The aim of this project is to examine added value of cross-cutting policies dedicated to large transnational regions. The research also investigates how these policies attempt to enhance coherence of actions (or image) of different policy actors in/towards these regions. That is achieved by the means of developing, testing and refining analytical framework through the examination of six case studies: the European Union’s (EU) and European states’ policies towards the Arctic and Baltic regions.

During the last decade, a number of policies or strategies dedicated to large transnational regions (region-focused policies) have been formulated by the EU and European states, including for the Danube Region, the Alps, the Atlantic, Baltic Sea Region, and the Arctic.

Due to international interest in the Circumpolar North, Arctic states have been in the forefront of this policy-making trend including Norway in 2006 and Finland in 2010. From 2008, the European Union has been also developing its Arctic policy. In 2013, United Kingdom published a document concerning its activities in the region. In the Baltic region, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was adopted in 2009. States such as Finland followed with Baltic policies of their own.

Policy-makers and analysts alike have understood many of these policies – especially towards the Arctic region – as exclusively foreign policy statements. The foreign policy dimension is, however, not the only aspect, often not even the dominant one. Policy components of internal character are of equal importance, including regional development and transport. Region-focused policies are thus mixed, cross-cutting, overarching frameworks bringing together numerous components. The aim of this project is to analyse whether such broad, vague, cross-cutting policies can have added value and capacity to bring about more coherence.

Added value is a crucial question due to significant resources are employed towards formulation and conduct of these cross-cutting policies. How do they matter and make a difference? Does their...
adoption impact on states’ or the EU’s overall policy systems? Do they positively affect states’ or the EU’s presence and activities in large transnational regions? Are they advantageous for various stakeholders within given states (or the EU), including research institutes, private business operating in the region, or sub-national governments?

Enhancing coherence of actors’ actions, policies, and consistency of their message towards internal and external audiences is one of the main reasons for formulating the analyzed policy statements. It is possibly also a key aspect of their added value. Rationale for formulation of these policies is the quest for consistency, comprehensiveness, integration, or synergy. In general, contemporary public policies are seen as being incoherent, unintegrated and thus the “aspiration to coherence is widespread across policy systems”. Yet, surprisingly, the notion of coherence in region-focused policy-making is often used uncritically, both by policy-makers and analysts. It is certainly an under-researched concept in policy analysis and political science.

Region-focused policies are also conceptualized in this research as component-based policies. Components of these cross-cutting policies (general transport policy, environmental policy, energy policy, external relations) have usually priority – temporal and in terms of importance within policy systems – to cross-cutting frameworks. That severely limits the capacity of region-focused policies to make a difference (added value) and adjust the objectives of sectoral actions to goals defined for specific regions. For example, the EU’s of Finnish transport policies or environmental policies are unlikely to be significantly revamped in order to better contribute to Arctic-specific objectives.

So far, little is known of how region-focused policies make a difference or what design features facilitate their added value. A holistic framework for analysis of the discussed policies is underdeveloped and the notion of policy coherence is scientifically ambiguous. Different policy components and various practices and activities associated with region-focused policy-making have not been analysed holistically. This research project proposes an analytical framework, where – building on the notion of coherence - seven aspects of region-focused policies are examined: rationality, policy components, policy glues, stakeholders, instruments, institutional arrangements, presence in the region. Transdisciplinary methodology brings together policy analysis, geopolitics and IR scholarship. The concept of coherence is discussed in the light of tension between planning and incrementalist policy ideologies.

The research will look at six cases of region-focused policy-making. First set of case studies deals with Arctic policies of Finland, Norway, UK and the EU. Finland and Norway, as Arctic states, have Arctic policy that reflects their membership in the Arctic Council and special attention to own Arctic territories. United Kingdom is a non-Arctic state with research and commercial interests. The second set of case studies concerns Baltic Sea Region policies: that of Finland and the EU (the first EU macro-regional strategy).

A series of semi-structured interviews with policy-makers and stakeholders (those involved or potentially/supposedly affected by the umbrella policy) together with documents produced by public administration and non-governmental entities is the key material to for analysis.

The development of an analytical framework will contribute to the enhancement of formulation, implementation and evaluation of region-focused policies, with research implications and methodologies being of relevance beyond analyzed Arctic and Baltic regions.

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