



## PHD TOPIC - MARTIN KERNTOPF

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### NORM DEPENDENT CHANGE *of* BORDER PERMEABILITY *and* REGIONAL IGOs: A Comparison of the Baltic Sea Region and the South China Sea Region

To what extent do border related norms of regional intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have an impact on member-states border configuration? This research project argues that borders are normative processes of varying permeability and that their configuration depends not only anymore on the outcome of bilateral relations but that regional IGOs have the ability to override existing border configurations through repeated and persistent diffusion of norms in form of binding agreements.

The concept of borders poses a conundrum: In a globalized world with border transgressing economies and almost free flows of information and persons, they seem to be remnants of the past. Relics of a Westphalian state system, in which borders and border regimes served the purpose to create and enforce categories and spaces such as territory, region, nation, and power. A process that also extends to the spheres of societal, political, and economic interaction among states and seems to gain new relevance in contemporary times. In this regard the importance of IGOs for facilitating mutually beneficial agreements across borders comes to the fore. Scholars have argued that IGOs matter insofar, as they have a decisive socializing influence on member states behavior and by creating beneficial conditions that stimulates interaction. Yet the question of how exactly IGOs exert their influence and to what extent it correlates with the outcomes of heightened interaction among an IGO's states is disputed. The main argument being advanced in this research project emphasizes that their significance as interaction facilitators rests mainly on a diffusion and implementation of binding agreements that have a normative dimension and thus create a convergence of perceptions, ideas, and behavior of the 'affected' states. Norms as "... *shared expectations about appropriate behavior held by a collectivity of actors*" act in this case either as 'bridge-builders' or means to coerce compliance by socializing actors. In the same line falls the argument of contemporary border studies, which advances the perception of borders as normative process of varying permeability that not only delineate but also connect political actors across all levels of interaction.

The goal of this research is to highlight the influence of IGOs on multidimensional relations among member states by altering their border configurations through the implementation of binding normative agreements. This approach will be illustrated in form of a most similar system design, by comparing the bilateral relations between the states of the *Baltic Sea Region* (BSR) and the *South China Sea Region* (SCSR) from 1951 to 2015.

The added value of this research project is given by establishing a link between the studies of borders and organizations. It has been argued that international organizations have a decisive influence on the behavior of states and non-state actors through their capacity as norm entrepreneurs, by distributing binding agreements, and their expertise on a variety of given topics. Borders on the other hand are predominantly perceived through the lens of states and as being an inextricable part of them. Yet border studies scholars argue that borders not merely exist as lines on our maps. They are the sum of social, cultural, and political processes that stretch, overlap, and create new spaces. As such, *“territorial borders both shape and are shaped by what they contain, and what crosses or is prevented from crossing. The ‘container’ and ‘contents’ are mutually formative.”* The changing relation between different containers and their content is therefore crucial in regard to transnational integration and globalized interconnectivity. The role of regional IGOs as a form of overarching container, paired with an increasing set of information and managing capabilities, even the more so.