

Autonomous Åland

A hundred years of borderwork in the Baltic Sea

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Abstract

This dissertation applies an ethnological and long-temporal view of borders. The region of Åland, being an autonomous and demilitarised island territory under Finnish sovereignty, serves as an illuminative case of the work that goes into keeping borders fixed for two reasons. The region being maritime is the first one, and it being in a betwixt position between a state and a province is the second. The study seeks to explore the borders as cultural entities composed by layers – legal, geographical, political and social – and the processes through which the borders have been anchored. As important are the ways in which the borders extend into everyday life by creating a local order that activities relate to. Borders are hence seen as both objects and sources of actions. Seeing borders as objects of action function as an entry into an exploration of how the borders have been objects of continuous work since their establishment in 1921. The idea of them being sources of actions serves as a window into how the borders in numerous ways have influenced everyday life for inhabitants. In order to analyse the work that goes into borders as well as the actions borders cause, the study explores both the authoritative borderwork and how the borders or their effects have been encountered and handled by individuals who live within. The multifaceted view is achieved through a broad material consisting of archived documents, archived ethnological interviews, participant observations and contemporary interviews, in combination with studies of law and publications. Through the use of the phenomenological concept of practico-inert, the study reveals both how borders are outcomes of incessant human actions, and how they create an undisputable structure for individuals to observe and relate to, but not necessarily obey. In summary, the study contributes with a detailed description of how bordered places are created, and how individuals navigate the structures that they live within.

Keywords: *Åland, Finland, borders, borderwork, built place, practico-inert, hodological navigation, maritime, minority, territorial autonomy.*

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