

The Fehmarnbelt project

In 1955, the German and Danish state agreed to construct a road and railway connection between Copenhagen and Hamburg with a direct ferry service between Rødby on the Danish isle Lolland and Puttgarden on the German isle Fehmarn. Eight years later in 1963, the so-called "Fugleflugtslinje" (bird flight line) was opened. Plans for the link had been almost 100 years in the making, starting with the first proposal in 1863.

History repeated itself in 2008 when the two neighbouring countries entered into contract to upgrade the "Fugleflugtslinje" with the construction of a fixed link over Fehmarnbelt with road and railway connections. We will see the result in 2021, when the 19 km long Fehmarnbelt tunnel will potentially half the transport time between the two metropolises. In 2000 the Öresund bridge brought about a road and railway connection between Sweden and Denmark, which makes the opening of the Fehmarnbelt tunnel in 2021 a milestone in the development of a Scandinavian-Mediterranean corridor from Malta to the Russian-Finnish border.

The advantages of transport via the tunnel will naturally be more appreciable in the Germany-Sweden-Denmark corridor, but the project would probably never have been realised had it only focused on regional interests. "We are a European project," states the builder, which is reflected in the substantial funding from EU's Ten-T and CEF programmes. The building owner expects EU to contribute 10 per cent of the capital sum of 5.5 billion euros (2008 rates). Out of caution, this expectation has been lowered in comparison with similar projects. The rest of the sum will be user-financed.

The builder is the company Femern A/S exclusively owned by the Danish state. The company lends to the construction on commercial conditions, with the Danish state serving as guarantor. Femern A/S expects to pay back the loan over 39 years, after which the tunnel will become a source of revenue. From a Danish perspective this is business as usual, as the state has financed both the Great Belt Fixed Link (1999) and the Öresund Link (2000) through the same model. For this reason the Danish state could assume sole responsibility for the construction with ease when the treaty was signed in 2008.

However, Germany will not avoid costs since both countries are duty-bound to invest in national upgrades of the road and railway constructions supporting the fixed link. Furthermore, additional investments could become invaluable. For example, the Danish state granted about a half billion Euro to the construction of a new Storstrømsbro between Falster and Sjælland in 2013. In Germany, there is discussion about the need to construct a new link across Fehmarnsund between Fehmarn and the German mainland that would equal or even surpass this cost.

The land construction in connection to the tunnel will be executed in Denmark by the state company Banedanmark and the Danish Road Directorate under the Ministry of Transport. In

Germany, the task lies with LBV Schleswig-Holstein under the Northern German Land Schleswig-Holstein and the German national railway company Deutsche Bahn. The Danish state-owned DSB and Deutsche Bahn will be responsible for train services. In Germany responsibility for the regional train service will lie with the Land's company, LVS Schleswig-Holstein. As a result the German co-ordination is slightly more challenged than in Denmark, as there is a need for decision-making and funding on the regional and national platform.

Research made by the BSR TransGovernance project shows managers and leaders of cross-border infrastructure initiatives in the Baltic Sea Region discovering common priorities and good communication between national and regional/local enterprises to be the key factors in optimising planning and development across the borders. The above mentioned major infrastructure investments expresses this conclusion very clearly. In this case, a 5.5 billion-euro investment could at worst turn into a huge cross-border traffic jam without proper communication.

As mentioned, the financial actors behind the Fehmarnbelt project represent a European and a national plan, as well as a regional platform. At the same time there are important parallel activities and constructions of facilities supporting the corridor construction financed by municipalities, regions, Land, state and EU. For many years, Region Sjælland has invested in boosting the regional companies' competence to increase the chances of growth when the activity rate intensifies, seeing as 3,500 new jobs will emerge on Lolland in 2015-2021. Meanwhile, commercial building plots by the motorway are being made ready in Guldborgsund Municipality on Falster. All are activities that add to the project's overall value.

In recognition that some decision processes do not automatically begin immediately when the first ground is broken, varying degrees of binding co-operations have sprung up between the authorities and organisations. The main goal for these organs is to pave the way towards growth, for example through more co-operations – within the nation, the region or across borders.

STRING, a network of regional authorities along with Hamburg and Copenhagen/Malmö, is an example of a political co-operation between regions and metropolises in all the three corridor countries: Sweden, Denmark and Germany. There are also national Fehmarnbelt co-operations in Northern Germany and Eastern Denmark. In Northern Germany, regions, Land, municipalities and cities in the Fehmarnbelt region have signed a "letter of intent" that they will co-ordinate their Fehmarnbelt-directed activities. In Eastern Denmark, municipalities, regions and Capital have established a co-operation organisation with the aim of strengthening the area's international marketing under the name "Copenhagen". In addition, there is the Danish Femern Bælt Forum consisting of region, municipalities and organisations for employers and employees. This forum works as a consultative organ for yet another establishment: the publicly funded development company Femern Belt Development, whose aim in its condensed form is to create

regional growth. The think tank Baltic Development Forum is also interested in the Fehmarnbelt construction as the infrastructure project has obvious importance for the Baltic Sea region.

A co-operation organ has also been made between the nation state Denmark and Land Schleswig-Holstein. Fehmarnbelt Committee focuses on removing the barriers to the integration of the German and Danish part of the Fehmarnbelt region, especially regarding education and labour market. Municipalities, regions, Land and representatives from education institutes and business organisations are in this co-operation. Fehmarnbelt Business Council is a co-operation between the industry's organisations in the three corridor countries. The aim is to strengthen conditions for growth in the area Malmö/Copenhagen - Lübeck/Hamburg.

In addition, there are a number of bilateral co-operations between the metropolises Malmö/Copenhagen and Hamburg, the same way as a number of local and regional business organisations are independently networking and co-operating.

While the actual construction approaches, private business networks and co-operation organisations have also come out. The first business organisations revealed themselves around 2010-11 and there are a handful of large formalised co-operations today, of which many seem to be competently organised. Naturally the goal is to increase the chances for taking part in the enormous construction project. In other words: growth.

For many years, the local German and Danish media have unfailingly reported on the on-going process, while new niche media have come into being in both public and private spheres.

Not to mention the hundreds of individuals and professionals connected to tourism, cultural life, schools, research and education involved in the process through one of the many EU funded projects working towards stronger integration and co-operations across the borders. For many years there have been German-Danish project activities identifying and harnessing the potentials of the coming tunnel link in mind. EU's INTERREG 4A program has been crucial financial support for these activities.

The amount of interested parties in the Fehmarnbelt tunnel and Fehmarnbelt region are overwhelming. The variation in the parties' spheres is vast. There is the pupil in Burg on Fehmarn, going on a school trip to Lolland's attractions with a "Fehmarnbelt-ticket" or participating in a discussion forum with Minister-President of Schleswig-Holstein and the Danish Trade and Development Minister. There is the railway expert attending conferences with colleagues and officials to talk over opportunities and barriers for providing the highest efficiency for the coming tunnel link.

For outsiders, all this can seem infinitely above their heads. This is also the case for many of the involved actors that are unfamiliar with the territory of the Fehmarnbelt network and organs. Each of these co-operation forums represents an organ with their own specific goal and way of working. Political or commercial interests drive some, while others are enthusiasts in specific

fields or in solidarity. The different interests do not contradict each other, but there are cases of actors overlapping, which would at best be a waste of resources and at worst could slow down a development process. How many analyses of e.g. business growth potential have to be made? Could government agencies gain from involvement in e.g. the German-Danish municipal co-operation in employment service and problems with cross-border commuters? Are expert reports of the enormous potential of the railway service's renovation properly presented to the decision-makers, and are they followed up? How many different branding processes can a relatively restricted area like the Fehmarnbelt region really carry?

There are many interests in business, almost too many. On the other hand there is an overall acceptance and acknowledgement between the numerous actors. The grounds are almost obvious: the German and Danish government have already made the most important decision, to build a fixed link across Fehmarnbelt. The construction is assigned to a newly established and fully Danish owned company with experience from two similar infrastructure projects in Denmark and Sweden (the fixed links across the Great Belt and Öresund). Meaning the main task of upgrading this important element in EU's infrastructure is placed inside a familiar concept and, in terms of law and company, a compact construction. This inspires confidence that the task will be performed professionally. Inclinations to question the builder's competence are most likely put off.

This also corresponds with the results of a survey conducted by BSR TransGovernance in transport initiatives in the Baltic Sea Region. Respondents stated that the "political ownership and leadership" is the most important factor and a crucial prerequisite for implementation.

To be fair, the German and Danish parliaments' final decision of the actual construction has not been made yet, and a part of the decision process will involve in particular environmental organisations and other interested parties in the public consultations, as is customary. The final parliament decisions are expected settled in the course of 2014 and the first half of 2015. After which contracts can be signed with the consortia that have given the best offers in the construction's four general contracts.

While the process around the actual tunnel construction and the connected land projects appear to run effectively, there is a great amount of activities and actors close by or behind, whose fruits of the individual and joint effort would benefit from better co-ordination and communication. There are a number of niche media for these actors, but in many cases they are not thorough enough when it comes to deep knowledge and specialised subjects.

The best effort at a joint co-ordination was in 2012, where Lübeck hosted the first "Fehmarnbelt Days". The Days comprised three conference days where everyone interested in the Fehmarnbelt region's future was invited. The Days will be repeated on 30 September to 2 October 2014, this time in Denmark. The organisers behind this year's event are Fehmarnbelt Business Council, STRING, the Danish Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs,

Fehmarnbelt Committee and of course Femern A/S, that will be represented by the parent company Sund & Bælt Holding. Baltic Development Forum assumes responsibility for holding this year's conference days.

At Fehmarnbelt Days, politicians, business leaders, officials, experts, environmental activists, cultural operators, students and many others can be enlightened, share experiences and meet new contacts. 600 participated in 2012.

This event gives a platform for one of the fundamentals for multilevel governance, as shown in the BSR TransGovernance project: Reflexive communication and discussion – not just between already established axes of cooperation but with any stakeholder from any country in any organisational context.

Which method could speed up all these processes? The authorities' co-operation, that could ensure the workforce the same direct path over the borders like the Fehmarnbelt tunnel offers car drivers and rail commuters? Which method can make regional and national transport companies work together for a joint strategy for a further modernisation of public transport? Is there a method to create a compact and efficient transnational growth agenda that maintains respect towards political and business related interests?

It is certainly worth looking for the answer and the tools that can be helpful in this search.

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September 2014*