

'Divided and validated'? The institutionalization of the Russo-Swedish border region in the 1743 peace treaty

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Abstract

In this article, I analyse the institutionalization of the border region between Sweden and Imperial Russia presented in the peace treaty signed in Åbo (now Turku) in 1743. The Russo-Swedish war of 1741–1743 was disastrous for Sweden. Instead of regaining the losses suffered on the eastern front in the previous war (1700–1721), Sweden ceded more territory to Russia shifting the state border westwards again. The new border located in the middle of the present-day eastern Finnish countryside followed no religious or linguistic divisions. The peace treaty was a top-down measure. However, one must recognise that regions were institutionalised in several parallel and interactive processes. I apply the approach of institutionalization of regions to categorise the peace treaty according to the four dimensions of the approach. The aim is to untangle the official re-establishment of the new regional order to indicate the room for the local influencing. I conclude that the peace treaty did not extensively define the shape of the border region, which led to challenges in reshaping and further developing the border region in the local practices. Classifying the region building process according to the dimensions of the regional institutionalization – though intertwined in practice – provide comparativeness for the local progressions foregrounding their distinctive and consistent characteristics.

Keywords: border studies, borderlands, re-bordering, institutionalization of regions, Sweden, Russia, state building

Introduction

The Russo-Swedish war also known as *The War of the Hats (1741–1743)* concluded with shifting the border between the Russian Empire and the Swedish realm westwards. Per the peace treaty of 1743, Imperial Russia gained an area on the northeast shore of the Gulf of Finland. The new borderland ran through the countryside of the present-day eastern Finland. The demarcation of the border was not based on cultural, linguistic or religious grounds. It was a new kind of

demarcation of a modern political territory based partially on strategic grounds. The idea of the territorial state had developed stronger in the Nordic context since the late 17th century. Therefore, it was now possible to demarcate the new borders without considering the local circumstances to remarkable extend (KATAJALA, K. 2010). Nevertheless, the power had to be legitimised and established at the borderland, a process that can be called the institutionalization of regions. In this paper, I apply the regional institutionalization approach on the research

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of this 18th century borderland. The aim is to analyse how the institutionalization of the new border region between the two states can be seen in the peace treaty of 1743.

A region exists in a certain cultural and temporal context. Further, it emerges in a combination of intersecting interests or claims forming it into an institutional structure of power. Therefore, a region is not created merely by drawing lines on a map (MASSEY, D. 1995; PAASI, A. 2011). In the formation of historical borderlands, READMAN, P. *et al.* (2014) put the emphasis on control, demand and interaction. The methodological and theoretical viewpoints of human geography considering the spatial dimensions have become increasingly relevant in social and cultural sciences in the past three decades. The spatial turn has directed the attention of scholars towards spaces and places, both physical and abstract. In historiography, space has been the connecting theme of several symposiums in recent years (e.g. LAMBERG, M. 2011; HALLENBERG, M. and LINNARSSON, M. 2014; STOCK, P. 2015). Still, I believe that the research of the early modern era could benefit on further invocation of the geographical approaches on region building.

In studying the building process of borderlands, many history scholars have concentrated on nascent national identities and ethnic grouping. Peter SAHLINS, in his well-known research demonstrated how national identities developed and eventually bloomed contrasting 'the other' on the Pyrenees between Spain and France (SAHLINS, P. 1989). Research of the borderlands between Sweden and Denmark-Norway has concentrated on the state integration process, state building from below, linguistic distinctions and perceptions of belonging among commoners. The scholars find that one of the crucial factors of the process is interaction, and as HALLENBERG and HOLM point out, there is significance in the dynamics of top-down ruling and the reactions from below (EDGREN, M. 2001; HALLENBERG, M. and HOLM, J. 2016; LERBOM, J. 2017).

I concentrate on the becoming of the border region. By focusing on the institutionalization of regions I approach the dynamics between

the official border shift and the actual process of forging regional consciousness. By reacting to the changing territorial situation, the locals affected the region building process proving the peace agreement to be an impulse in the process rather than resolution. I concentrate on the document that officially determined the regional disintegration and triggered reactions from the local level. To complete the analysis of the peace treaty of 1743, it is significantly important to employ the previous Swedish-Russian peace treaty signed in 1721.

Geography scholars have utilised the institutionalization of regions framework by geographer Anssi PAASI on researching emergence and dissolving of regions, regional and place identity, regional transformation, and re-establishing historical regions (e.g. PAASI, A. 1986; MACLEOD, G. 2001; SEPP, V. and VEEMAA, J. 2010; ZIMMERBAUER, K. and PAASI, A. 2013; SEMIAN, M. and CROMY, P. 2014; VAISHAR, A. and ZAPLETALOVÁ, J. 2016). PAASI, A. (1986, 1999, 2011) introduces the institutionalization of regions as a process during which a place transforms into a region and the collective consciousness of it emerges. The process consists of four dimensions: forging of (1) the territorial, (2) symbolic and (3) the institutional shape of the region, and (4) the region emerging in the spatial structure of the society. As commonly in critical geographical approaches, the theory suggests that regions are social constructions, shaped in conceptualising, networking, and actions. Thus, a region is not eternal but historically constructed (BERGER, P.L. and LUCKMANN, T. 1967; PAASI, A. 1986, 2002; HACKING, I. 1999; ZIMMERBAUM, K. and PAASI, A. 2013).

Regions are collectively remembered and forgotten but the historical progress is by no means a self-directed temporal development. To legitimise the desired status or shape, the retrospective evaluation of the regional history may be inspired by the future goals. Therefore, the questions of birth, dissolution, and the transformation motivate the research of regional institutionalization. If an attempt to institutionalize or deinstitutionalize a region is very dramatic, argue PAASI, A.

and ZIMMERBAUM, K. (2013), demonstrations promoting counter identity may occur. These actions are often collective and temporary. The process of regional institutionalization proceeds simultaneously at multiple communal levels. A political decision alone cannot deinstitutionalize a region. Even though demolished from the regional administrative map, divided into pieces or merged into a bigger unit, a region can continue existing in symbolic and mental form. Thus, the processes are not always cohesive, or unanimous in practice. Therefore, a region may appear fuzzy in territorial shape, lifespan, and authorization (PAASI, A. 1986, 1999, 2002; PAASI, A. and METZGER, J. 2016).

The peace treaty of 1743 was a significant act in forging the localities into the border region. Can we see it as a disintegration of the region, though? I categorise the peace treaty transcript per the dimensions of the institutionalization of region framework. I study the aims of the peace treaty by content analysis, foregrounding the intended shape of the borderland. A question of whether this border region became something fixed and then emerged in the social process, or if the social construction refers to the forging of the shape peculiar to the region in addition, is ontologically essential to the research (PAASI, A. 2002; STOCK, P. 2015; PAASI, A. and METZGER, J. 2016). I believe presuming fixed outcome may impede the true motives. Re-bordering the state does not necessarily mean complete regional redefinition. Therefore, I consider the borderland communities as cases. In practice, the interacting dimensions of the institutionalization process intertwine, and therefore do not fall into the categories easily. The complexity of the actual region and the experience of different individuals and interest groups of the past is hard to grasp in total. However, the institutionalization framework gives shape to the study that enables comparative analysis of the multifaceted progressions of the local communities along the borderland. It also foregrounds the interaction between social groups, regions, and centrum and periphery, for closer examination.

I focus on the establishment of the border region. By enlarging on the institutionalization process, it is possible to emphasize the socio-spatial aspects on the development of historical state peripheries. The institutionalization of regions is employed as an analytical tool. By categorising the establishment of the border region in the transcript, I demonstrate that a top-down perspective is not enough of a viewpoint for the process of building a region.

The peace treaty of 1743

On the 7th of August 1743, Frederick I of Sweden, and the empress Elisabeth of Russia signed the peace treaty between Sweden and Russia after long negotiations. The terms had been agreed with the parties earlier in the summer and the Russian troops had started withdrawing from the territory they annexed. During the war, the seizure of the Russian troops reached the Gulf of Bothnia. It was in their interest to pursue further territorial conquest but as Sweden agreed to nominate Elisabeth's favourite as the successor to the throne, most of this territory was restored under Swedish domination. The war had broken out from the Swedish heat for revenge after the great defeat in the wars between 1700 and 1721. However, the treaty of 1743 brought only more territory losses for Sweden (CEDERBERG, A.R. 1942; VILLSTRAND, N.E. 2012).

The 18th century was a time of the expansion of the Russian empire while the Swedish realm was territorially reducing. The so-called Great Northern War (1700–1721) marked the end of Imperial Era in Sweden. In the peace treaty of 1721 with Russia, Sweden ceded Ingria, Estonia, Livonia, partially the Province of Kexholm, and the Karelian Isthmus from her eastern realm. The war of 1741–1743 ended with a similar outcome as the border shifted westwards again. In the treaty of 1743, Sweden ceded more territory to Russia, along with three fortresses (CEDERBERG, A.R. 1942; PAASKOSKI, J. 2005).

Deciding on the new borderline, the negotiators were concerned of their defence strat-

egies ignoring the local circumstances. The border ran through altogether seven parishes dividing villages and estates. In the division, three of the parishes split in half, leaving significant parts on both sides of the border. In four parishes, only minor parts were separated from the main part of the parish. Reconstituting of localities brought tension to the institutionalization process of the border region (CEDERBERG, A.R. 1942).

Establishing the borderland

Territorial shape

PAASI, A. describes the emergence of the boundaries of a region as a development of social practices. The borders, physical as well as mental, provide grounds for social classification. In other words, the regional consciousness requires ends for the imaginary reference group of inhabitants (PAASI, A. 1986). In the peace treaty, the border was described in four sections:

- The demarcation departed from the northern shore of the Gulf of Finland as a natural boundary, following River Kymmene northwards. Natural shapes have been exploited abundantly in history (KATAJALA, K. 2010).
- The second section started at the meeting place of the River Kymmene and the border of the County of Tavastland. The state border followed county demarcation that had taken root at least a century before. In the document, this second section of the border is referred to as the ‘common borders’ (Swedish *vanlige Gränzer*, §7). The customary borders facilitated the shift of administration.
- The third section, located at the Saimaa lake district, was called the new border (Swedish *Nya Gränze-linien*, §7). The demarcation was planned to follow no customary borders but it was determined by measurements on military strategic grounds. It was to circle the Nyslott fortress at a range of 2 Swedish miles. Landowners who forfeited part of their estate were entitled to compensation.

The transcript defines the approximate course of the borderline ribboning directly across the landscape without considering the customary borders in the region, such as village or estate limits. To avoid miscalculation, the measurement was specified as the Swedish mile, but it was not precise enough of a definition, for the point of departure was ambiguous.

- The fourth section begun from the south-eastern side of the fortress following the former state border of 1721 (Swedish *Nystadske Freden fastställa Gränzen*, §7). From Porajärvi (Russian *Porosozero*) northwards the border followed a line agreed in the peace treaty of 1617. The essential part of the state border in my research comprises the first three sections.

From the 17th century, a territorial comprehension of the state became predominant. The territorial shape of the state partly overcame the interests towards the population (SUNDERLAND, W. 2007; KATAJALA, K. 2010). Amnesty was declared for all prejudicial acts during the war by the second article of the peace treaty of 1743. More importantly, it stated that above all it is necessary to have the border ‘divided and validated’ (§7) to avoid further mistrust, for that would truly secure the peace. However, the peace negotiators retained from dictating details of the exact demarcation leaving them for the border commissions to define. The Swedish and Russian border commissions, delegated to agree on the details, delayed the physical demarcation of the boundary for years. Later, as the officials proceeded from negotiations to demarcation issues between the states, defining the borderline became even more difficult (MIELONEN, A. 1993). In certain parts, the parties never fully agreed on the demarcation.

The vagueness of the peace treaty left much room for interpretation, which the border commission failed to seal. It is conclusive, that the peace negotiations did not define the border region practices to detail for the treaty, but demonstrated the attempt to redefine the territorial composition within the area. The commissions’ task was to validate

the state border locally as they demarcated it. By implication, this referred to interaction with the local mediators. The Swedish border commissioner Stiernstedt's reports reveal that peasants operated as experts on local geography and old borders (Border documents 1743–1747). It is interpreted that locals took advantage of the disorganised situation as consensus was unaccomplished. For example, the vague demarcation was used against the officials to avoid taxation (MIELONEN, A. 1993). This shows how the local common people benefitted from the porous governance.

Due to the unstable foreign affairs, the commissions' task took years. Especially the contention over the strategic places of Pyttis, Puumala sound and the Nyslott castle surroundings disturbed the fluency. In Savonia, the Swedish and Russian border commissions drifted into disagreements from the beginning and marked their own versions of the border. Two clearly disputed areas, which both states had demands on were left in the middle of Kerimäki parish. The areas were declared as 'no man's land', a territory of neither state in 1744 and they remained disputed until the next border shift. The population of these disputed lands was free of crown taxation until 1809. (Border documents 1743–1747; MIELONEN, A. 1993; GUSTAFSSON, H. 2007). Despite its reputation as a wild free state it was not a seedbed of decadence but much attached to the surrounding society. Nevertheless, as a third space between Swedish and Russian territories, this strip of land was to operate as a channel for smuggling (MIELONEN, A. 1993; KOSKIVIRTA, A. 2015). The tension between the states introduced the population possibilities to exploit their position more uninhibitedly to protest, for example.

Symbolic shape

The symbolic or conceptual shape of a region develops most significantly in language. The inhabitants express their regional consciousness that may not always correlate with the outsiders' comprehension. It draws from the

historical and traditional conceptions of the region and society. Therefore, the region can be built simultaneously on several levels of society (PAASI, A. 1986).

The transcript repeatedly referred to two territorial entities on the border: the side of the Royal Sweden, and the side of Imperial Russia. The emphasis on the spatial dominance is notable and the rulers connect closely to the territory. The king of Sweden and the empress of Russia signed the peace treaty of 1743 on behalf of 'the realms, lands, subjects and inhabitants'. It was a contract obligating not only the rulers but also people living within certain territories (KATAJALA, K. 2010; LIIKANEN, I. 2014). In the territories Sweden ceded, the agreement relieved the population of the oath of allegiance to the king. Equally, the oath of allegiance to the empress given during the occupation became void for the inhabitants of the restored areas after the seizure ended (CEDERBERG, A.R. 1942). The subservience was dissociated from the status of inhabitant per the peace treaty. People had different positions and allegiances (SUNDERLAND, W. 2007), but the peace agreement validated people not on the grounds of citizenship, but their whereabouts. A soldier or a trader was to obey the laws of the province he was visiting. However, they were not necessarily subordinated under the same legal institution. Soldiers were under the military laws and legal actions against foreigners were problematic to execute. The border did not aim to block the social interaction, but the population's position was administratively incompatible, which decreased the legal security. In cross-border cases it was not as likely to win justice (KOSKIVIRTA, A. 2003, 2015).

Despite the composition of two sovereigns, two states and two territories presented in the peace treaty, the negotiating parties were asymmetrical in many senses. Firstly, the rulers' authority differed from each other. Elisabeth was an autocrat representing the absolute authority. In Sweden, the so-called Age of Liberty (1718–1772) had reduced the king's authority in relation to the estates (GUSTAFSSON, H.

1994). Therefore, the Swedish Realm (Swedish *Sveriges Rike*, §1, §3) authorised the agreement in addition to the Royal Majesty. In fact, in the Age of Liberty, the phrase Royal Majesty did not refer to the king in person, but to the ruling power of the state: the diet and the king together. It included the administrative system combining the king's authority that operated through the representative government in the Council of the Realm (GUSTAFSSON, H. 1994).

Sweden can be called rather a geographically unified state in the 18th century, while the Russian Empire, expanding to Europe in the west, and across Siberia to the Pacific Ocean in the east, was very much a conglomerate with territories under different political systems. Since the era of Peter I, the peripheral provinces of the northwest conquered during the century, and Siberia, were distinguished from the historical core of the empire. Therefore, despite the increased control over different parts of the empire, the empress faced different symbolic roles within territories that operated under different administrative systems (GUSTAFSSON, H. 1998; SUNDERLAND, W. 2007). For example, in Estonia, Livonia and Karelia, seized by Russia at the beginning of the 18th century, Elisabeth was a duchess, yet the empress of the whole realm as well. The Swedish king's title does not suggest Finland being separate from the core areas of Sweden. Heraldic references to the grand duchy of Finland were not actively used between 1718–1802 (PAASKOSKI, J. 2005; ENG, T. 2008). Still, both parties acknowledged that the border shift happened in the territory referred to as 'Finland', inhabited by 'Finns'.

One of the primary regional symbols is the name (PAAASI, A. 1986). Interestingly, the peace treaty mentions the Grand Duchy of Finland as an entity. A grand duchy refers to a politically uniformed entity (LIIKANEN, I. 2014). However, the peace treaty suggests another way of defining 'the grand duchy of Finland', as a bipartite region, with a Swedish and a Russian side (*Figure 1*). Per the peace treaty, all the occupied areas included in the grand duchy. Further, 'historically Russian' territories Karelia and Kexholm interconnected with

Finland now. After the border shift, the grand duchy was continuously understood to reach from the Gulf of Bothnia to the eastern end of the Karelian Isthmus, including Åland islands. 'Finland' denoted unity historically and geographically, but politically it was divided into separate units located in two realms.

Ostrobothnia that often was not perceived as part of the geographical Finland was also paired with the so-called grand duchy (§5). Historian Jonas NORDIN has argued that the special position of Finland within the Swedish realm and the geographical shape that included Ostrobothnia is read from the sources from the 18th century onwards, an interpretation that has been welcomed with criticism (NURMIAINEN, J. 2003; NORDIN, J. 2010). However, there are some signs supporting the viewpoint. The historical nature of the region becomes evident from the peace treaty. Both parties agreed to refrain from the claims towards the other side of the grand duchy for eternity, no matter with which name this territory would be known as in the future. The Russian empress acknowledged the Swedish domination over the part of the province of Kexholm, 'that belonged to Russia in the old times' (§6, §8). The Swedish state forced to accept a greater defeat. The ceded regions were incorporated to Russian empire 'for now and forever' (§4). The remoulding of the region went beyond the immediate border.

The parishes and villages that the border divided were not renamed by the state officials in the establishment process. However, the church needed to distinct the subservience in their bookkeeping, so the clergy found it necessary to rename some parts of villages or estates. (Population registers of Kerimäki 1743–1805; Kerimäki congregation, communion books 1748–1801.)

Institutional shape

The formal institutions as well as practices affect the institutional shape of the region. Interaction – social, economic, and political – forges the shape of the region and builds its character



Fig. 1. The Grand Duchy of Finland after the peace treaty of 1743 (edited by the author)

(PAASI, A. 1986). The treaty confirmed the institutional unification of the Kymmenegård and Vyborg provinces guaranteeing to sustain rights, privileges and benefits for the subjects and inhabitants. The Lutheran Church and

schools would continue operating and the Greek Orthodox Church would gain equal rights to operate. Thus, the annexed provinces were not subordinated under Russian core areas, but they maintained their old Swedish

legislation forming a separate institutional entity. In the 18th century Russia, the idea of a historically bound core state and surrounding peripheral provinces populated by non-Russians was the prevailing conception of the empire (SUNDERLAND, W. 2007).

Paralleling the annexed provinces in the peace negotiations prefigured the establishment of the Vyborg Governorate in 1744. It consisted of two provinces attached to the Russian Empire in the Peace of 1721 – half of the Kexholm province and the province of Vyborg –, the newly seized province of Kymmenegård and parts of the Savonia province. The governorate was founded as a part of the Imperial Russia with restricted autonomy much like the Reval and Riga Governorates in the Baltics. The governorates were combined under the College of Justice for Livland, Estland and Finland. However, though changes from Swedish to Russian rule seem modest, it was not a uniform institutional system (PAASKOSKI, J. 2013; RÄIHÄ, A. 2014).

As the peace treaty acknowledged the territorial cross-border connection to ‘Swedish Finland’, it also connected the annexed territory to the Vyborg and Kexholm Provinces that Russia seized in the treaty of 1721. The peace treaty paralleled these two territories, and therefore the peace treaty of 1721 was repeatedly referred to. Especially the tenth article of the act refers to the previous treaty. Equal to the article 12 in the treaty of 1721, the empress secured the proprietorship rights to the lands for the subjects of the annexed territories. The article was reconfirmed in the next peace agreement in 1743. The inhabitants who had fled the war could return to their estates.

Position in the spatial system

The final parallel dimension of the regional institutionalization process is the emergence of the territory in a spatial structure of the society. It is interconnected with the rest of the dimensions since the territorial, symbolic and institutional shape provide the region its identifiable shape (PAASI, A. 1986). The

cross-border parishes indicate how wavering the top-down institutionalization of the border region was in the beginning. The peace agreement did not concentrate on the local level. The only parish the peace agreement mentions is Pyttis by the Gulf of Finland. It states that Imperial Russia gained ‘...the part of Pyttis located on the other and Eastern side of the last arm of Kymmene or Keltis River, the stream that floats between Great and Small Ahvenkoski [...] with the harbours, places, districts, shores, and all from the same arm till the passage to the south-eastern islands...’ (§5, §6). Pyttis’ division was defined in the peace treaty, which stresses the importance of its location.

Other divided parishes were not specified in the peace treaty. Mäntyharju had been split between three Swedish counties to begin with. The parishioners already attended district court and places of registration in their own directions. Located on the second section of the border where the division followed the county demarcation, the eastern part of the parish, submitted under the provincial administration of the province of Kymmenegård, was cut across the border (FAVORIN, M. 1975). The rest of the divided parishes were located on the ‘new border’ with straight demarcations, which followed no customary demarcations (SOININEN, A. 1954; LAPPALAINEN, P. 1971; MIELONEN, A. 1993; SEPPÄNEN, P. 1999).

The peace treaty describes Pyttis’ division, but the parishes not mentioned never fully diverged institutionally. Therefore, their administrative circumstances shaped in various ways, depending on the local circumstances. The congregations continued operating across the border and balance with twofold local government (FAVORIN, M. 1975; MIELONEN, A. 1993). This introduced several directions of influence to pursue local matters that forged the cross-border parishes’ individual shape.

The crown’s local administration was organised independently on both sides of the state border, but the practices overlapped partially through the ecclesiastical system. The congregations, Pyttis excluded, con-

tinued operating unified across the border. The commoners continued visiting the same church and marrying mostly within their own parish. The priests read the announcements, kept a population register and lead the parish assemblies as usual (LAPPALAINEN, P. 1971; FAVORIN, M. 1975; MIELONEN, A. 1993). This placed the clergy in an administrative double role mediating between the two states and gradually forging the practices.

Conclusions

In this article, I have categorised the peace treaty of 1743 between Sweden and Russia per the dimensions of the institutionalization of regions. The case of the state border of 1743 is an interesting example of the social development that challenges the clear-cut drawings on the late-18th-century maps. The peace treaty discussed the location of the state border and the institutional circumstances of the seized areas, as well as defined the position of the seized territory and inhabitants within the Russian empire. However, as the peace negotiators divided the territory on new grounds, the regional understanding about 'Finland' remained border-crossing and the boundaries further defined.

The peace treaty of 1721 was confirmed and paralleled with the status quo. Together, these two peace treaties defined the regional borderland. One can also see how history was acknowledged in shaping the region. The regional understanding about 'Finland' was politically bipartite. The territories seized by Russia were not considered the heartland of Imperial Russia but conquests. They were not desirable for intense integration policies, and therefore maintained the essentials of the Swedish political system instead. The peace treaty paralleled the seized territories that formed into the governorate of Vyborg in the following year.

Little attention was given to local details that provided much room for local interpretations of cross-border practices. The negotiating parties' interests lay in territory over the in-

habitants and land use. The border commissions received authority to arrange the local circumstances according to the given guidelines, but failed to reach a conclusive settlement with each other as well as between the states and the locals. In Pyttis, where the border was defined more precisely, the division was executed more intensely. Geographical significance influenced the institutionalization process. It was not consistent throughout the border region, which became more evident in time. Further north from the Gulf of Finland, the local level had more room to interpret the conditions. The cross-border congregations and the local community bound the border region together.

I see the peace treaty as a mere arrest of the ongoing process. It portrays an overview of the significant regional transformation process where the parish communities sought their shape as the new border region as well as cross-border region. Understanding the border region as a historical entity with a beginning and an end, I recognise that after ratifying the peace treaty of 1743, the border region 'was' not, but it was in the process of 'becoming', referring to the perpetual adaptation of regions from their establishment to disappearance (PAASI, A. and METZGER, J. 2016).

As a framework, I find the institutionalization of regions to bring focus to different dimensions of regional transformation. My attempt is not to claim that the idea of institutionalization of regions proceeded as a conscious project in the 18th century. However, I argue that establishing the borderland was socially constructed in several parallel processes. The political language, interaction, conflict and state building all are included in the process of institutionalization. In this article, I only concentrated on the peace treaty of 1743. To deepen the understanding of the regional institutionalization process, though, further attention must be directed beyond the political settlements, in the interaction and the networks of the borderland. The dimensions of the regional institutionalization approach provide a consistent tool for further investigations. A customary network might

be considered a more crucial factor in defining the regional boundaries than shifting the physical borders. When researching cross-border regions, it is crucial to define the contacts across the state border, as well as the institutional ties of the specific region. A fruitful scene to research conceptualising the region is in the discussions within localities and between the local and the governmental level.

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