wave triggered a new surge of amendments to the principal statutory instruments (October—December 2020). The third wave did not cause a peak in the amendments and new versions of the law: the legislative efforts were not concentrated in time as it happened earlier. Yet, a cluster of amendments made between October and November 2021 can be seen in the Kaliningrad, Pskov and Novgorod regions and the Republic of Karelia.

Our conclusions about the waves of the pandemic being reflected in rule-making are supported by an analysis of monthly peaks in legislative activity in Russia's Baltic regions. Like in the case of amendments to, and new versions of, the principal statutory instrument, the first cluster is seen between March and July 2020; the second, dispersed, cluster, between October and December 2020; the third one, October and November 2021. The clusters coincide with the pandemic peaks (Table 3).

The stringency of restrictions imposed before COVID-19 vaccines became available was evaluated using a traffic light rating system: red stands for tight restrictions; yellow, moderate; green, lax. Table 4 shows the results of the evaluation.

Table 2

Amendments to the principal regional statutory instrument issued to counter the spread of the COVID-19 infection[1]

Region/Month	2020										2021											
	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
St. Petersburg	7	4	3	6	2	3	2	3	4	4	3	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	1	3	1	0
Leningrad region	4	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kaliningrad region	1	0	0	5	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	5	1
Republic of Karelia	12	12	16	10	5	6	3	5	13	11	7	5	6	1	3	6	1	2	2	6	5	2
Novgorod region	4	7	4	2	3	2	3	4	2	5	2	2	4	3	2	1	4	2	2	4	3	0
Pskov region	0	14	10	7	8	4	2	4	3	4	2	4	2	2	1	3	5	1	1	5	4	2
Murmansk region	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: calculated by the authors using the ConsultantPlus legal research database.

[1] The principal statutory instruments, by region: On measures to control the spread of the COVID-19 infection: *Resolution* of the Government of St. Petersburg of 13 March 2020 № 121; On the introduction of a high-alert state in the Leningrad region for administrative bodies and the Leningrad Regional System for Early Warning and Response in Emergencies and on some measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection in the Leningrad region: Resolution of the Government of the Leningrad region of 13 March 2020 № 117; On the introduction of a high-alert state in the Kaliningrad region for administrative bodies and the Kaliningrad Regional System for Early Warning and Response in Emergencies and on some measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection in the Kaliningrad region: Resolution of the Government of the Kaliningrad region of 16 March 2020 № 134; On the introduction on 12 March 2020 of a high-alert state in the Republic of Karelia for administrative bodies and the Karelian Republican System for Early Warning and Response in Emergencies and on some measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 infection in the Republic of Karelia: Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Karelia of 12 March 2020 № 127-r; On the introduction of a high-alert state: Order of the Governor of the Novgorod region of 06 March 2020 № 97; On measures to ensure security in the Pskov region amid the spread of the COVID-19 infection: Order of the Governor of the Pskov region of 15 March 2020 № 30-UG; On measures to counter the spread of the 2019-ncov infection in the Murmansk region: Resolution of the Governor of the Murmansk region of 16 March 2020 № 47-pg.

Table 3

The timeline of COVID-19 rule-making in Russia's Baltic region (January 2020—December 2021)

Region/Month	2020												2021											
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
St. Petersburg	3	3	53	92	68	63	53	57	25	41	39	79	17	16	24	20	20	23	23	16	14	19	24	11
Leningrad region	1	0	71	100	91	78	42	21	23	40	34	35	13	21	16	13	13	22	35	31	16	31	17	33
Kaliningrad region	1	1	58	83	38	50	37	25	23	21	25	37	9	9	15	13	19	17	15	13	16	19	18	10
Republic of Karelia	2	3	19	49	39	29	19	12	11	20	23	40	6	8	13	8	8	17	17	9	12	11	8	6
Pskov region	1	3	71	117	58	60	46	32	13	26	24	41	13	22	14	16	9	20	19	15	13	38	24	15
Novgorod region	1	2	34	72	62	59	38	30	11	28	18	22	8	9	14	6	4	16	9	7	7	16	9	7
Murmansk region	0	3	107	177	154	145	58	45	21	55	54	78	13	25	17	18	14	19	22	14	6	17	26	10

Source: calculated by the authors using the ConsultantPlus legal research database.

Table 4

An evaluation of the stringency of COVID-19 response measures introduced by regional authorities in 2020

Region	Stringency (traffic light rating)
St. Petersburg	Red
Leningrad region	Yellow
Kaliningrad region	Green
Republic of Karelia	Red
Novgorod region	Green
Pskov region	Green
Murmansk region	Red

A detailed analysis of the Covid-related legislation adopted by Russian regions and municipalities, as seen in the ConsultantPlus legal research database, shows that a distinction exists between national and regional restrictions on travel. In 2020, many regions copied the travel regulations adopted in Moscow and at the federal level. We looked at the unique measures taken by regional authorities to accommodate the course of the pandemic specific to their 'spaces'. Summarising the COVID-19 regulatory framework adopted by all Russian regions in 2020 during the first waves of the pandemic allowed us to distinguish five types of additional travel restrictions: 1) those on intra-regional passenger travel luggage transfer at airports and/or checkpoints (yes/no); 2) the 'extended' version of national regulations on the self-isolation of new arrivals (yes/no); 3) the move to remote working (yes/no) and its details (the category of employers, the percentage of the employees required to work from home); 4) lockdown imposed for selected municipalities at a regional level (rather than mayors and heads of municipalities) (yes/no); 5) fines for violating travel restrictions (yes/no).

Further, all Russian regions, including those of the Baltic macro-region, were rated on a yes/no scale against the five criteria. No region scored the maximum of five. The Republic of Karelia, St. Petersburg and the Murmansk region scored between two and three (red). The Leningrad region raked in the middle with a more 'anxious' agglomeration part abutting St. Petersburg and the more remote periphery (yellow). The Kaliningrad, Novgorod and Pskov regions scored the lowest (green).

Let us look at the types of restrictions by region in effect as of the end of 2020 (Table 5). Mass vaccination had not yet begun at that time, and the non-pharmaceutical measures against a pandemic were as varied as possible.

Table 5

Measures to counter COVID-19 spatial diffusion as of late December 2020

Region	Horizontal diffusion (home — work), public and private transport	Hierarchical diffusion (classical, along land routes)	Comment
St. Petersburg	At least 30 % of employees of city executive bodies moved to remote work, along with people over 65 and with chronic conditions employed by organisations and private entrepreneurs	None	Penalty for the first violation is an administrative fine of 4,000 roubles; for repeated violations or those on public transport, 5,000 roubles
Leningrad region	Employees over 65 years moved to remote work	Individuals driving across the Leningrad region are not allowed to stop before reaching the destination	—

The end of Table 5

Region	Horizontal diffusion (home — work), public and private transport	Hierarchical diffusion (classical, along land routes)	Comment
Kaliningrad region	At least 50 % of office employees moved to remote work, including pregnant women and people with certain conditions	None	—
Republic of Karelia	Remote work, primarily for people over 60 and with certain conditions (unless self-isolation at the workplace is possible). Remote work and self-isolation are a priority for people over 65 and those working in the largest regional settlements	Individuals arriving on business from other Russian regions must have a negative COVID-19 test result received within two days before the arrival	Priority cities and towns for the shift to remote working: Petrozavodsk, Belomorsk, Kem, Kondopoga, Lahdenpokhya, Medvezhyegorsk, Olonets, Pitkyaranta, Pudozh, Segezha, Sortavala, Kostomuksha, Suoyarvi, Louhi, Muezersky, Pryazha
Novgorod region	At least 30 % of employees of city executive bodies moved to remote work, along with employees with certain conditions and pregnant women	None	—
Pskov region	At least 30 % of employees of city executive bodies moved to remote work	None	Masks are not mandatory at places of communal gathering (markets, fairs, shopping malls) but at those associated with certain activities (retail, services provision, work)
Murmansk region	Employees over 65 moved to remote work; at least 50 % of office and management personnel and employees of the regional executive and municipal bodies moved to remote work	Restrictions on non-resident arrivals by car in Kirovsk and Apatity. Individuals with a permit to access restricted areas are required to stop at checkpoints.	The term 'restricted access areas' was introduced to refer to territories where stringent quarantine measures have been introduced.

Source: prepared based on the collection of laws and regulations *Coronavirus (COVID-19). Travel and access restrictions in Russian regions*, as available through the ConultantPlus legal research system.

Scholars investigating the spatial patterns of infection spread compared the process to the diffusion of innovation long before the COVID-19 pandemic [28]. Originally proposed by Torsten Hägerstrand in the 1950s (the work was first published in English in 1967 [29]), the model was developed further by Everett Rogers [30]. They have distinguished three forms of innovation diffusion [31]:

— hierarchical core-periphery diffusion (described in Hägerstrand's classic work) following the nodes of the land transport network and the hierarchical system of core cities of different ranks: from larger to smaller ones;

— horizontal diffusion associated with day-to-day or event-driven communication at places of residence and work or when commuting within the local labour market area;

— relocation diffusion: the transfer of the virus by plane from one pandemic hotbed to another, separated by hundreds or even thousands of kilometres. This type of diffusion was not included in our institutional analysis of regional legal frameworks for COVID-19 as it can be classified as an external factor.

Since St. Petersburg is a federal city with a population density greater than in the other study regions, the local authorities focused on measures to counter horizontal diffusion across the city space and the local labour market area, which includes the contiguous districts of the Leningrad region.

In the Leningrad Region, the key factor behind the spread of the virus was proximity to St. Petersburg (the types of monthly excess mortality change coinciding in the two regions is indicative enough). The influence of St. Petersburg on the diffusion of the pandemic in the Leningrad region can also be seen in the regulation of zoning municipal entities according to the stringency of the restrictions imposed on business entities.[2] The Vsevolozhsky, Vyborg, Gatchinsky, Tikhvinsky and Tosnensky districts were included in the first zone associated with the highest risk. All of them are in close proximity to St. Petersburg, constituting the periphery of its agglomeration.

In the other two zones of the Leningrad region, the restrictions were less tight. In the first zone, single-window service centres provided a limited range of services by appointment only; the clients were required to wear masks when visiting the centres. In the second zone (the Volosovsky, Kirishsky, Kirovsky, Lomonosovsky, Luga, Priozersky, Slantsevsky and Sosnovy Bor districts), the centres offered all the services within their remit; making an appointment and wearing a

[2] *Resolution* of the Government of *the Leningrad region of* 5 November 2020 № 716, *Official Legal Research Website*, URL: http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/4700202011060001 (accessed 26.05.2022).

mask were also mandatory. Finally, in the third zone (the Boksitogorsk, Volkhov, Kingisepp, Lodeynopolsk and Podporozhsk districts), all the services were provided, and masks were obligatory.

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted a specific feature of the region: it consists of two distinct parts. The first one belongs to the St. Petersburg agglomeration, with many social and economic ties connecting it to the city, and the region's COVID-19 policy response concentrated on this part. The other one has its own local centres, which turned into hotbeds of infection and transmitted it further to their rural periphery.

The Leningrad region was affected by horizontal and spatial diffusion of COVID-19. In terms of horizontal diffusion, the region was both a source and adopter of the infection. Although many residents of the region commute to St. Petersburg, a number of local towns (for instance, Gatchina and Vsevolozhsk) act as cores attracting the workforce from the periphery. This is evidence of the hierarchical nature of agglomeration links: in addition to the main centre (St. Petersburg), which pulls the flows of information, goods and people, there are second-order cores serving as partial alternatives to the main centre.

The Kaliningrad region took another important measure in addition to moving at least half of the employees to remote working: businesses, both legal entities and private entrepreneurs working in the transport industry, which had sustained substantial losses, received subsidies.[3] The latter fact stresses the significance of inter-municipality passenger traffic for the local economy: the density of hard surface roads in the region was 527 km/km^2 in 2020 against 64 km/km^2 on average in the country, 47 km/km^2 in the Republic of Karelia and 24 km/km^2 in the Murmansk region. Sergey Tarkhov has demonstrated that a territory's accessibility by car has a key role in the spread of COVID-19 once the virus has entered it by plane [32].

The statutory instruments adopted in the Republic of Karelia governed intraregional and interregional rotational employment.[4]The instruments approximated those in effect in the Murmansk region, where access control was introduced for rotational workers.[5]

[3] *Resolution* of the Government of the Kaliningrad region of 26 November 2021 № 766, *Official Legal Research Website*, URL: http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/3900202111300001 (accessed 26.05.2022).

[4] Order of the Head of the Republic of Karelia of 12 March 2020 № 127-r, *Official website of the Republic of Karelia*, URL: https://gov.karelia.ru/coronaviridae/5837/ (accessed 26.05.2022).

[5] *Resolution* of the Government of the Murmansk region of 4 April 2020 № 175-PP, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, URL: https://rg.ru/documents/2020/04/05/murmansk-post175-reg-dok.html (accessed 26.05.2022).

The factor of rotational employment was decisive for the spatial spread of the pandemic in the Murmansk region. For instance, an outbreak of coronavirus infection amongst rotational workers occurred in late April 2020 in the village of Belokamenka, where the Offshore Superfacility Construction Yard was being built at the time. The absolute number of cases was several times the regional average.[6] Another targeted restriction peculiar to the Murmansk region was a temporary ban on entry to the region's many closed towns.[7] This measure applied, in particular, to the closed towns of Severomorsk, Zaozyorsk and Ostrovnoy. The Republic of Karelia and the Murmansk region tailored their policy response to prevent both the horizontal and hierarchical diffusion of the infection, i.e. the spread of COVID-19 within the local labour market area and following the core-periphery pattern (from cities to villages, from larger urban cores to smaller urban cores).

In many countries, for example, Sweden, the infection did not always spread exclusively from larger cities to less densely populated areas: often the hotbeds were small isolated facilities, such as retirement homes [33]. The virus then spread from isolated sites to adjacent, unrestricted areas.

The problem of isolated hotbeds of infection was also acute in the Pskov region, where COVID-19 struck retirement homes, in-patient psychiatric care facilities, convents and monasteries.[8] Although such facilities posed a challenge in other regions as well, in Pskov, the scale of outbreaks was more considerable and the number of hotbeds greater.

Comparable to Pskov in both areas (55,401 km^2 and 55,399 km^2 respectively) and population size (592,400 and 620,200 people respectively), the Novgorod region shows a similar pattern of excess mortality and proportion of employment in manufacturing, also experienced outbreaks of the type discussed above.[9]

The Pskov and Novgorod regions adopted regulations with a view to counter the horizontal rather than hierarchical diffusion of COVID-19. Since the two territories do not have large agglomerations, their legislative efforts focused on preventing horizontal diffusion, which may point to the difficulty of moving to remote working and the need to maintain a high intensity of personal contacts during the pandemic.

[6] Increase in COVID-19 cases stops at rotational worker camp in Belokamenka, 2020, *Interfax,* URL: https://www.interfax.ru/russia/706151 (accessed 26.05.2022).

[7] *Resolution* of the Government of the Murmansk region of 4 апреля 2020 № 175-PP, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, URL: https://rg.ru/documents/2020/04/05/murmansk-post175-reg-dok.html (accessed 26.05.2022).

[8] Right hotspots of COVID-19 in Pskov region, 2021, *Delovoy Peterburg*, URL: https://www.dp.ru/a/2021/01/12/V_Pskovskoj_oblasti_ostal (accessed 26.05.2022).

[9] Valdai monastery closed to public due to coronavirus, 2020, *Interfax-Tourism*, URL: https://tourism.interfax.ru/ru/news/articles/73403/ (accessed 26.05.2022).

Of particular interest are the Chudovsky and Malovishersky districts of the Novgorod region, located near the border with the Leningrad region, where the disease situation was much worse than in the regional centre and the Novgorod district skirting the city. The explosive increase in incidence resulted in a temporary closure of road and rail links to these municipalities.[10] Such a drastic restrictive measure was necessitated by the two districts lying within a 1.5—2 hours' drive from the outskirts of the city.

3. Analysis of regional and municipal COVID-19 regulation and investigation of regional digital media, such as *Delovoy Peterburg* and *53 Novosti*, have revealed an internal differentiation of the space of the Baltic macro-region: it includes both spaces of flows and spaces of places.

In the regions dominated by the spaces of flows, the main factors affecting the spread of COVID-19 were the openness of the economy and labour mobility. These areas are the Kaliningrad region and the St. Petersburg agglomeration comprising the city of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region (mainly the areas bordering the city). The most significant risks for the space of flows are associated with developed transport infrastructure and greater mobility of labour causing a rapid spread of infection. In the regions classified as such, the main challenge faced by the authorities was the timely move to remote working to reduce the passenger flow.

In the regions dominated by the spaces of places, the central role in the spread of the pandemic was played by isolated hotbeds: small closed towns, in-patient care facilities, retirement homes, etc. (Table 6). Here, the authorities had to deal with local outbreaks, often by imposing lockdowns.

Table 6

Local hotbeds of the pandemic in Russia's Baltic regions

Region	Predominant space type	Types of local COVID-19 hotbeds	Risk factors
St. Petersburg, Leningrad region, Kaliningrad region	Space of flows	—	Rapid virus spread
Republic of Karelia, Murmansk region	Space of places	Camps for rotational workforce	Infection coming from other towns and municipalities

[10] Traffic jam on road to 'closed' Chudovo district, 2020, *53 Novosti,* URL: https://53news.ru/novosti/56847-na-v-ezde-v-zakrytyj-chudovskij-rajon-skopilas-probka.html (accessed 26.05.2022).

The end of Table 6

Region	Predominant space type	Types of local COVID-19 hotbeds	Risk factors
Murmansk region	Space of places	Restricted areas	Rapid infection spread in isolated spaces
Pskov region, Novgorod region	Space of places	Convents and monasteries	Rapid infection spread in isolated spaces
	Space of places	In-patient psychiatric care facilities; retirement homes	Rapid infection spread in isolated spaces; infection coming from other towns and municipalities

The COVID-19 regulations reflected the priorities of regional authorities in combating the spread of the infection. In the spaces of flows, the primary objective was to reduce the intensity of the flows and seek ways to identify the infected within them. In the space of places, the authorities had to focus on isolating local hotbeds.

The results of the qualitative analysis aimed to identify the spaces of flows and the spaces of places coincide with the typology of regions based on monthly excess mortality patterns. The Pskov and Novgorod regions once again fall into the same category; Kaliningrad is grouped with St. Petersburg and the Leningrad regions; the Murmansk Region with the Republic of Karelia.

Quantitative analysis is not sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the processes causing the differences in the spread of the infection. It must be supplemented by a qualitative analysis of regional COVID-19 legislation and digital news outlets (this study examines reports by *Interfax*, *Delovoy Peterburg* and the Novgorodian website *53 Novosti*). Similar values of the indicators could conceal different forms of space organisation and, as a consequence, differences in the spread of the pandemic.

Discussion: a Covid-based assessment of the spaces of Russia's Baltic regions

Summarising international research into the COVID-19 pandemic makes it possible to outline several priority topics to be explored in the context of Russian regions. These include a regression search for new factors affecting COVID-19 morbidity and mortality; looking for new metrics of the impact of the infection on regional economies; investigating the effect of COVID-19 on intraregional and interregional migration; using GIS and big data technologies to track the spatial spread of the pandemic; modelling the pre-vaccine spread of the pandemic particularly to assess the effectiveness of non-pharmaceutical measures to combat the pandemic; examining the impact of the pandemic on regional industries, such as tourism; analysing attitudes of local regional communities to vaccination, travel restrictions, etc.

The global challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping many familiar social processes and phenomena, such as urbanisation and the internal organisation of cities. This observation was made at the peak of the first waves of the pandemic by well-known economic geographers Richard Florida, Edward Glaeser and others. For economic geography, this means putting the problems of communication and human contacts on the research agenda. These include, in particular, the contact intensity associated with different kinds of economic activity, the configuration of regional and local social networks, the spatial mobility of talent, transport channels as infrastructure social communication rather than traditional freight transport, etc. The points (platforms), channels and structures of human/social/industrial contacts are becoming priority areas of research.

In this vein, an attempt was made to investigate the spaces of Russia's Baltic regions by considering the COVID-19 pandemic and regional authorities' restrictive measures as a test, an experiment revealing specific communication-related properties. Out of the whole pool of statistical indicators, 14 indicators seemed suitable for this purpose: area; total population; population density; density of paved public roads per 1000 km^2; railway density per 10 000 km^2; the share of paved roads in the total length of public roads; the number of private cars per 1,000 population; the proportions of regional rural and urban population (the degree of urbanisation); the share of the population of the regional centre in the total regional population (monocentric or polycentric structure, the intensity of the agglomeration effect); the proportion of retail chains in total trade (an indicator of urbanisation); the proportion of households and businesses with broadband Internet access (in the total number of surveyed households and organisations); the percentage of arrivals and departures from the region in the total number of arrivals and departures (openness to migration); the proportion of post-working age population (the degree of communication activity).

Together, these measures describe the unique features of each space of Russia's Baltic regions from the perspective of communication, which has the key role in the spatial diffusion of COVID-19, and the measures taken by the regional authorities. For example, ubiquitous broadband access simplified the move to remote working. The extremes (minima and maxima for the entire sample of seven regions) were identified for each region and for each study indicator to thoroughly describe the specific properties of local spaces (for example, St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region are the largest by population; the Republic of Karelia, by area, etc.).

Then, the regional indicators were examined to reveal the unique clustering of their distinct values within the sample into integrated conjugate chains characterising the specific properties of space. These properties manifested themselves in outbreaks, excess mortality, and the special measures taken by regional authorities during the pandemic. This way, a continuum of spatial features — restrictive measures emerges, supporting the conclusion that each case is unique.

A direct formalised integration of the selected indicators into a single index is impossible due to their varying significance. Therefore, an expert attempt was made to obtain a qualitative but systematic picture of regional Covid spaces.

St. Petersburg had the highest per capita morbidity and excess mortality during the first waves of the pandemic due to the super-intensity of all socio-economic processes and interactions (all the density indicators had the maximum values in the sample). The Leningrad region is organised according to the von Thünen's model. The inner rings, the closest to St. Petersburg, fall into the city's morbidity rhythm through commuting-driven horizontal diffusion. The outer rings develop the rhythm of relocation diffusion, similar to that of the Pskov and Novgorod regions. The maximum number of municipalities (205) and the maximum share of the rural population in the sample prompted the regional authorities to systematise the COVID-19 restrictions by setting up three zones according to the degree of stringency.

The Kaliningrad region is an exclave region characterized by a significant population density, a prominent regional centre, and a well-developed network of high-quality roads and railways. Intensive hierarchical and horizontal diffusion of the virus could have occurred here, but moderate intra-regional migration and outward mobility (the exclave is isolated from mainland Russia) created natural barriers to the spread of the pandemic despite the intense internal social and economic activity.

In the Republic of Karelia, the regional centre is home to about half the population, which translates into a high degree of urbanisation. The republic has the largest territory and the lowest population density among the Russian Baltic regions. The spread of COVID-19 within the region was primarily confined to intra-city spaces, having a well-developed telecommunications network. However, the rural areas remain poorly connected to the city centres due to the general lack of high-quality roads and railways.

The Novgorod region with its polycentric settlement and considerable car traffic along numerous but poor-quality roads experienced the classic hierarchical diffusion of the virus from its numerous urban centres to the rural hinterland. There, COVID-19 mostly affected elderly people residing in 'closed' spaces, such as retirement homes (the Novgorod and Pskov regions have the highest proportions of pensioners). The situation was very similar in the Pskov region, whose space has many features in common with Novgorod.

In the Murmansk region, the peculiarities of its space, as well as demographic and socio-economic processes, made COVID-19 a disease of the urban working-age population, including rotational workers. Relocation diffusion played a major role in this region characterised by openness to migration. Lockdowns were often imposed in the closed towns and camps for workers. The introduction of quarantine measures was simplified by the local working-age households being avid Internet users. Whilst horizontal diffusion was hampered by the insufficient road density, whilst classic hierarchical diffusion reinforced by a polycentric settlement structure was conspicuous in the region.

Conclusions

The spread of the pandemic had some specific features in Russia's Baltic region. None of the territories exhibited an excess mortality pattern similar to the national average (April 2020—December 2021). A comparison of the Baltic macro-region with the Far Eastern federal district shows that the territories of the latter had much greater fluctuations in excess mortality.

A month-by-month analysis of the intensity of COVID-19 rule-making across the Baltic regions of Russia has confirmed the existence of three pandemic waves: the first cluster of March—July 2020, the diffuse second peak of October-December 2020 and the third cluster of October—November 2021 largely coincided with the peaks in excess mortality.

Regional policy responses to the spatial spread of COVID-19 were differentiated by the type of diffusion into horizontal diffusion restrictions affecting the local labour market (commuting) and hierarchical diffusion restrictions limiting traffic along a region's motorways.

A special case was camps of rotational workers and isolated hotbeds, such as covenants, monasteries, retirement homes and in-patient psychiatric care facilities, where the number and scale of the pandemic outbreaks were particularly significant and lockdowns were often imposed by the authorities.

The Russian regions comprising the Baltic macro-region differ in the pattern of the pandemic spread. Horizontal diffusion of COVID-19 through local labour markets was observed in St. Petersburg, the Pskov, Novgorod and Kaliningrad regions, whilst the pandemic entered the Republic of Karelia, the Leningrad and Murmansk regions penetrated through both horizontal and hierarchical diffusion, as indicated by regional regulations.

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TOURISM

TERRITORIAL STRUCTURE OF INBOUND AND DOMESTIC TOURISM IN THE BALTIC STATES

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This paper examines the transformation of the territorial structure of tourism in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The spatial and temporal organisation of tourism in these countries has undergone significant changes since they became independent and joined the EU. These changes have affected the geography of tourist flows and destinations of interest. This study aims to define the geographical and economic peculiarities of the development of tourism in the Baltic States and to identify the central, peripheral and semi-peripheral regions. Elements of the centre-periphery structure were identified through cluster analysis covering the period 2009—2019. Eleven indicators were used to determine the level of socio-economic development, the state of inbound and domestic tourism and the degree of transport infrastructure development. The results of the study suggest that there have been progressive changes in the territorial structure of tourism in the Baltic States. The main centres of attraction are the capitals and their adjacent territories. Horizontal contacts with more developed regions of the EU states and vertical interaction with other regions of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have a significant impact on the development of tourism activities. Central regions are dominant in terms of attracting tourist flows. This is characteristic of a highly polarized tourism structure. However, many semi-peripheral and peripheral regions have lately improved their position, being integrated into national and cross-border tourism routes and increasing outreach in the tourism market.

Keywords:
tourism, territorial structure, cluster analysis, Baltic States, centre-periphery

Introduction

The Baltic States — Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia — entered the global tourist market quite recently, after gaining independence in 1991. Today, tourism is a major factor in their socio-economic development. According to the World Trav-

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el and Tourism Council,[1] the industry accounted for 12.1 % of Estonia's GDP in 2019, compared to 10.3 % worldwide. In Latvia and Lithuania, this proportion is also significant, albeit below the global average: 7.7 % and 6.0 % respectively. Moreover, tourism, one of the most labour-intensive sectors of the economy, creates new jobs. Estonia's tourism industry is the largest contributor to national employment (11.7 %). In Latvia and Lithuania, the share of those employed in tourism was 8.3 % and 4.8 % respectively.

A comprehensive indicator for comparing tourism development at a national level is the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report. In the 2019 document,[2] the Baltic States ranked in the top half of the 136-strong list, which points to the attractiveness of doing business in their tourism markets. Estonia ranked 46th, Latvia 53rd and Lithuania 59th. Amongst the key competitive advantages, experts name a well-developed healthcare system, a low crime rate, a relatively high level of the locals' ICT skills and affordable prices of services. Constraints to competitiveness include insufficient openness towards international travel and the paucity of natural and cultural resources.

In 2019, the total number of arrivals in Estonia was 3.3 million; in Latvia, 1.9 million; in Lithuania, 2.9 million.[3] The length of stay in the Baltic states varies from year to year, due to both global events and the low-base effect. In 2019, 4.2 million tourist overnight stays were registered in Estonia; 7.8 million, in Latvia; 3.7 million, in Lithuania. In the 21st century, the number of arrivals and the length of stay in the three countries have been primarily affected by economic crises and geopolitical changes. Traditionally, the main inbound tourism flows (90 %) in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia come from the European region. The main countries of visitor origin can be divided into three groups: neighbouring states, historically related countries and leaders in the European market [1].

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia concentrated at first on promoting their metropolitan regions, which attracted the most interest from tourists. But, over time, the visibility of other regions of the Baltic States has increased, affecting the geography of inbound and domestic tourism in these countries. These regions, neighbouring the most attractive destinations, embarked on becoming part of tourist routes and drawing in more visitors. For example, the tourism exchange between Riga and Pierīga developed over the years by virtue of a serviceable

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[1] Economic Impact Reports, 2022, *World Travel & Tourism Council,* URL: https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact (accessed 15.08.2022).

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[3] UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, vol. 19, iss. 4, July 2021, *UNWTO,* URL: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/envir_e/unwto_barom21.pdf (accessed 15.08.2022).

transport network and a shared tourism product. The share of this exchange in the total tourist travel increased from 15 % in 2009 to 17 % in 2019, whilst that of international arrivals reached 25 % in 2019.[4]

This study seeks to identify and describes the territorial structure of the tourism space and how it has changed in the 21st century due to the growing interaction between the Baltic States, their neighbours and other European countries. The spatial structure development is examined from the standpoint of the centre-periphery model of tourism space. The identification of core regions, less developed peripheral territories and intermediate semi-peripheral areas provides a rationale for spatial development strategies for tourism and makes it possible to increase the efficiency of tourism destination management by distinguishing between driver regions and territories in need of support.

State of research

A surge of scientific interest in tourism development in the Baltic States as a cohesive region coincided with the independence of these countries. Agita Šļara and Iveta Druvaskalne have examined the role tourism played when the three states were joining the common European space [2]. Russian geographers focus on international cooperation in tourism and its specific spatial forms, such as transboundary tourist and recreational regions (TTRR). Irina Dragileva, Elena Kropinova, Andrei Manakov and other authors investigate in their works transboundary region building in the Baltic area in terms of tourism and recreation. They have described the essence, features, factors and patterns of TTRR building at macro-, meso- and micro-levels identified the most effective tools of transboundary cooperation in tourism and proposed a typology of Baltic TTRRs [3—8]. Svetlana Kondratyeva (Stepanova) has evaluated the potential for cross-border interactions between neighbouring regions in the north of the Baltic macroregion [9; 10]. Despite the growing number of works exploring various aspects of tourism-focused cross-border cooperation and transboundary interactions in the Baltic region, tourism and recreation are a relatively new object for cross-border research. In Russian recreational geography, only the first steps have been made towards a theory and methodology to study the tourism potential of state borders and transboundary tourism region building.

Another set of works looks at special types of tourism in the Baltic region and their territorial organisation. It is worth noting the contributions by Melanie Smith on health tourism in the Baltic area [11]; Virgil Nicula and Simona Spânu, rural and gastronomic tourism [12], Aleksei Anokhin, Elena Kropinova and Edu-

[4] Hotels and other tourist accommodation establishments in regions, cities and municipalities, 2009—2021, *Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia*, URL: https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/en/OSP_PUB/START__NOZ__TU__TUV/TUV050/ (accessed 15.08.2022).

ardas Spiriajevas, geotourism [13]. Many works investigate the general state of the tourism industry in the Baltic States [14—17], ways to improve its competitiveness [18; 19] and COVID-19 relief measures [20—22].

Of special interest are the works by Baltic authors employing a comprehensive approach to explore the tourism systems of each of the three states. A significant contribution to the study of the Estonian tourism system has been made by Jeff Jarvis [23], Heli Müristaja [24], Heli Tooman [25]; Latvian tourism, by Ilgvars Abols, Andris Klepers, Maija Rozite [26]; Lithuanian, by Eduardas Spiriajevas [27], Algirdas Stanaitis, Saulius Stanaitis [28].

The centre-periphery model, showing how central and peripheral areas interact as they develop, is the key to a theoretical justification for transformations in the territorial structure of inbound and domestic tourism in the Baltic States. Developed by John Friedmann in the framework of the regional approach, the model has been extended to tourism. It may facilitate assessing tourism space polarisation at different hierarchical levels. The three-tiered spatial structure of tourism has been considered in terms of tourism by Anna Aleksandrova, Viliyan Krastev, Ivan Pirozhnik and others [29—31].

Recently, the academic interest in tourism and recreation in the Baltic region and its constituent countries has increased. The literature is growing, and the topic is being gradually recognised as a major research problem. Yet, the territorial structure of tourism in the Baltics is still not fully understood, remaining a peripheral interest of Russian and international recreational geographers.

Materials and methods

To develop a classification of regions of the Baltic States according to advances in tourism, we used a statistical method consisting in automatic data processing and collating, namely cluster analysis. The term was coined by the American psychologist Robert Tryon in 1939 [32]. A definite advantage of cluster analysis is its applicability to processing a large data set with several variables and classifying objects based on this information. Two necessary conditions for classification are simultaneously met in this case: each object falls into one cluster only; the clusters cover all the objects. A cluster method classification was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics statistical analysis software.

Amongst the disadvantages of the cluster approach is the subjectivity of the indicator selection and, consequently, groups sharing common features. Thus, it is important to optimise the selected indicators as, on the one hand, a strong direct correlation between the parameters or their small number may cause problems with distinguishing meaningful groups, and, on the other, a substantial quantity of parameters may result in a profusion of small groups comprising very few objects and unable to cover the entire system [33].

Creating a centre-periphery model of tourism and recreation space requires distinguishing clusters at the lowest hierarchical level for which there is statistical information. This study relies on the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) developed by Eurostat to collate and analyse statistical data across territorial levels. Using this system ensures the representativeness of a concurrent study of the three states. Since the Baltics are quite small in terms of area, this study will focus on NUTS 3 level, which represents lesser territories. The clustering will be carried out at that level as well.[5]

The study encompasses a decade-long period, spanning from 2009 to 2019. The selection was determined by the existing dynamic data series from the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian statistical authorities. Information on the data of interest was taken from the official websites of the statistical offices of the Baltic States: Statistics Estonia,[6] Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia[7] and Statistics Lithuania.[8]

Taking into account the above and drawing on earlier findings [29; 34], we used 11 relative indicators to develop the classification. These indicators can be grouped as follows.

— The indicator of the overall socioeconomic development of a territory: GDP per capita (in current euros). According to the estimates of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the dynamics of tourist flows depend directly on GDP growth/decline. An average annual economic growth of about 4 % or higher translates into tourism development at an even faster rate. The opposite situation arises when the rate of economic growth is below 2 %. In 1975—2000, GDP increased at an annual average rate of 2 %; GDP grew by 3.5 % on average annually and international tourism by 4.7 %, i. e., 1.3 times faster.[9]

— Indicators of the role a region plays in inbound tourism: the inbound arrival rate (‰), i. e. the annual number of international tourist arrivals per 1,000 inhabitants; a region's share in total annual inbound arrivals (%), a measure of regional contribution to tourist reception; the average length of stay of international tourists, i. e. the ratio between overnight stays at regional hotels and similar premises to the total number of international tourist arrivals.

[5] NUTS, 2022, *SIMAP,* URL: https://simap.ted.europa.eu/web/simap/nuts (accessed 15.08.2022).

[6] Estonia Statistics, URL: https://www.stat.ee/en (accessed 15.08.2022).

[7] Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, URL: https://www.csb.gov.lv/en/sakums (accessed 15.08.2022).

[8] Lithuania Statistics, URL: https://www.stat.gov.lt/home (accessed 15.08.2022).

[9] International Trade Statistics, 2015, *WTO*, URL: https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2015_e/its15_highlights_e.pdf (accessed 15.08.2022).

— Indicators of a region's role in domestic tourism: domestic tourist arrival rate (‰); a region's share in total annual domestic tourist arrivals (%); the average length of resident tourists' stay in a region.

— Indicators of transport infrastructure development: availability of air transport facilities in a region, planes being the principal means of transportation today (2 points are awarded for an international airport; 1 for a local airport; 0 for no airport; if there are several airports region, the points are summed).

— Indicators of tourism infrastructure development: density of hospitality facilities, i.e. the number of beds at a region's tourist accommodation establishments per 1 km^2.

— Indicators for the presence of objects raising awareness of the country and highlighting its uniqueness in the eyes of international visitors: UNESCO World Heritage sites and contenders located in Estonia[10], Latvia[11] and Lithuania[12] (2 points awarded for a World Heritage site; 1 for a contender; if there are several such objects, the points are summed).

— It is worth noting that tourism statistics impose a limitation on the choice of the study period and groups of indicators: new methods for statistical data collection and indicator calculation were adopted before the countries acceded to the EU and in their first years as member states. But for the study to be fully comprehensive, some other indicators left out of the list should be explored as well, namely, rail and road density (useful in describing transport infrastructure), the contribution of tourism to the economy of each region and human resources available for the tourism industry. Unfortunately, these indicators have received little research attention due to the failure of some regions to provide the necessary data.

The accuracy of calculations lies at the heart of this study. Particularly, data standardisation was performed to prevent information distortion. The conventional method of the z-transform was employed to reduce the data to a single range of values [33]. Ward's method was used as well, which allows the identification of a greater number of clusters even when inter-cluster differences are slight. Largely in line with this technique, the Euclidean distance was calculated between the points since larger clusters are composed of micro-clusters having a minimum increase in squared Euclidean distances to the mean values of individ-

[10] Estonia, 2022, *UNESCO,* URL: https://en.unesco.org/countries/estonia (accessed 15.08.2022).

[11] Latvia, 2022, *UNESCO,* URL: https://en.unesco.org/countries/latvia (accessed 15.08.2022).

[12] Lithuania, 2022, *UNESCO,* URL: https://en.unesco.org/countries/lithuania (accessed 15.08.2022).

ual variables [36]. The Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to confirm the method selection and cluster analysis results. The model was chosen based on the lowest sum of asymptotic errors.

The cluster tree, a horizontal dendrogram, makes hierarchical clustering a convenient method to obtain a picture of the possible level of cluster identification. For further cluster analysis, objects are grouped in such a way as to obtain clusters with the most distinct features. In this case, another, iterative, cluster analysis approach is useful, namely, k-means clustering. It is taken to determine the centres of a cluster according to a predetermined number and perform further grouping of objects around the resulting value. The centre of a cluster is the aggregate of average index values of all the objects within it.

This approach is used primarily to identify the features according to which clusters are labelled as the centres, semi-periphery and periphery. The mean values describe the characteristics of a particular cluster. Changes in the mean values of different clusters can point to variations in the weight of certain factors happening over time. The mean index values describe the 'ideal' region for the cluster in question, therefore, when these values change, regions can move from one group into another.

Obviously, cluster analysis based on the selected indicators does not provide an exhaustive picture. Adjustments reflecting the specifics of the regions' development, economic situation and geographical position were made to produce the final version of the classification. The next stage consisted of analysing each cluster in view of the total number of clusters identified and the mean values of applicable indicators. The objective was to determine a cluster's place within the centre-periphery structure of tourism space, which changes over time. The classification was visualised in cartographic form.

Four clusters were identified in the course of the cluster analysis of the Baltics' regions. The areas with the highest scores were classified as the core; those with intermediate ones, as semi-periphery; the rest, as periphery. Periphery is divided into two smaller clusters: advanced and deep periphery, the latter associated with the lowest study indicator values.

Results and discussion

Figure 1 shows the spatial structure of tourism in the Baltics and how it changed between 2009 and 2019.

The core includes a the capital (Riga, Latvia) and capital regions: Vilnius county (Lithuania) and Northern Estonia (Estonia).

The semi-peripheral regions differ in two respects. Some boast historical cities (Tartu in South Estonia) or major seaside and health resort (Druskininkai in

Alytus County, Klaipėda in Klaipėda County, Jūrmala and Ķemeri in Pierīga); others have both. West Estonia, for example, is home to the resort town of Pärnu and the Kuressaare Castle on the island of Saaremaa, a UNESCO World Heritage contender. In Kaunas County, there are Kaunas, the former capital of Lithuania, and the health resort Birštonas.

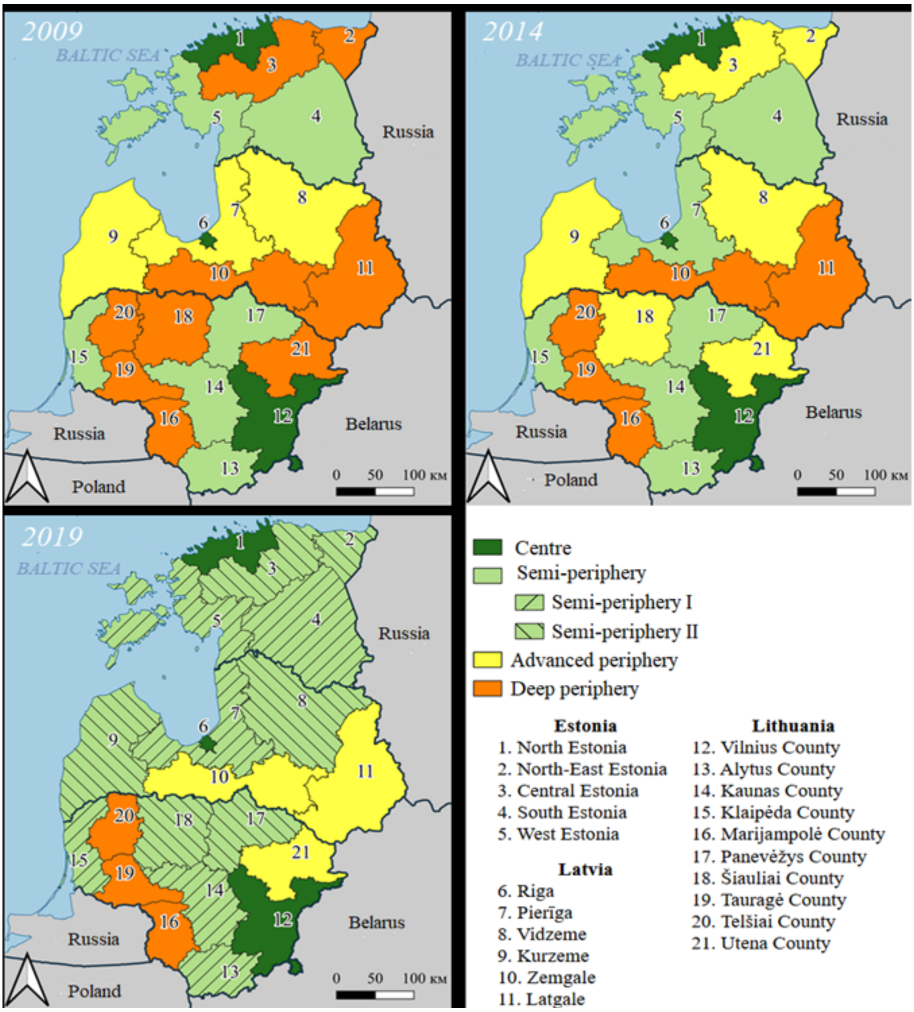

Fig. 1. The centre-periphery structure of tourism in the Baltic States, 2009—2019

Peripheral regions do not have a clear specialisation in the tourism market: tending to take advantage of different opportunities to increase their visibility as tourism destinations, they do not have strict preferences.

Table 1 provides some quantitative characteristics of the centre, semi-periphery and periphery of the Baltic States' tourism space, which differ dramatically in key dimensions. This difference does not disappear over time, testifying to the stability of the core-periphery structure.

Table 1

Mean indicator values for four clusters in 2009, 2014 and 2019

Indicator	Centre			Semi-periphery			Advanced periphery			Deep periphery		
	2009	2009	2014	2019	2009	2014	2009	2009	2014	2009	2009	2014
GDP per capita in current euros	17.86	11.5	20.12	17.5	11.5	10.2	6.54	8.35	7.52	8.35	8.74	8.43
Domestic arrival rate, ‰	33.25	48.9	37.13	114	48.9	92.8	22.7	15.38	20.6	15.38	57.42	50.84
Regions' contribution to total domestic arrivals, %	24.28	19.7	23.92	23.6	19.7	19.8	18.9	5.79	4.85	5.79	10.95	7.89
Average length of stay of domestic visitors at local accommodation, nights	2.21	2.57	1.98	2.05	2.57	2.48	2.06	2.07	1.91	2.07	1.76	1.75
Inbound arrival rate, ‰	961.1	531	1762	1280	531	647	149	111.1	54.4	111.1	218.1	142.8
Regions' contribution to total inbound tourism, %	70.08	7.74	70.37	30.8	7.74	10	6.32	1.43	0.81	1.43	2.43	1.62
Average length of stay of inbound visitors at local accommodation, nights	2.09	3.52	1.84	2.36	3.52	2.64	2.39	2.13	1.9	2.13	2.44	1.76
Regional accommodation density: beds per 1 km^2	15.98	1.3	17.33	8.09	1.3	1.54	0.45	0.33	0.28	0.33	0.58	0.46
World Heritage sites and contenders	4	2.67	4	2.78	2.67	2	0	0.78	1.2	0.78	0.83	2
International and regional airports	1.33	2.67	1.33	2.78	2.67	3	4.67	0.33	0.4	0.33	1.67	0.67

From 2009 to 2019, the economy was growing in all the three states. Yet, the progress was uneven across regions. The cores of the tourist space retained their positions: their GDP per capita, albeit having decreased between 2009 and 2019, was approximately twice the national average. The GDP was about the national average in the semi-periphery and below that in the periphery.

Both inbound and domestic tourism have priority in the Baltic States. The main flows of international visitors gravitate towards the cores of tourism space. Depending on the year, North Estonia accounted for 71—74 % of the total inbound tourism in the respective country; Riga, for 77—78 %; Vilnius County, for 58—59 %. Nevertheless, international tourists do not stay long, spending an average of two nights in the capital regions.

The inbound arrival rate in the core regions is generally high, ranging between 96 to 206‰ over the study period. The substantial fluctuations may be due to the migration outflow from the Baltic countries, with international tourist flow increasing: during the study period the population of Riga decreased by 7 %, and the number of international tourist arrivals grew 1.5-fold.

Semi-peripheral regions received much fewer international tourists: their contribution varying between 4 % and 16 % of total inbound arrivals. The length of stay of international visitors in such regions slightly exceeded that in the centre regions, varying between 2.5 and 3.5 nights. The inbound tourist arrival rate is stable, in the range of 50—60‰. In the semi-periphery of the first order, which became visible by 2019, this proportion is approximately three times that in the semi-periphery of the second order: 90‰ and 30‰ respectively. Thus, some regions of the semi-periphery were catching up with the core in some respects.

The periphery made a negligible contribution to inbound tourism, of about 2 %. Most of the trips involved about two overnight stays. The average inbound tourism arrival rate for the regions of the advanced periphery did not exceed 22‰, whilst for those of the deep periphery it was twice as low (11‰).

In contrast to inbound tourism, the role the core has in the domestic tourism market is rather modest, its share not exceeding 30 %. The capital regions, home to most of the Baltics' population and principal tourist destination, produce most of the domestic tourist traffic without being its principal recipients. Domestic tourism is less intense than inbound travel: the domestic tourist arrival rate is 33—50‰. The length of stay by national visitors was approximately two nights.

Domestic tourism is a priority for semi-peripheral regions, which account for almost 20 % of the total numbers. Yet, there is an almost twofold difference between the contribution of the semi-peripheral regions of the first and second order, the average 2019 values being 23 % and 10 % respectively. This becomes especially noticeable when considering the domestic tourist arrival rate. The average value ranged from 50 to 65‰ in the semi-periphery and reached almost

90‰ in more advanced regions. Although the length of stay of domestic tourists in these regions did not differ from that in the core regions (about two nights), it was shorter than that of international tourists. This may be due to the relatively small size of the countries and, as a consequence, the possibility to make frequent short-term trips.

The peripheral regions are less visible in both inbound and domestic tourism. The advanced periphery accounts for less than 6 % of domestic arrivals, with a domestic arrival rate of 16‰; the deep periphery, for 1.5 % (8‰).

A distinctive feature of a tourism space core is its developed infrastructure. Accommodation density varies across specific regions, depending on their degree of urbanisation and tourism specialisation. The Riga region, consisting exclusively of the capital city (with 53 beds at tourist accommodation establishments per km^2), stands out against the general background. North Estonia, second by a large margin has five beds per 1 km^2. Lithuania's Klaipėda County, where the country's most popular resorts are located, ranks third. In the semi-peripheral regions of the first order, the accommodation density is only 2 beds per 1 km^2; in the second order and periphery, less than 1.

A region's tourist appeal largely depends on the presence of tourist attractions, particularly World Heritage sites. There is a positive correlation between their number and status, on the one hand, and the volume of tourist flows, on the other. In the Baltics, the number of UNESCO World Heritage sites did not change over the study period. Most of them are located in the core regions. In the semi-periphery and periphery, their number is half that number or absent respectively.

In the Baltics, the capitals are centres of political and administrative life, main transport hubs and principal holiday destinations: they account for over 60 % of international tourist arrivals. The capitals have put the Baltics on the map of tourist destinations; their positive image is contributing to the competitiveness of the three countries as a single macro-region in the global tourism market.

Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius have a wide range of tourism specialisations and are popular amongst domestic and inbound tourists alike. Moreover, they are known as centres of cultural and educational tourism. Historical parts of the cities are UNESCO World Heritage sites. In other words, the core regions and their environs boast sites of world renown, which makes it possible to launch routes within a single tourism product bringing together the core, semi-periphery and periphery. For example, 25 km away from Vilnius, there is a UNESCO site of considerable cultural and historical significance: the archaeological sites of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė. The site is part of the Four Capitals of Lithuania route, which runs through Vilnius, Kaunas, Trakai and Kernavė.[13]

[13] Gamtos ir kultūros paveldo objektai, 2022, Keturios Sostines, URL: https://www.keturiossostines.lt (accessed 15.08.2022).

The capitals of the Baltics are also visible business tourism centres. This is partially due to the fact that the capital regions take priority in national economic development planning. A comfortable urban environment is being created by building new houses, renovating old ones, opening shopping and leisure spaces, and perking up museums and theatres. The airports of all the three capitals have been reconstructed since 2007. A trend particularly important for a common tourism and recreational space is the new type of business tourism dubbed 'bleisure' — business travel combined with recreation. Such programmes make it possible to integrate the capitals' environs into a single route. The first attempts to organise such tours were made in Latvia by Latvia Tours and Amadeus.[14]

As emphasised above, the capital regions are leaders in the international inbound tourism market. Various EU instruments and institutions have contributed to their development. Latvia's Presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2015 helped to promote the country's international image and present Riga as a business travel destination. About 200 events were organised during Latvia's presidency, with 25,000 people staying in Riga for 2—3 days [17].

The Baltic States are active participants in the European Capitals of Culture project supported by the Council of the European Union. Repeated victories in this prominent annual competition have played an important role in raising European tourists' awareness of the three capitals. This prestigious title was awarded to Vilnius in 2009, Tallinn in 2011 and Riga in 2014.[15] Although most of the initiative's cultural events were aimed at local audiences and the development of the capitals' cultural space, economy and infrastructure, their international coverage during the year made a significant long-term contribution to the cities' international recognition. In a survey of international tourists carried out in Riga in the summer of 2014, 2.9 % of respondents indicated the events held within the European Capital of Culture initiative as the reason for their coming to Riga [37]. The project experience expanded the geography of events and provided an impetus for integrating the cultural and tourist space. Kaunas was selected as one of the European Capitals of Culture for 2022 and Tartu for 2024. The cities are carefully preparing for project implementation.

Major sports events have made a significant contribution to raising awareness of the Baltics as a tourism destination. Twice, in 2006 and 2021, Riga

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[14] Members explore leisure travel, 2017, AmCham Latvia, URL: https://www.amcham.lv/en/communications/news/2793 (accessed 15.08.2022).

[15] European Capitals of Culture, 2022, Culture and Creativity, URL: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture (accessed 15.08.2022).

hosted the Ice Hockey World Championships. In 2011, the European Basketball Championship was held in Vilnius, and the European Figure Skating Championship in Tallinn. Some of the sports events engaged sports infrastructure in non-capital regions. For instance, during the 2011 European Basketball Championship, the sports events, visited by 20,000 international tourists, took place in not only Vilnius, but also Alytus, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Panevėžys and Kaunas [38].

Another important characteristic of a tourism space is connectivity and integrity ensured, amongst other things, by diffusion of innovations within the centre-periphery structure. Innovations in tourism — new types of tourist products, more efficient business models for tourism, better service technologies, and others — spill over from more to less developed areas with holidaymaker and business visitor traffic moving along radial routes from the centre, using developed transport infrastructure around the capital cities. The diffusion of innovations within the tourism industry is also influenced by the movement of capital and workforce.

Integration into the pan-European space plays a special role in spreading innovation in the Baltic States. Innovations enter the capital regions from abroad through horizontal links. Then, they spread vertically within the country, from more to less developed areas. For example, the opening of Radisson hotels in Vilnius and, later, Kaunas[16] improved the quality of tourist services and stimulated the introduction of international hospitality standards.

A principal form of cross-border cooperation in Europe is Euroregions. Groups of regions of EU member states conclude agreements with states bordering the Union sign and run joint projects, including tourism initiatives [12]. The Baltics participate in 12 projects at different levels, some of them involving Baltic Sea countries.[17] Such partnerships give participants in the tourism market ample opportunities to embrace best practices in due time.

Despite being persistently reproduced, the centre-periphery structure of the Baltics' tourism space changes over time. In the course of evolution, the traditional pyramid-like structure is becoming increasingly barrel-shaped. Between 2009 and 2019, the semi-periphery group grew. Gravitating towards the cores, it ensures innovation spillover from the capitals to the periphery (Fig. 2). An expanding network of tourist routes and the growing geography of tourist traffic in the semi-periphery facilitates the development of the tourist space of Estonia, Latvia

[16] Explore hotels in Lithuania, *Radisson Hotel Group Destinations*, URL: https://www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/destination/lithuania (accessed 15.08.2022).

[17] EU Interreg Programmes, 2022, *Interreg,* URL: https://interreg.eu/ (accessed 15.08.2022).

and Lithuania. This change involved new territories into innovation exchange and spurs business activity in their tourism market, reducing spatial polarisation and risks of system ruptures.

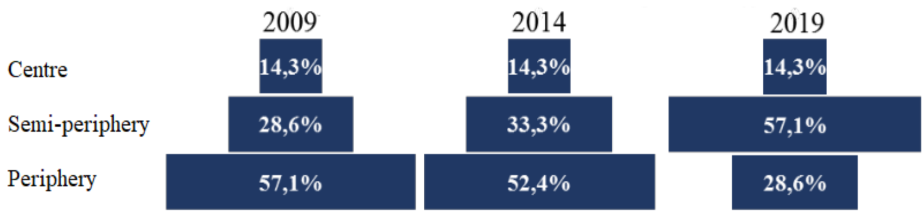

Fig. 2. Change in the centre-periphery structure of inbound and domestic tourism in the Baltics, 2009—2019

Conclusions

Cluster analysis has proved useful in studying the territorial structure of tourism. It shows that the factors, conditions and results of tourism activities exhibit spatial differentiation and the tourism space of the Baltics has a pronounced, highly polarised centre-periphery structure. This hierarchical organisation is being transformed as the countries adapt to new conditions relating to their accession to the EU. Other major influences include the states' transit position, persisting historical ties with different groups of countries and a historical footing for current tourism development.

In the territorial structure of the Baltics' tourism, the capital regions act as 'growth areas' that are competitive in the international, primarily European, travel market and capable of attracting international tourists. The other regions receive tourists from the cores, specialising chiefly in domestic tourism. Local centres in the semi-peripheral regions are rapidly developing, attracting inbound traffic and catching up with the cores.

The changes that occurred in the Baltic States between 2009 (and especially 2014) and 2019 point to some continuous trends in domestic and inbound tourism. The territorial structure is becoming more complex: despite the persistence of polarisation and the presence of absolute leaders (the capital regions), the semi-peripheral territories split into two groups. The semi-periphery of the first and second order became visible by 2019. The peripheral regions, located at a distance from the Baltic Sea and traditional tourism centres, are becoming progressively involved in tourism. They must be integrated into tourist routes to become a constituent part of the tourism space.

Despite some improvements in the situation of the peripheral regions and the evolution of the centre-periphery structure of the Baltics' tourism space, the gap between the core and the less developed regions remained substantial in 2019. Narrowing this gap is the key to further progress and the formation of stable and balanced tourism structures in the Baltics. Tourist periphery requires effective promotion in domestic and international travel markets, with the former having priority. The international campaign may focus on not only territories traditionally producing tourist traffic to the Baltics but also new Asian countries of origin. By continuing to create innovative products and solutions, the core will expand the geography of tourist trips and redistribute existing tourist flows in favour of less developed areas. This can be implemented through special marketing efforts, original niche tourism products, participation in the EU interregional cooperation programmes, taking advantage of state support tools that proved effective during the pandemic, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent geopolitical changes have had a negative impact on the Baltics' tourism market. As 'driving forces', the core regions were forced to respond to new economic challenges by offering new solutions. With visa formalities tightened on the part of the Baltic States and Baltic transit to the Schengen area denied to Russian citizens, the semi-periphery and periphery sharing a border with Russia and Belarus no longer serve a prominent role as transit territories. If these restrictions persist, structural changes in the travel geography of the Baltic States will take place, with the countries becoming even more closely integrated into the Western European travel market; existing tourism products will be adjusted to meet the needs of EU consumers; the positive changes in the periphery and semi-peripheral will slow down.

Further research should be undertaken to explore the spatial structure of the Baltics' tourism market. The evolution of a complex phenomenon such as tourism, especially amid a deteriorating macro-situation and growing uncertainty, is in need of scientific support and even foresight. The required geographical analysis looks promising in the virtual absence of up-to-date, complete and reliable tourism statistics. It may help make decisions regarding the spatial organisation of tourism and bring them in line with the tourist 'experience of the territory' (by analogy with the 'economic and geographical experience of the territory' proposed by Leonid Iofa). This will increase the competitiveness of the Baltic States in the tourism market and turn tourism into an even more efficient a tool for comprehensive and sustainable development of territories.

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CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE AND GEOGRAPHY OF TOURIST FLOWS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Tourism suffered more than many other sectors amid COVID-19 travel restrictions. This article looks at the impact of the pandemic on the territorial redistribution of tourist flows in the Baltic region. The study draws on regional annual and monthly data on international and domestic tourist arrivals between 2019 and 2021, available on the websites of the statistical offices of the Baltic Region countries. The regions earlier dependent on tourist arrivals from Russia experienced the largest drop in inbound tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, domestic tourism burgeoned in most of the region's countries. In 2021, the most dramatic increase in domestic arrivals occurred, year on year, in the border regions of Russia's Northwest Federal District; the growth was also notable in Finland and the Baltic States. Domestic tourist flow compensated, partially or even fully, for the decrease in inbound tourist flow in most regions. The structure of inbound tourism changed markedly during the pandemic, with the share of tourists from the Baltic States growing. The strongest rise was in some regions of southern Finland and more modest in Latvia and Lithuania.

Keywords:
COVID-19, domestic tourism, tourist flow, tourist flow structure, inbound tourist flow substitution

Introduction

Tourism suffered much more than many other industries from the travel restrictions and other COVID-19 response measures. The bulk of studies exploring the effect of the pandemic on tourism tackle the problem at a global and national level. Much fewer works look at the changes in the geography of tourist flows. These changes, quite evident at the global level, require investigation at the level of groups of countries, individual countries and regions. In the Baltic region, the structure and geography of tourist flows altered during the pandemic.

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In this study, the term 'Baltic region' is used predominantly in its narrow sense [1] to refer collectively to Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany's five states (Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg and Berlin) and Poland's five northern voivodeships participating in the building of transboundary tourist and recreation regions on the Baltic coast. Yet, on the Russian side, the term is treated as covering not only the Baltic territories proper (St Petersburg, the Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions) but also three border regions of the Northwestern federal district (the Pskov and Murmansk regions, the Republic of Karelia), the latter included in the Baltic region 'in a broad sense'.

This study aims to evaluate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the spatial distribution of the tourist flow within the Baltic region.

To reach this aim, the following objectives are attained:

— identifying the regional patterns of change in the flow of inbound and domestic tourism in 2021, compared to 2020;

— assessing the role of domestic tourist flow in balancing the pandemic-induced drop in inbound tourism;

— calculating an indicator of change in the contribution of tourists from the Baltic region to inbound tourism in selected areas.

Materials and methods

This study is based on open access data from the statistical services of Finland,[1] Sweden,[2] Denmark,[3] Poland,[4] Estonia,[5] Latvia,[6] Lithuania,[7] Russia[8] and Germany's states of Brandenburg, Berlin,[9] Mecklenburg-Vorpommern,[10] Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg.[11]

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Regional annual and monthly data on 2019—2021 international and domestic arrivals were used. For Sweden, where data on arrivals by region are not available, the number of overnight stays in the regions was considered along with the average number of overnight stays in the country.

The index of substitution of domestic tourism for the inbound flow was computed according to the formula:

$$IS_{domtour} = \frac{Tour_{dom2021} - Tour_{dom2019}}{Tour_{inb2019}} \times 100\%,$$

where $IS_{domtour}$ stands for the index of substitution of domestic tourism for inbound flows; $Tour_{dom2021}$, for domestic tourist flow between July and September 2021, $Tour_{dom2019}$, for domestic tourist flow between July and September 2019; $Tour_{inb2019}$, for inbound flow between July and September 2019.

The period between July and September, the 3rd quarter of 2019—2021 seems to be the most indicative for two reasons; in that quarter, less tight restriction were in place in most European countries as incidence reduced, and the tourist industry was allowed to profits from the holiday season.

Another indicator of the contribution of Baltic region state to the structure of inbound tourist flow to selected areas is used in this study. It is calculated as follows:

$$IB_{inbTour} = \frac{\Sigma Tour_{inbBalt}}{\Sigma tour_{inb}} \times 100\%,$$

where $IB_{inbTour}$ stands for the contribution of the Baltic region to the structure of inbound tourism; $\Sigma Tour_{inbBalt,}$ for the total inbound tourist flow from Baltic region states; $\Sigma tour_{inb}$, the total inbound flow.

The index was calculated to cover the whole Baltic Sea region (in the 'narrow sense'), with the exception of Russia since entry to EU countries was restricted to Russian citizens after March 2020 with the tourist flow from Russia decreasing to negligible amounts as a result.

The 2021-on-2019 reduction in the index is of particular interest as the structure of inbound tourist flows changed dramatically in spring 2020 after international travel restrictions had been imposed. In 2020, the amount of tourism between January and March often exceeded that in the remaining nine months. The structure of inbound tourist flows did not change significantly the next year: either in the first six months, when severe travel restrictions were in place in the study countries, or later, when tourism started to recover following the introduction of Green Passes that allowed vaccinated and recovered persons to cross borders and check into hotels without having to quarantine.

State of research

A large body of research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism has accumulated to date. In the first year of the pandemic, studies focused mainly on the losses incurred by the global tourism industry amid border crossing restrictions and lockdowns [2—7]; in the second and third years, publications increasingly focused on changes in the amount and direction of international tourist flows began to appear.

Notable works have been published covering the situation in Romania [8], Moldova [9], Finland and Estonia [10], Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan [11]. One contribution [12] predicted a recovery in demand in 2021 for twenty tourist destinations around the world. Another noteworthy study was carried out by Polish authors who analysed the impact of the pandemic on inbound tourism across thirty European countries by computing the Perkal index using five UNWTO and Eurostat indicators calculated for 2020. [13].

There is a growing body of publications on the role of domestic tourism in the recovery of total tourist flows. Such studies have been conducted in Russia [14], Germany and Ireland [15], Italy [16], Turkey [17; 18], South Korea [19], New Zealand [20] and other countries. Mathematical methods are being increasingly used for this purpose. Post-pandemic tourist behaviour is another nascent area of investigation; studies with such a focus have appeared in Hungary [21] and South Korea [22]. Russian scholars have concentrated on the impact of the pandemic on the amount of tourism in the country by region. Several studies have looked at regions of the Northwestern federal district and their performance in 2020 [23; 24].

The aim and objectives of this prompt one to pay particular attention to the findings of studies into changes in the tourist flow and its geography at the level of regions. Most of these works concentrate on inbound tourist flows, for example, to the regions of Ireland [25], Great Britain [26], Norway [27], Estonia [28] Austria and Switzerland [11]. These investigations, however, use pre-pandemic statistics without considering the changes in tourism flows caused by COVID-19.

For the first time, we addressed changes in the amount of tourism at the level of territorial units of the Baltic region when classifying cross-border tourism and recreational regions based on statistics from early 2019 to June 2021 [29]. It was observed then that the largest drop in tourist flows occurred in the first year of the pandemic in the cross-border tourism and recreational regions established with participation from Russia and Sweden. This study, in turn, will investigate the change in the amount and structure of tourism in the second year of the pandemic. It will also determine whether there was an increase in the domestic tourist flow, whether the inbound tourist flow begin to recover, and if so, in which parts of the Baltic Sea region.

Results and discussion

The first step towards identifying territorial differences in the recovery of tourist flows in the Baltic region was comparing the amount of inbound tourism in 2021 and 2020 (Fig. 1). These two years were selected as they provide a more accurate picture of inbound tourism recover than a comparison with 2019 levels, to which none of the study regions reverted in 2021, having experienced an over 50 % reduction in the inbound tourist flow.

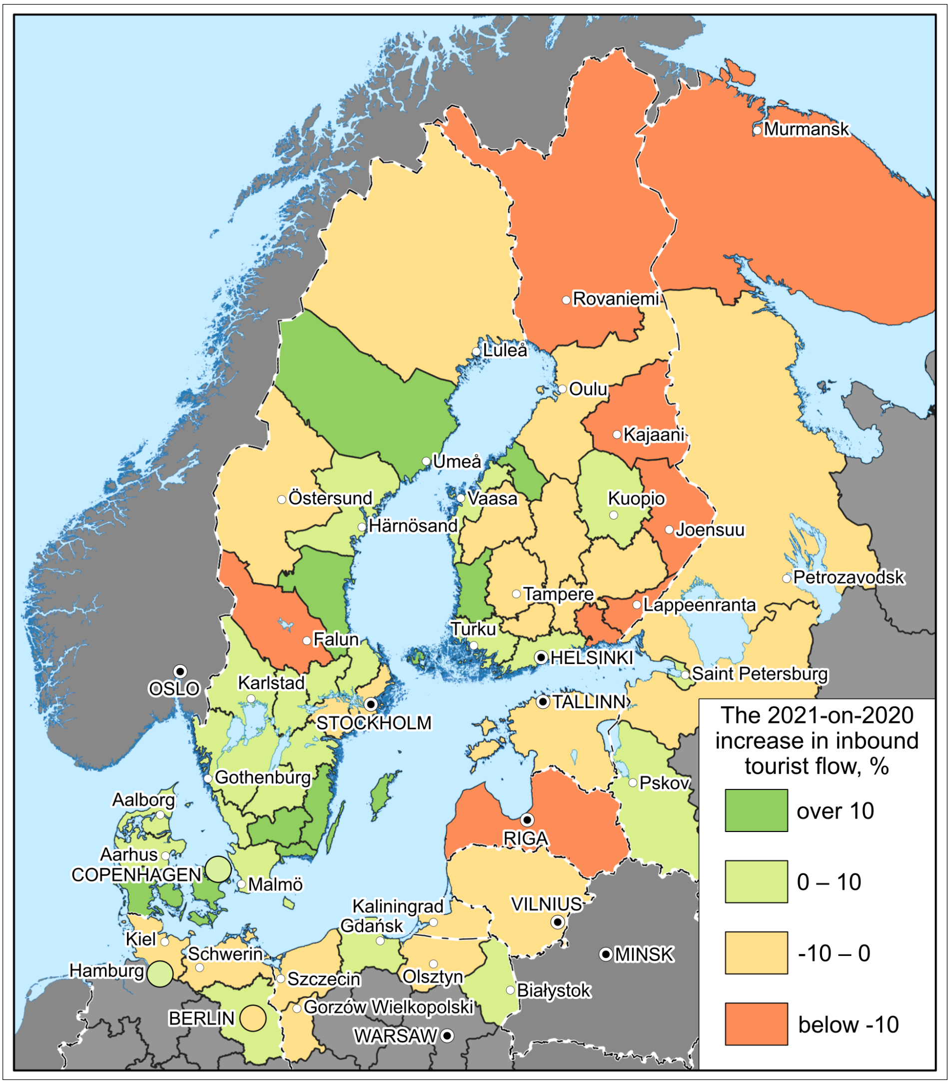

Fig. 1. The 2021-on-2020 increase in inbound tourist flow, %
(prepared by I. A. Ivanov)

The territorial units where the decrease was the sharpest fall into two groups. The first one includes the countries and regions that had depended on tourist flows from Russia, namely, Latvia and the Finnish regions of Kainuu, Kymenlaakso, South and North Karelia. The second one comprises regions with a significant proportion of winter arrivals, all of them boasting major ski resorts. These are Finland's Lapland, Sweden's Dalarna and Russia's Murmansk region. This choice is predicated on two factors. Firstly, the inbound tourism flows did not change much between January and March, with the decline beginning in the latter month, and a winter lockdown was imposed in 2021, making inbound tourism virtually impossible. The figures of the first three months of 2020 were never reached over the rest of the year due to the restrictions in place. Secondly, the reduction in international air travel, the preferred mode of transport for most ski resort visitors, was another negative influence.

The regions of the Gulf of Bothnia performed better than the others, with the amount of tourism growing in all Finnish regions except for North Ostrobothnia and all Swedish counties excluding Norrbotten. Inbound tourism did not recover that rapidly in most of the coastal regions, where the growth in absolute values was insignificant.

A positive trend was observed in the regions of South Sweden and Denmark, with the majority of arrivals coming from Germany. Yet, In Poland's Lubusz and West Pomeranian voivodeships, where Germans also account for most of the international visitors, there was no such increase: these differences may be due to less tight COVID-19 restrictions than in Denmark and Sweden being in effect in Poland in summer 2020 (according to Oxford University's stringency index[12]). In 2021, the differences in the stringency of restrictions were less profound, and, compared to 2020, Denmark's and Sweden's less tough restrictions led to a marked increase in inbound tourism (primarily from Germany).

Amongst the Russian territories, only the Pskov region saw a rise in inbound tourist arrivals, but the increase in absolute values was small (9,000 arrivals in 2021 versus 8,000 in 2020).During the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism grew in importance. Fig. 2 shows the 2020-on-2021 increase in domestic tourist arrivals. There are sharp contrasts in the patterns of domestic tourist flows: two German federal states (Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) and most regions in Sweden saw a decrease in domestic tourism.

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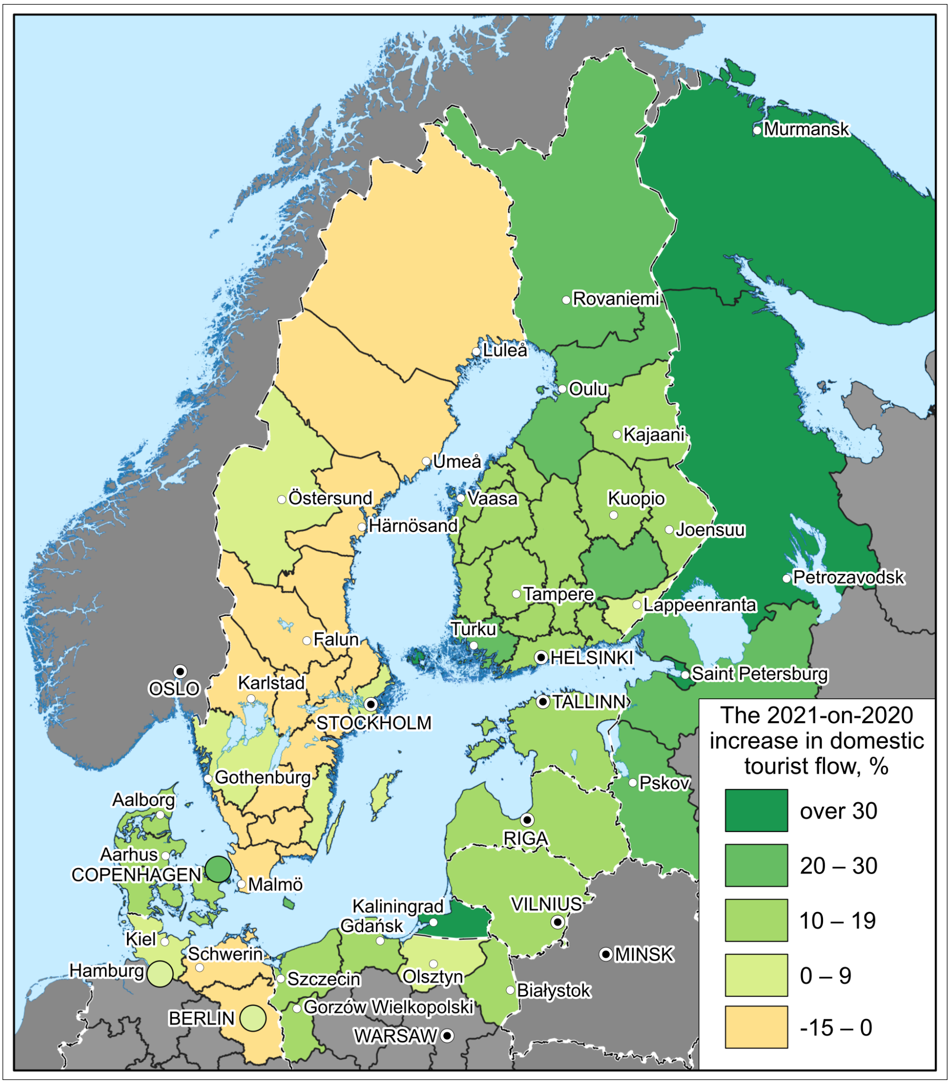

Fig.2. Increase in domestic tourist flows in 2021, % of 2020 values (prepared by I. A. Ivanov)

The highest rates of increase were in the border regions of Russia's Northwestern federal district (most probably, due to the restriction for the Russians on travel to Europe). The Kaliningrad region, home to seaside resorts, benefited from the weather in summer 2021: the season was rainy on the Black Sea coast. In 2021, domestic tourism grew in all Finnish regions by over 10 %, the only exception being South Karelia, where the increase was lower. In the Baltics, Denmark and most Poland's voivodeships, the growth was also above 10 % (excluding Warmia-Mazury).

In almost all the regions that experienced a dramatic drop in inbound tourism in 2021 the rise in domestic tourism was insignificant, or even a reduction occurred. This applies to the Finnish regions along the border with Russia, Latvia and Sweden's Dalarna. The exception was Finland's Lapland where domestic tourism grew by 30 %.

Figure 3 shows the index of substitution of domestic tourism for inbound flows in 2021 on 2019, calculated by the authors of this article.

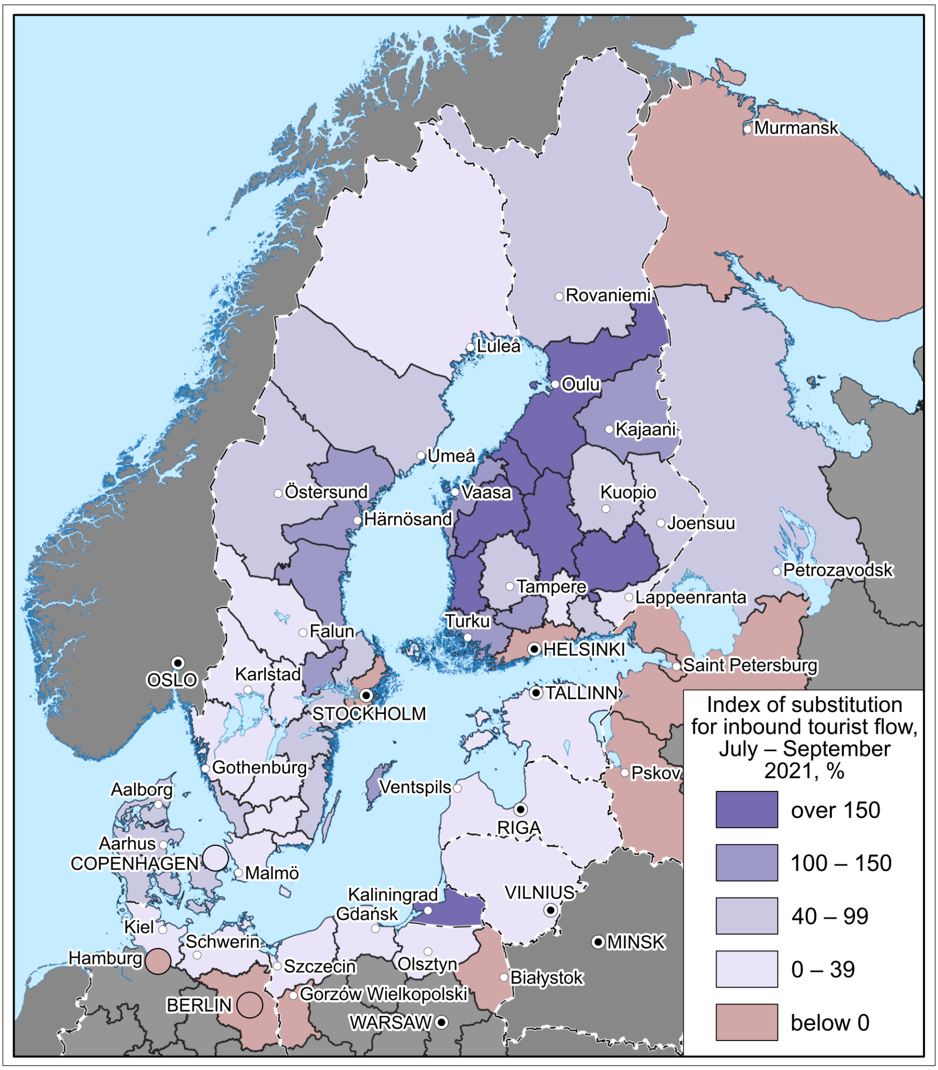

Fig. 3. Index of substitution of domestic for inbound tourism in between July and September 2021, compared to 2019 (prepared by I. A. Ivanov)

A rate of above 100 % means that not mere substitution but growth in the total tourist flow took place between July and September 2021 compared to 2019. This happened in most of the regions (except for some territories bordering Russia), some Bothnian territories and Russia's Kaliningrad region. In the Baltics and in the regions on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea, the degree of substitution was rather moderate. In some of the regions, even a partial substitution of domestic for inbound tourism did not occur. A characteristic examples are the capital regions of the Baltic region countries, St Petersburg and Germany's Hamburg and Brandenburg, all of them major pre-pandemic destinations for international tourists. This group also includes the Murmansk, Leningrad and Pskov regions, and two Polish voivodeships where the 2021 increase in domestic tourist flows failed to compensate for the decline in the first year of the pandemic.

In 2021, the structure of inbound tourist arrivals underwent radical changes. Figure 4 shows variations in the proportion of arrivals from the eight countries of the Baltic Sea region in 2021 compared to 2019. Domestic tourist arrivals were factored out along with the figures for Russia, whose borders were closed during the study period. In contrast to the previous two analyses of tourist flow patterns, we chose 2019 as the base year since the year 2020 is not representative in terms of structure: January-March 2020 had the same structure of arrivals, whilst a drastic change occurred in the summer in most regions. And the structure of tourist arrivals was much more stable in 2021.

In most the study areas, the structure of inbound tourist flow experienced an increase in the proportion of arrivals from the Baltic region states, which points to a decrease in the average distance travelled by tourists. Against the background of plummeting inbound tourism, this proportion grew not following an increase in the tourist flow but as a result of a more modest reduction.

The most considerable growth took place in some southern regions of Finland (Kanta-Häme, Kymenlaakso, South Karelia and South Savo), Poland's Podlaskie voivodeship and, to a lesser degree, in Latvia and Lithuania, which suffered a sharp decline in the number of tourists from Russia and the Republic of Belarus. The quantity of arrivals from the Baltic region states also grew in Sweden's *län* bordering Norway as the number of visitors from the latter country dwindled. In some of the regions, the share of arrivals from the Baltic Sea region declined as a consequence of a significant decrease in the contribution of the formerly leading countries of origin. For southern Sweden and western Poland, such a country is Germany; for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sweden (the Netherlands, which are located outside the Baltic region, became the de facto leader in this German federal state in terms of arrivals).

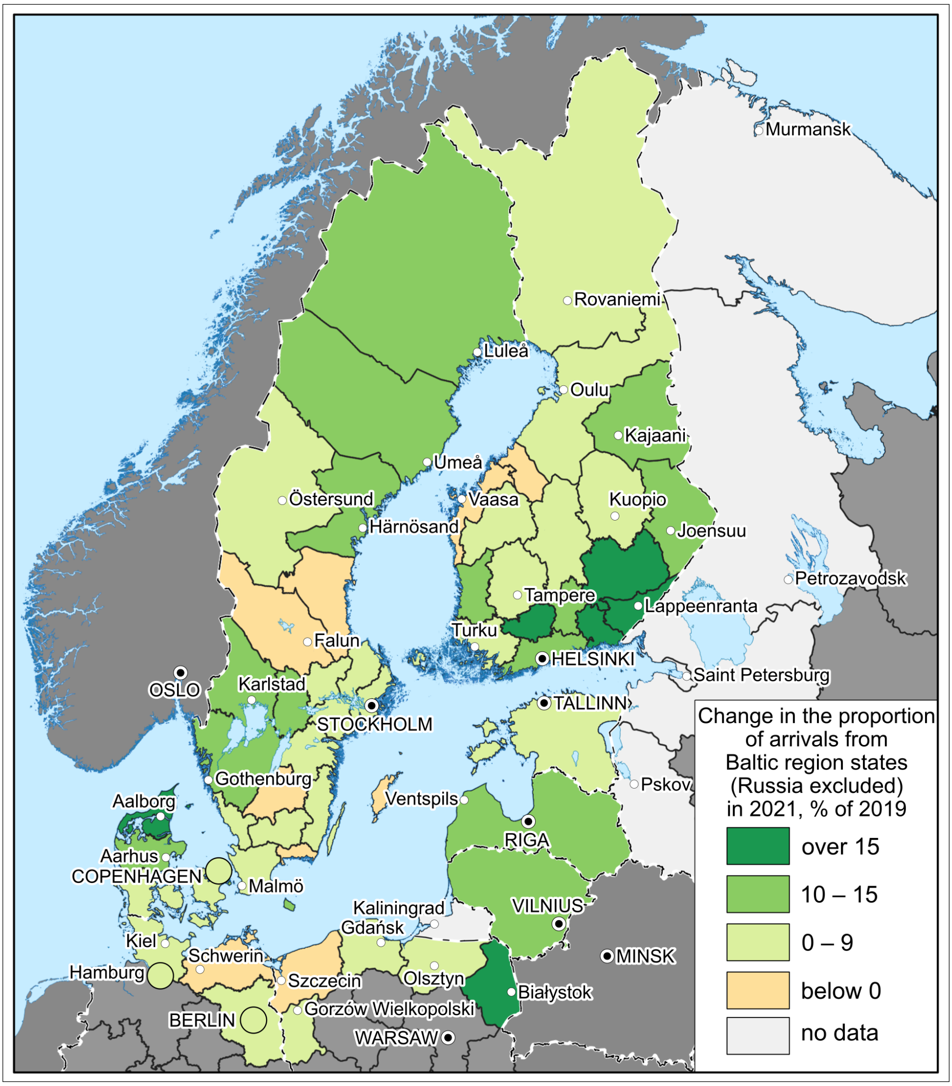

Fig. 4. Change in arrivals from the Baltic region (excluding Russia) compared to 2019 (prepared by I. A. Ivanov)

Conclusions

This study revealed regional patterns in the 2021-on-2020 change in inbound tourism. The territories of the Baltic region that experienced the most drastic reduction in tourist flows were divided into two groups. The first one includes the countries and regions hat received that largest tourist flows from Russia; the second, those with a considerable proportion of winter arrivals (lockdown was imposed in the winter of 2021, rendering inbound tourism virtually impossible.

The highest rate of increase in inbound tourist flow compared to 2020 occurred in the regions of the Gulf of Bothnia due to a low initial amount of inbound tourism. A positive trend also developed in the territories of Denmark and South Sweden, where Germans accounted for most arrivals.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries in the Baltic Sea region experienced an increase in domestic tourism. The most significant 2021-on-2020 growth in domestic tourist flows occurred in the border regions of Russia; the increase was also noticeable in Finland and the Baltic States. A reduction in domestic tourist flows took place in most Swedish regions and two German federal states (Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern).

An increase in domestic tourism in most regions partially or even fully balanced the drop in inbound tourism. The exceptions were the capital regions and some territories of Russia, Poland and Germany where the domestic tourist flow in 2021 did not revert to 2019 levels. This conclusion was made based on the index of substitution of domestic tourism for inbound flows from July to September 2021 compared to the same period of 2019.

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EVENTS DIGEST

GEOPOLITICAL SECURITY OF RUSSIA: REMARKS ON THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

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This paper summarizes the results of the seminar "Geopolitical Security of Russia: Remarks on the Problem Statement", held on August 26, 2022, at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Kaliningrad. During the seminar, the Institute of Geopolitical and Regional Studies of the university announced an initiative to devise a system of monitoring the geopolitical (regional) security of Russia. The debate centred around the development of a conceptual framework and a geopolitical security model as a prerequisite for the system. The discussion also covered other relevant issues, including the definition of geopolitical security and geopolitical space as well as the types of geopolitical threats and vulnerabilities. Another topic on the agenda was the analysis of theoretical approaches applicable to monitoring the geopolitical security in Russia. A constructivist approach based on discursive practices was viewed as the most promising for tracking changes in geopolitical threats. In this work, the emphasis should be placed on regional issues, i.e. the situation in particular regions. Other promising avenues for further research are the operationalization of relevant concepts and the development of a set of indicators of geopolitical threats and vulnerabilities, which Russia has already faced and may face in the future.

Keywords:
geopolitical security, geopolitical space, geopolitical threats, geopolitical vulnerabilities, geopolitical monitoring

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Introduction

Yana A. Vorozheina. In the present era of heightened international tensions, the need for strong national and international security has become all too apparent. The geopolitical implications of this issue are particularly noteworthy. In response, the Institute of Geopolitical and Regional Studies at IKBFU has undertaken active research into the area of national and international security, with a particular focus on the development of a monitoring system known as the 'Security Equation,' designed to monitor Russia's geopolitical security.

The implementation of the project involves a series of stages, beginning with the creation of a conceptual model for assessing Russia's geopolitical security. As part of this initial stage, a seminar was held to explore key concepts related to geopolitical security, including the definition of geopolitical space, threats, and vulnerabilities. This seminar aimed to establish a foundation of shared understanding among project stakeholders and to ensure that subsequent stages of the project are built on a robust conceptual framework. Among those who participated in the discussion were prof. Klemeshev, Doctor of Political Sciences (President of IKBFU, Scientific Director, IKBFU); prof. Fedorov, Doctor of Geography (Director of the Centre for Geopolitical Studies of the Baltic Region, IKBFU); prof. Komleva, Doctor of Political Sciences (Director of the Centre for Geopolitical Analysis of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems); prof. Druzhinin, Doctor of Geography (Director of the North Caucasus Research Institute of Economic and Social Problems, SFU, Leading Researcher of the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences); Dr Voloshenko, Candidate of Economic Sciences (Director of the Centre for Social and Economic Research of the Region, IKBFU); prof. Belozerov, Doctor of Political Sciences (Head of the Department of Political Science, member of the Scientific Council under the Security Council of the Russian Federation). The key points of the discussion are presented below.

Geopolitical Security and Geopolitical Space

Andrey P. Klemeshev. The importance of Russia's national security issues in the contemporary geopolitical landscape is widely recognized. However, the task of monitoring the country's geopolitical security requires a strong foundation in theory, methodology, and technical expertise.

We view the geopolitical security of the country as an integral component of national security. This distinction is based on the nature and location of threats that pose risks to Russia's geopolitical stability. Given the critical importance of national security and the need to protect the country against a range of potential threats, including those with geopolitical implications, it is imperative that we adopt a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to monitoring and safeguarding the security of the nation.

The concept of geopolitical space refers to a set of ideas that describe the power dynamics of international politics. At its core, it involves a competition among actors, primarily states, to compete and gain control (in various forms) over specific territories at the global, regional, and local scales, as well as within various sectors of international relations and security, including the political, military, socio-cultural, and economic realms. The structure of the geopolitical space is constantly evolving, reflecting changes in the international balance of power over time. At the level of political discourse, these ideas coalesce into a distinct geopolitical worldview that is transmitted to the mass consciousness (and the collective unconscious), where it becomes entrenched as attitudes, stereotypes, and archetypes.

The Cold War era was characterized by a global power struggle between two dominant superpowers, each possessing a formidable arsenal of nuclear weapons. This confrontation played out on a global stage, with both sides vying for dominance in the ideological, political, and socio-economic realms. The all-encompassing nature of this conflict meant that it extended to all levels and sectors of international relations and security. At its core, the Cold War was a competition for control over the global geopolitical space, with both superpowers striving for hegemony in a world that was increasingly polarized and divided.

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, only one superpower remained in the international arena with a claim to world hegemony. The United States used to consider and still considers it possible to interfere in issues of not only global but also regional and local scale and nature. The Russian Federation retains the status of a great power, as institutionally it acts as a legal successor to the Soviet Union, being, for example, a member of the UN Security Council, and possesses an appropriate arsenal of nuclear weapons. However, at the global level, it enjoys a very narrow 'corridor of freedom'. The economic and socio-cultural potential, as well as partly the military potential of modern Russia, corresponds to the level of the geopolitical region, the post-Soviet space. Thus, the geopolitical space of modern Russia in terms of territory is primarily its post-Soviet surroundings. This is where its geopolitical boundaries lie. Within these boundaries, there are geopolitical threats that determine the character of Russia's geopolitical security with its clearly territorial dynamics [1].

The threats and scope of nuclear confrontation are obvious. The United States and its NATO allies have begun not just to "penetrate" the post-Soviet space but to 'overlay' with their interests the interests of the countries that form the post-Soviet space as a geopolitical region and a regional security complex [1].[1] As a result, Russia's geopolitical space has turned into a vector field with confrontation in all sectors of international security. In each of these sectors, in each of the countries of the post-Soviet space, geopolitical threats manifest themselves primarily as vectors negative towards Russia. The United States and its allies strive to make the vectors of all security segments in every country of the post-Soviet space negative towards Russia. There is now a struggle to change the vector geopolitical space of Russia, which begins (and continues) with rewriting history, reformatting both the consciousness of elites and mass consciousness and ends with colour revolutions and proxy wars. We proceed from the fact that monitoring geopolitical threats is an acute issue. Identifying them at an early stage would allow negating them with the minimum risks and damage. The current events in Ukraine are the most persuasive evidence of the need for such a monitoring system.

Natalia A. Komleva. It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the phenomena and concepts of national and geopolitical security. The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation[2] defines national security as "a state when the national interests of the Russian Federation are being protected from external and internal threats, the implementation of constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens, decent quality and standard of living, civil peace and harmony in the country, protection of the sovereignty of the Russian Federation, its independence and state integrity, social and economic development of the country are being ensured".[3] In other words, national security is a state of pro-

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[1] We use the model of superpower intervention in regional security complexes developed by Buzan and Waever.

[2] Approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation № 400 of 02.07.2021.

[3] On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation № 400 of 02.07.2021, *President of Russia,* URL: http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046 (accessed 10.10.2022). For more details on aspects of national security, see: [2; 3].

tection provided to the interests of the individual, the state and the society. This very hierarchy of interests is enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

Numerous studies investigate the essence of national security, while geopolitical security has not received proper research attention. There are practically no papers that purposefully consider geopolitical security as a separate phenomenon. The only exception is "Geopolitical Security of Modern Russia" by Morozov [4], however, oddly enough, there is no definition of the concept included in the title in the text of the article. Some papers closely link national and geopolitical security, for example, those by Zimichev [5], Zubkov [6], Moskvitin [7], etc. However, as a rule, they offer either no definition of geopolitical security or provide similar ones to the following: "Geopolitical security is a state of geopolitical interests of the country being protected" [5].

Therefore, identifying the nature and features of geopolitical security is an urgent research task. I view geopolitical security as a phenomenon that is *a state of the geopolitical space of a society being protected from threats and vulnerabilities to ensure the unhindered survival and development of the society.* I proceed from the fact that the geopolitical space has four major forms: geographical (the main actor is the state), economic (the main actor is corporations producing goods and services), information and ideological (the main actor is the media, academic, artistic, literature communities, teaching and management staff in education), information and cybernetic (the main actor is software and network developers).

Structurally each form of the geopolitical space consists of three main elements: 1) actors, 2) resources, and 3) ways of struggling for resources.

We define resources as the means of survival and development of human communities representing the foundation and the objective of the geopolitical struggle.

Here, we understand resources as follows:

— raw materials (natural resources);

— people, the totality of its quantitative and qualitative characteristics (natural and social resources);

— the economic system of a society, the totality of the dominant form of ownership and the main way of managing the production of goods and services (economic resources);

— methods and technical means of influencing mass and individual consciousness to form a system of values determining social behaviour;

— software, information and cybernetic technologies (information resources).

Thus, *geopolitical security is an aspect of the national security of a given society ensuring a favourable course and the outcome of the struggle for the resources for its survival and development*.

Alexander G. Druzhinin. It is necessary to focus on the fact that the geographical (territorial) aspect is extremely important in geopolitical security. Haushofer, one of the founders of geopolitics, defined this science as "space from a state's perspective" [8]. Lacoste, another prominent geographer, understood it as a scientific discipline studying the "power rivalries over territory" [9]. Russian researchers develop similar approaches [10—13]. According to Kolosov and Mironenko [14], geopolitics is a subject area aimed at fixing and predicting the spatial boundaries of power fields. Turovsky believes it is "the geography of relations between the centres of political power in the world" [15, p. 30]. There is also an even more "geographic" approach, where the subject of geopolitics is "the impact the features of the territory have on the policy of the state located in this territory" [16, p. 113]. Geopolitical issues are often considered in conjunction with security ones [17; 18]. Modern research in Russia devotes close attention to this area [19—21].

Taking into account the above definitions of geopolitics, *geopolitical security can be defined as a state (a set of factors, processes and their consequences) in which a particular country can steadily and effectively, in cooperation with other (sometimes competitive) centres of power, control a territory (and equip it, develop, use its communicative, resource, military-strategic and other capabilities) falling within its political, economic and humanitarian interests*.

Vasily K. Belozerov. Russia's geopolitical security deserves close attention from researchers. Taking into account instrumental and applied considerations and the latest developments in the international arena, it makes sense to view Russia's geopolitical security as *the security of its geopolitical space*.

I would like to emphasize that problems and obstacles are virtually inevitable in the course of the theoretical study of this topic and its promotion as a concept. I identify two approaches to theoretical studies of space in political science: utilitarian and value-ideological. Note that (1) there is no impenetrable wall between them, and (2) they both manifest in real-life politics.

The first approach identifies political space with the territory. According to it, space is "the real extent of the territory of historically predetermined political life or political influence" [22, p. 296]. The reference to historical circumstances limits the political subject's claims to the land, i.e. utilitarian, space. Practically the same ideas serve as the foundation for the geographical paradigm of politics. They have been the basis for classical geopolitical concepts for quite a long time. For instance, the famous German military theorist General Hans von Seeckt (1866—1936) stated that "the most real political foundation is homeland" [23, S. 11].

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that for some years our country has been conceptualizing state policies aimed at the development and protection of its geographical space. We can find relevant provisions in the country's major doctrinal document, the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, approved by the President in the summer of 2021. Interestingly, current Russian legislation identifies defence as the armed protection of the Russian Federation, and the integrity and inviolability of its territory.[4] Such an approach inevitably restricts both the perception of Russia's geopolitical space and measures aimed at ensuring its security.

In this regard, it is appropriate to refer to the understanding of the political space as a value-ideological one, which is characteristic of the second approach. According to it, it is the scope of politics, the area of influence of political subjects determined by the prevalence, strength and effect of their ideas, theories, programmes and their acceptance by society [24, p. 301]. Understanding the geopolitical space requires a peculiar perception of its limits and boundaries. Geopolitical boundaries do not always coincide with state borders. State borders cannot constrain the geopolitical space, the area claimed by a subject. A Russian geopolitician Vandam (1867—1933) in his work "Our situation", published in 1913, provided the following assessment of the steps taken by the Russian foreign affairs department to establish borders in the east of the country: "It is often that being frequently repeated many words lose their deep inner meaning. For instance, the word "border" means a barrier constraining the attacker and benefiting the defender. China, which has long lost its aggressiveness and shifted to defence, being closed from the sea and having surrounded all its cities with high stone ramparts, embodied the idea of the border in its famous Great Wall. Since on its left flank, Russia was the offensive side, it is clear how erroneous the initiative of our diplomacy was".

[4] See Article 1 of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation dated May 31, 1996 № 61-FZ "On Defence", 1996, *President of Russia,* URL: http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/9446 (accessed 10.10.2022).

Threats and Factors of Geopolitical Security

Andrey P. Klemeshev. We believe that a constructivist approach focused on discursive practices is a promising direction for monitoring the dynamics of geopolitical threats. An example is the Buzan-Waever concept of securitisation providing a broader understanding of the security and threat construction process [26].

Natalia A. Komleva. To define the essence of the geopolitical security of modern Russia, I would propose a threefold scheme for considering threats and vulnerabilities.

The main threats are:

1. In geographical space: military aggression of NATO countries and, more broadly, the countries of the "collective West" against our country, expressed in military actions in Ukraine using western weapons, western instructors and western PMCs, as well as possible NATO's military expansion to the Union State of Russia and Belarus [27; 28].

2. In the economic space: sanctions against Russia.

3. In the ideological space: ideological subversion of mass consciousness to change the traditional value system and disinformation against Russia.

As I see it, the systemic threat to our geopolitical security is currently based on three main vulnerabilities of Russian society:

1. The most important element of the geopolitical security system is the optimal communication between the ruling and the subordinate, in other words, between the authorities and administration, on the one hand, and the public, on the other.

2. The performance discipline of administrative authorities is breaking down, they are more interested in KPI grabbing than in tangible results. This contributes to the distortion of political communication in the "ruling and subordinate" bundle.

3. Lack of moral censorship in literature and art, as well as in the media (including the blogosphere).

For each type of threats and vulnerabilities, I propose to distinguish between

1) relevant;

2) potential;

3) preemptive (though they may or may not form, they still require monitoring).

Alexander G. Druzhinin. The current situation calls for a comprehensive and systematic approach to analyzing the various aspects and factors of geopolitical security that need to be taken into consideration:

1) within the framework of the danger — security dichotomous assessment scale (as a combination of significant challenges and threats and, at the same time, opportunities, interests, and priorities);

2) as a set (system) of chronological (consecutive) and spatial (varying from place to place, i. e. unique to specific regions) situations;

3) as a conjugation (and hierarchy) of the global (Earth-wide structures and processes), macro-regional (for Russia it is, for example, the Baltic region or the Black Sea region) and regional (Crimea, the Kaliningrad region, etc.) levels.

It is important to realize that in real geopolitics (when the rivalry between the key players is becoming increasingly fierce [29]), any sustainable security of a country (even a leading powerhouse) is achievable only in theory. This allows focusing on the level of security, or rather, on the level of geopolitical risks, which often complement and sometimes substitute each other (for example, the danger of confronting the geopolitical hegemon and its military-political bloc and the risk of total subordination, loss of geopolitical subjectivity).

Talking about the priorities of the combination of geo-situational, dynamic and multiscale approaches based on the spatial analysis [30]. It is important to note that when analyzing the components of Russia's geopolitical security or risks, one must consider the systemic duality of the Russian Federation and its external geopolitical context. The focus of attention should be on identifying the risks generated by the existing geopolitical architecture of the world, as well as its major transformations, including the transition to a multipolar model accompanied by general turbulence [31] and the formation of regional powerhouses along almost the entire perimeter of the Russian borders. Thus, we have to reconsider both multifaceted risks and dangers generated by Russia's position [11] in global and Eurasian geopolitics, including those associated with the transition to an open confrontation between the Russian Federation and the collective West [32; 33].

Gennady M. Fedorov. It is important to closely monitor Western geopolitical concepts, as many of them have been formulated by Western geopoliticians in a manner that is unfriendly towards Russia. Following the ideas of Mackinder and Speakman, they initially aim at fighting the continental 'Heartland' (by definition conservative, even reactionary, despotic and barbaric) opposed to the oceanic democratic and civilized 'Rimland'. We need to carefully study Western articles and books on international relations concerning our country, especially foreign university and school textbooks on history and geography. Then it will become clear what kind of relationship our potential partners aim at and whether equal cooperation (and cooperation in general) is possible.

Geopolitical Security and Regions

Alexander G. Druzhinin. Developing and defining the category of *geopolitical security*, it is crucial to focus on the circumstances of Russia's internal development that are essential for its stable geopolitical position, on the situation in specific regions, their economic, demographic, ethnocultural dynamics, on regional identity, inclusion in all-Russian and international centre-peripheral interdependencies. Here, geopolitical studies are directly connected with socio-geographical analysis, and the latter must inevitably be 'geopolitised' acquiring a definite subject-thematic aspect.

It is not only the territory of the Russian Federation that requires geopolitical structuring and typologising but also the adjacent spaces (limitrophes, areas of outgoing threats, and vital territories). Attention should also be focused on the identification of areas and zones of interest of global and regional geopolitical actors within the Russian Federation (similar to the geopolitical structure of the 'Turkish world', which in recent years has been gaining its increasingly clear outline [33]). It is equally important to generate systemic (taking into account the actual situation and interests of the regions as well) ideas about the relevant and promising sphere of geopolitical interests of Russia (in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Black Sea region, in Central Asia, etc.) [35, p. 218; 36].

Andrey P. Klemeshev. Discussing the geopolitical space of Russia and the corresponding geopolitical threats, we must not forget that the actors are not only the United States but also countries close to the Great Limitrophe [37; 38], the multivalent 'strait-territories' [39], which are relatively independent players interfering in the balance of power in the post-Soviet space as a geopolitical region, a regional security complex [1]. A notable example is the position of Turkey in the Karabakh conflict.

Under certain conditions, for instance, sociocultural, including confessional, such interference will affect the regions of the Russian Federation. Talking about the Great Turan, we must be aware of the effect such a structure might have in some Russian regions.

Vasily K. Belozerov. Few people doubt that it is short-sighted and even dangerous to limit the provision of the security of Russia's geopolitical space to its territory and borders. The geopolitical security of our country, being an integral phenomenon, is also made up of the totality of the security of its regions. Moreover, the security of a subject of the Russian Federation is not limited to its territory and state borders. The geopolitical status of the subjects of the Russian Federation is diverse.

Ksenia Yu. Voloshenko. I agree that the national security of Russia is the generic concept of its geopolitical security,[5] its part that corresponds to the national interests in "maintaining strategic stability, strengthening peace and security, and the legal foundations of international relations".[6] Its safeguarding and promoting are achieved through the implementation of the strategic national priority of enhancing strategic stability and mutually beneficial international cooperation. Thus, the terminological foundations of geopolitical security are linked to a foreign policy aimed at protecting Russia's national interests and strengthening its international security. A question arises whether the term *geopolitical security* can apply to a region and the role of each Russian region in advancing it.

Considering the territorial peculiarities of Russian regions, both geopolitical research and socio-geographical approaches are significant for addressing geopolitical security issues. Different (geo-)strategic roles and geographical locations (including their closeness to the border) of the regions mean completely different tasks in implementing strategic national priorities, including in terms of ensuring geopolitical security.

Geopolitical security issues are of utmost urgency for Russia's geo-strategic territories,[7] and they require deep theoretical understanding. It is through the socio-economic development of geostrategic territories that the national security of the Russian Federation, and therefore its geopolitical security, is ensured.

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[5] On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation: Decree of the President of the Russian Federation №400 dated 2.07.2021, *President of Russia*, URL: http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046 (accessed 17.08.2022).

[6] Ibid.

[7] On approval of the Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2025: Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation №207-r dated 13.02.2019, *Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation,* URL: https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/directions/regionalnoe_razvitie/strategicheskoe_planirovanie_prostranstvennogo_razvitiya/strategiya_prostranstvennogo_razvitiya_rossiyskoy_federacii_na_period_do_2025_goda/ (accessed 17.08.2022).

However, due to their border location, the geostrategic territories, in turn, need to ensure their own geopolitical security, but only insofar as it is within the powers of the region or concerns the scope of external and internal threats.

Current situation, prospects and problems

Alexander G. Druzhinin. Identifying and evaluating the parameters of geopolitical security is crucial in understanding the military confrontation between Russia and the collective West, which has resulted from the ongoing situation in the SMO and has turned the entire territory of the Russian Federation into a space of hybrid war.

In this context, Russian geopolitics is rapidly getting more 'territorialized'. An extremely wide range of regional development issues is becoming geopolitically significant: from local identity and socio-political activity to the financial and economic capabilities of the territory, its place in the existing 'centre-periphery' relations, and the importance of cross-border contacts and foreign partnerships. Against this background, the geopolitical 'specialness' of individual territories and their groupings has become particularly pronounced. The spatial development of our country is becoming an important area of geopolitical confrontation. It also generates systemically significant geostrategic risks. At the same time, it serves as an incentive and resource in playing for high geopolitical stakes sharply intensified in the context of the SMO.

Vasily K. Belozerov. We propose the following objective (expected result) of the work on assessing Russia's geopolitical security:

1) development and definition of the concept of "geopolitical security";

2) identification of criteria, indexes and indicators of geopolitical and regional security of Russia;

3) clarification of the following issues:

changes in challenges, risks, dangers and threats (CRDT) to Russia's geopolitical security by region;

current social and political tension in the regions;

nature of external factors and their impact in a particular region;

geopolitical status of Russian regions in the context of national security;

classification of Russian regions and subjects by their established geopolitical status.

Andrey P. Klemeshev. A conceptual model of geopolitical security is a prerequisite for the development of a system for monitoring Russia's geopolitical security. We need the tools for this kind of monitoring. Today attention will largely focus on various discursive methods: discourse analysis, frame analysis, and content analysis. However, creating such a monitoring system requires selecting a relevant technical approach. Collecting and analyzing information from open sources (OSINT) appears to be the most promising approach

Conclusion

Yana A. Vorozheina. The discussion allowed us to draw several conclusions. First, no one doubts the urgency of raising the problem of Russia's geopolitical security, and ways to monitor it in a given period and in certain zones of the country's geopolitical space. Secondly, it is also clear what requires additional substantive study. It is geopolitical security, geopolitical space, geopolitical picture of the world, geopolitical borders, threats and vulnerabilities. The most important thing is to determine what distinguishes geopolitical issues from all others related to national security. Not simply repeating the word 'geopolitics' but assigning it a clear meaning is what we should do to be able to use it in our further work. Thirdly, with the contours of the conceptual model of geopolitical security already visible, an important long-term task is the operationalization of the relevant concepts and the creation of a set of indicators for the already known geopolitical threats and vulnerabilities. It is important to identify them to choose relevant monitoring tools and instruments.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE PEAKS AND TROUGHS OF RUSSIAN-ESTONIAN RELATIONS

Review of the book: Tambi, S. A. Estonia: the history of relations and the modern era. On the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations [Estoniya: istoriya vzaimootnosheniy i sovremennost. K 100-letiyu so vremeni ustanovleniya diplomaticheskikh otnosheniy]. St. Petersburg : Piter, 2021.
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The world is witnessing the most profound changes of recent decades: a severe economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the bitter confrontation between Russia and the West, to name a few. At the core of Russia's foreign policy is indubitably the conflict with the West, centred around Ukraine. The member states of the EU and NATO that share a border with Russia adopted the most hard-line position, and Russia's relations with its western neighbours have always been strained. A important role is played in these tensions by the ideological component, namely the different and often conflicting interpretations of historical events. Since the disputed events took place in the recent past, and some of the participants are still alive, these differences are sharp and acute. It would be erroneous to say that no attempts have been made to discuss the contentious issues and reconcile the differences. Bilateral commissions were set up bringing together historians from Russia and Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. They provided solid groundwork and prepared a series of documents and studies for publication. Estonia, however, has always been a special case: in the absence of government-supported structures, scholars from the two countries have conducted intensive research into the history of Soviet—Estonian and Russian—Estonian relations. Being far from exhausted, this research agenda continues to attract scholarly attention.

Sergey Tambi is a young researcher holding a bachelor's degree from Saint Petersburg State University, School of International Relations, and a master's degree from MGIMO University. His work is a showcase of the achievements attained by Russia's two major centres of academic excellence in international relations. Tambi authored a book dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Estonia, which is captivating in terms of content and original in terms of genre. A substantial part of the book is documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, reprints of reports from the Soviet, Russian and Estonian media and some other sources earlier unknown or familiar to a very narrow group of specialists in the field. Introducing these materials into scholarly discourse makes it possible to analyse the key trends in the evolution of bilateral relations and highlights earlier obscure details. It is only to be expected that Tambi, an acting diplomat with experience of working in Estonia, pays particular attention to the history of Soviet and Russian diplomatic missions in Tallinn and the Estonian embassy in Moscow. Comprehensive accounts of these topics have never appeared in the literature, with only several pages of this history thoroughly explored. Yet, the role of embassies in foreign policy decision-making is substantial as they both provide their governments with information and are involved in the practical implementation of the decisions made. Reports from the media of the 1920s—1930s and the recent decades envelops the reader in the atmosphere of those periods, giving an insight into the public attitudes prevailing at the time. Probably, this fine book would have benefited from the inclusion of excerpts from the memoirs of prominent politicians and diplomats. Although the utilisation of such narratives as a primary source has its deficiencies, they could play a useful role when researching the history of international relations, those between Russia and Estonia being no exception here.

Tambi adopts the official position of Russian diplomacy but refrains from involvement in the debate between Russian and Estonian historians, who have very different views and rely on disparate approaches. He focuses on the analysis of the documents rather than the events that led to their production. In the book under review, this approach is tenable since the documents and media reports studied by the authors do not contain any facts questioning the established perspectives and concepts. Nevertheless, Tambi scrutinises a number of narratives revealing the complexity and ambiguity of the processes considered.

He believes the peace treaty signed in Tartu (1920) by Soviet Russia and Estonia to have become void in 1940 when Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. At the same time, he demonstrates that the conclusion of the treaty was of enormous significance for both countries as it provided a framework for the further development of bilateral relations and strengthened the international standing of Soviet Russia and Estonia. This is an important conclusion since Soviet historiography used to underplay the role of the Treaty of Tartu, which was usually mentioned in passing as a minor event or completely disregarded. Unfortunately, this approach survived into the present, being observable in the works of some Russian experts on the history of international relations. Yet, the 1920 treaty with Estonia was not only a landmark in bilateral relations, but also created the first legal channel by means of which Soviet Russia could forge political and economic ties with the outer world.

Naturally, the socio-political systems of the USSR and Estonia were not only different: they were precise opposites. Although this imposed serious limitations on the development of relations across all spheres, the search for ways towards mutual understanding remained possible. In this respect, Tambi draws the reader's attention to several remarkable episodes. For instance, in 1921, when large areas of European Russia were stricken by famine, the government of Estonia and the Estonian Red Cross provided humanitarian aid to Soviet Russia. A special train carrying foodstuffs and medicines arrived in Moscow, from where they were delivered to Kazan, Samara, Simbirsk, Ufa and other cities. In his letter of gratitude to Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Otto Strandman, one of the top officials of Soviet Russia Lev Kamenev called the aid the first gift his country had received from its western neighbours. Although Tambi writes about the difficult Soviet—Estonian relations in the military sphere, there is a photograph in the book (p. 143) of the Marshal of the Soviet Union Aleksandr Egorov taken during his visit to Tallinn in 1937. Probably, this event deserves closer attention: the way Egorov was received in Estonia (it is the only known case when the Day of the Red Army was celebrated in a foreign state in the 1920s—1930s), his negotiation with the Estonian leadership and the reactions of the Soviet and Estonian media to the visit seem to require further research.

The section dedicated to the history of Russian—Estonian relations in the past three decades, i. e. after the disintegration of the USSR, concentrates on political, economic and interregional ties, as well as those in the fields of science, education, culture, arts, etc. The information provided is vast but often resembles excerpts from a reference book. More details on these connections and concrete, first of all, humanitarian projects could be a worthy addition to the book. The experience in the area was positive and valuable.

Today, there is a serious confrontation between Russia and the West, and much of the positive legacy of the past decades has been lost. However, the question of normalising the relations will one day be on the agenda again. Of course, the future efforts will focus on not recreating the past but finding answers to new questions and rising to new challenges. Then, an objective analysis will be indispensable of what caused the past strategies to fail, what requires entirely different approaches and what can still be utilised. In such a case, the materials presented in Tambi's book will be even more relevant than they are today.

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