



Seminar

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The Transformations of 'the Baltic': Constructing Regions in the Baltic Sea Area

Thursday, 27 March, 4:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY



ABOUT PÄRTEL PIIRIMÄE

After studying history at the University of Tartu and Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Pärtel Piirimäe received an M.Phil. in the History of Political Thought and Intellectual History in 1999 and a Ph.D. in History in 2007, both from the University of Cambridge. In 2003-2006, he worked as a Research Fellow in European History at St. John's College, University of Cambridge, and since 2006 he has been working as Senior Researcher and Associate Professor at the University of Tartu.

His research field covers early modern political and legal ideas, propaganda and the public sphere, regional identities, and intellectual history in the Baltic area. He is the author of chapters in *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); *Exploring Cultural History* (Ashgate, 2010); and *The Roman Foundations of the Law of Nations: Alberico Gentili and the Justice of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2010). Piirimäe is currently completing a book on the legitimation of war in seventeenth-century Europe. His publications also include articles in the *Historical Journal*, *Trames*, and *Journal of Early Modern History*. He has edited *The University of Tartu in the Early Modern Academic World* (2010), *Baltic Regionalism* (2012) and *Die baltischen Kapitulationen von 1710* (Böhlau, in print), and is the editor of *Ajalooline Ajakiri: The Estonian Historical Journal*.

During his fellowship at SCAS, Piirimäe intends to study the discourses of international law and morality in early modern Europe. He will focus on the formation of a Euro-centric conception of 'the law of civilized nations' which replaced the universalist, natural law-based aspirations of seventeenth-century international law scholars. He will also look at the reception and development of these ideas in Northern Europe.

ABSTRACT

Space and spatial thinking have become increasingly popular research themes, so that scholars are even speaking of the 'spatial turn' as one of the recent paradigm shifts in humanities and social sciences. This has brought along a new wave of cross-fertilization between disciplines, where geography, in particular, has become an exporter of various concepts and methodologies. In historical research, the understanding that 'space' is essentially a cultural or social construction has triggered an increasing attention to the varieties of spatial thinking in history. Among various spatial concepts borrowed from geographers, the concepts 'region' and 'regionalism' stand out in recent historical scholarship.

In the presentation, I will discuss the construction of mental geographies on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, with a focus on the transformations of the concept 'Baltic' from the early 19th-century to the present day. I will also look at various alternative regional concepts such as Baltoscandia, *Norden*, *Mitteleuropa*, Finno-Ugric world, etc., that were proposed at certain junctures of history. I am especially interested in the questions, to what extent the region-building can be viewed as a 'construction' by the elites, what were the motives behind such constructions, and what were the factors that determined the success or failure of particular regionalist conceptions.