

# Performing a Transnational Region The Importance of "Open House Strategy"

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***Performing a Transnational Region***

***- The Importance of "Open House Strategy"***

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**Performing a transnational region**  
- *the importance of "Open House Strategy"*

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# Performing a transnational region

## - the importance of "Open House strategy"

*This paper discusses the transnational regionalization in the Öresund area, where the ambition and will to regionalize has existed ever since the late fifties. However, from being futurism it has during the nineties turned into a huge project with many actors and resources organized around the very idea of creating a transnational metropolis. This regionalization process has some interesting properties, which this paper will elaborate upon discussing organization within the frame of "Open House-strategy" using events and concepts as vehicles for the process. With these vocabularies I intend to reflect on a strategy process, which has not very closed boundaries, but is like an invitation for participation, and how concepts and events are very important social arrangements in organizing the "Open House".*

Yesterday, when I was doing some housework I turned on the television just to listen to the weather forecast for today knowing, however, that I would not have the time to enjoy potential good weather. So maybe it was just to be confirmed that no sunshine would be missed or maybe just a bad habit! According to the weatherman *Jutland could expect some rainy and windy weather, South East of Denmark a bit cloudy, and in the Öresund Region there would be some sunshine, but later this afternoon rain would come.* It wasn't that the expected sunshine or rain astonished me – maybe I was just a little annoyed. But I was really surprised that the phenomenon "the Öresund Region" was used in the weather forecast implying that the *Öresund Region* not any longer only was a playground for organizations and researchers with a special odd interest. Many organizations have during the years put some properties into the Öresund Region, but for the first time the Öresund Region had its own weather forecast. This is an example of a *marginal* phenomenon turning into *mainstream* (Linde-Laursen, 1999), and as a social phenomenon the Öresund Region was, I think, only objectified even stronger. It was not only identified in connection with specific interests and organizations, but it was identified in a popular context.

### The social creation of the Öresund Region

The Öresund Region is a social phenomenon and a social creation, which has been talked into being (ex. Shotter, 1993) during the last 40 years. The Öresund Region has been performed in conversations among persons, organizations, and institutions, who have stated their perceptions of an integrated region producing, using and reproducing arguments making up an imagination of a future Öresund Region (Tangkjær, 1997 & 1999). The Öresund Region has primarily turned into being a *conceptual institution* involving the very idea of a region as imagined during the last four decades. As the Öresund Region is being organized (e.g. projects, networks, alliances, new organizations) the conceptual institution is translated (Latour, 1999) by the many different actors striving for a position in the imagined future region. In that

light the above-mentioned weather prophet had just participated in a continuing dialogue or conversation among organizations carrying out the imagination of the Öresund Region. But, I assume that he did not have any particular clear stakes in the Öresund Region, but more or less acted towards the objectification of an Öresund Region (Berger & Luckmann, 1992) thereby bringing forth the very idea of something called the Öresund Region. Theoretically, the prophet was socialized into the conversational community upon which the Öresund Region rests and he is now considered to be a member of the actor network performing the Öresund Region (Law & Hassard, 1999).

## The Öresund Region as a new strategic context

One extremely important event putting the Öresund Region on the track was the decision made in 1991 to build a fixed link between Denmark and Sweden, which has put more hope and economic investments into this particular area. Within the last five years the ambition to create a transnational region has certainly intensified. Scania and Greater Copenhagen will be connected by a fixed link in year 2000 breaking down the physical barriers, and today's organizational activities try to build cultural, political and industrial bridges.

The will to regionalize Greater Copenhagen and Scania is closely linked to the ambition to build a fixed link between Copenhagen and Malmö, and many would probably say that the Öresund Region has been the political argument for deciding this infrastructural element since the fifties (Sørensen, 1993). Even though the Öresund Region in both Sweden and Denmark materialized into political decisions to build a fixed link it still was only established at a level of political debate and vision-making. In the eighties both the fixed link and the Öresund Region had a renaissance, and since the mid-nineties the Öresund Region has been established as a highly legitimated discourse which has developed and mobilized actors, resources, visions and problems (e.g. Tangkjær, 1999). Primarily the visions of an Öresund Region deals with industrial development and economic progress, but due to the fact that industrial competition needs cultural, political and institutional arrangements the Öresund Region is discussed within many sectors and areas today.

### Political ambitions or an industrial necessity?

Not surprisingly, the ambition to regionalize has been accused of being a political project rather than a project meeting requirements from firms and organizations looking for collaborators on the other side of the Sound, but who have not had the infra-structural accessibility needed for corporation. Right to say, individual firms and organization have not expressed a need for a fixed link or better opportunities to do business with suppliers and customers on the other side of the Sound (Berg et al, 1995 & 1997). It is not that transnational commerce in the Öresund area is well supported and pronounced, but that there is no tradition for corporation and trade

between Danish and Swedish firms and organizations in this particular area. The daily commuting cross the Sound is approximately 2,000 persons working in Sweden and living in Denmark or the other way around. This could of course lead to the impression that the Öresund Region is a *white elephant* with only little political value. Nevertheless, the Öresund Region is a window of opportunity for many organizations and far from being an empty project driven by a political will it is today a fairly crowded strategic context.

Hundreds of different and somehow interrelated actors are today actively involved in creating the Öresund Region, and they all give the impression of an enormous will to transform the Öresund area into a region. Many projects have been organized during the last five years, many organizations have found each other in their work on regionalizing the Öresund area and quite many resources – political as well as economic resources – have found their way into the arrangements of the Öresund Region. This resource allocation has of course motivated and activated quite a lot of actors, and turned the Öresund Region project into a domain of “normal” business interest. It certainly seems that the Öresund Region has been an institutionalized phenomenon giving priority to transnational projects and activities within many organizations. The Öresund Region has turned into a more or less distinct organization of actors wanting and doing the Öresund Region. However, this does not mean that an absolutely agreement exists between the different actors on how to create this new regional space. A few months ago organizations representing Greater Copenhagen’s and Scania’s taxi drivers had a confrontation upon the right to do business in a transnational manner. From a Danish perspective Swedish taxi drivers should not be allowed to pick up new customers at Copenhagen Airport when bringing Swedish customers to the Danish side of the Öresund Region. This dispute has now ended, and it is only to a small degree possible for Swedish taxi drivers to pick up customers on Danish ground.<sup>1</sup> This is just a small example of how the Öresund Region’s sometimes already institutionalized practices are far from being just visionary ideas of common good and progress.

### ***A strategic process with no clear direction***

As stated earlier the Öresund Region has existed as an ambition for many years, and many ideas have been related to the very idea of integrating Greater Copenhagen and Scania. *The Øresund region as a new regional centre of force in Northern Europe! The Øresund region as the gateway to the Baltic States! The Øresund region as a research centre! The Øresund region as a Medicon Valley!* During the last decade the region has been given a never-ceasing amount of labels. We are confronted with a region that, apart from its strictly geographical existence, to a much larger extent seems to have achieved a linguistic social existence – despite the fact that it is considered *not* to exist

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<sup>1</sup> “Øresund – en region bliver til”, page 57, report prepared by the Danish and Swedish government, May 1999



in a proper sense<sup>2</sup>. It is indeed not "out there" as a centre of force, a gateway, a research centre or a Medicon Valley. Still it leads a life of its own (Tangkjær, 1999) – free from the economic and political structures that normally are seen to connect people, organizations, actors and agents in a regional context. However, as a process of organizing actors and resources the regionalization in the Öresund area does not seem very clear, but certainly has the property of ambiguity. This is primarily the case due to the absent of a clear organization or coalition, and because no clear intentions and procedures are known on how to organize a transnational regionalization.

### The absent of a dominant coalition

It is not that organizations work on their own basis trying to create self-oriented opportunities for an integrated Öresund Region. Rather than being a process driven by the many opportunistic individual agents striving for own organizational success, the regionalization is driven by collaboration across organizational as well as national boundaries. Organizations simply have to cooperate. That is the whole idea behind the Öresund Region, and organizations (e.g. the European Community) supporting the process financially make sure that all projects have a transnational character. This of course does not prevent individual organizations to behave opportunistically, but only that opportunism should not be the explicit statement when being engaged in the Öresund Region-project and corporation with different organizations.

Today it is possible to observe how new more or less formal networks evolve within the different sectors linking individual organizations in a strategic network of new resources and action structures. The academia "the Öresund University" links the many different universities and business schools in the Öresund area. "AF-Øresund" is a formal network of job centres. "Medicon Valley" has during the last five years been a vehicle for corporation between research institutions and firms within the medical industry. "Öresund Business Council" is the umbrella for organizations representing different industry interests in the Öresund Region. The project "The Birth of a Region" is concerned with marketing and development of the Öresund Region initiated by public organizations in the area, and "Science Region" is perhaps a label that possible could integrate the networks above into a cohesive whole.

This short list of initiatives is just mentioned to illustrate that many things are happening and a lot of organizations take part in the project of integrating the area using own money and investments. I wouldn't say that no agreements and common interests exist across these organizational networks regarding regional development making it impossible to talk about a dominant coalition (Cyert & March, 1963). But I

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<sup>2</sup> "The Birth of a Region – Strategisk oplæg om Øresundsregionen", October 1997, prepared by The Øresund Committee, Wonderful Copenhagen, Copenhagen Capacity, Scania Tourist Board, The County Administrative Board of Scania, Malmö City and Øresundskonsortiet.

think it is very difficult to imagine that these many different organizations and institutions organized in different projects some day could act in concert giving the Öresund Region cohesiveness and one distinct direction. However, it is also difficult to point out any specific areas where conflict possible could evolve between the different organizations and networks.

As a transnational development process we should remember that this project is of an international character and that no traditions for transnational corporation exist in this particular area. This means that the existing institutional structures do not support the development process, but actually have to be explored, and that no authority yet has the legitimacy to rule and control the process of development. From time to time it is argued that a regional management structure or governance structure is needed to control the regionalization process and to make the right decisions at the (Öresund) regional level. Some hope and believe that the Öresund Council constituted in 1994 actually could develop into a political authority and regional government, but all still agree that the council needs political authorization, power and attractiveness to be more than a resource intermediary and project initiator (Rosenholm, 1997).

#### The absent of clear intentions and procedures

In a pamphlet from 1997 presenting strategies for marketing and development of the Öresund Region it is stated that<sup>3</sup>:

*Many corporations take place, first of all initiated by political and public institutions. The infrastructure, which is a precondition for building the region, is under construction. However, still planning is needed, an elaboration upon the political ambition in visions and plans in a public as well as private context. What kind of region is it that we want in the future – and how can it be exploited? And not least what are in it for people in the region, the business and international society?*

The organizations behind this statement are a group of organizations who actually could be a kind of a dominant coalition regarding a field as regional marketing, but even more important they represent strong political institutions in both Denmark and Sweden. What they call attention to in this statement is a kind of ambiguity concerning the exploitation of the Öresund Region, which of course not seems very remarkable thinking of a process of development. But one has to remember that this is a development with origins in the fifties and especially started in the late eighties. The Öresund Region is not imposed on organizations and institutions, but actually a vision created by the very same organizations and institutions. This means that the will and ambition to develop the Öresund Region comes before the very idea of exploiting that region in some way or another. This was also one of the conclusions

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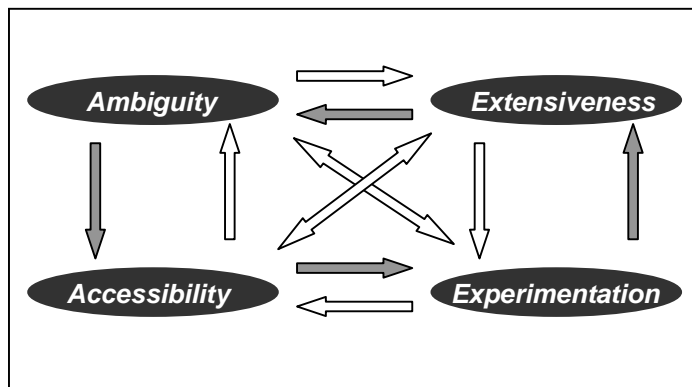
<sup>3</sup> Page 4 in "The Birth of a Region – Strategisk oplæg om Øresundsregionen", October 1997, prepared by The Öresund Committee, Wonderful Copenhagen, Copenhagen Capacity, Scania Tourist Board, The County Administrative Board of Scania, Malmö City and Øresundskonsortiet.

of a research conference in 1995 where researchers from Denmark, Sweden and even Norway were unable to identify clear intentions followed by organizations and institutions working intensively for an integrated urban area around the Sound.

It is also interesting that even though regions have had a kind of renaissance especially in Europe in the last two decades, there does not seem to be any clear script of how actually to do a region. Among others Smouts (1998: p. 37) has stated the strive for transnational regions in Europe as a means for harmonious development of the whole Community *turns the development of Euro-regions and the increase in transborder co-operation networks into an integration laboratory*. Parkinson & Harding (1995: p. 65-6) and Dumford & Kafkalas (1992: p. 5) somehow in another perspective also state that it is very uncertain how political actors at the regional level can act in an entrepreneurial way exploring and exploiting own resources cut off from the national level and support. To develop a region seems to be a very popular thing to be occupied with, but not a very clear project to throw oneself into, and even though *institutional learning* (Rhodes, 1995: p. 1) or imitation is a possibility doing a transnational region brings forth a lot of experimentation.

## “Open House” as an organizing strategy

In the following I will briefly present the strategy process behind the development of the Öresund Region, which is characterized more specifically by *accessibility*, *ambiguity*, *extensiveness* and *experimentation*.



**Figur 1** Properties of the Open-House strategy

### Accessibility

Above I have reflected upon the regionalization in the Öresund area as a strategic process, which is characterized by openness and ambiguity. There does not seem to be very strictly defined organizational boundaries excluding organizations and institutions from being involved in the regional development. On the contrary the process seems to invite organizations to join the regionalization process broadening

the Öresund Region both in scale and scope and enlarging the structure of relevance, which is important if the legitimacy of the project should be extended. This means that the Öresund Region is a project for everybody – person, firm, organization, industry, municipality etc., but of course some organizations and persons do have a greater authority to speak up and act, just meaning that not everybody can form the project in their own interest.

### Ambiguity

Ambiguity has for long been a phenomenon of interest in research on organizations (e.g. March & Simon, 1958; Cyert & March, 1963; March & Olsen, 1979 & 1989; March, 1994) and Sahlin-Andersson (1986) has used the term to discuss the *strategy of ambiguity* as a way of organizing large, complex and extraordinary projects. From the discussion above it seems that ambiguity is pronounced in the Öresund project. One implication of the strategy of ambiguity is that decision making gets easier because no stakes are excluded from the arena, but it is possible for almost every organization to put their interpretations into the decision reducing conflicts between participants.

### Extensiveness

Another important property of the strategy process is that the whole process contains a very large project, which is impossible to study or view comprehensively. This makes it impracticable for any single or group of organizations to control the process and to build governance structures. Instead many projects and activities take place at the same time, some support directly each other consciously or unconsciously, and others do not. This also has the implication that the Öresund Region is an ever-growing project.

### Experimentation

The last thing to mention here is that no exact procedures are developed on how to regionalize a transnational area, meaning that the Öresund Region necessarily must rest on the logic of experimentation. Resources put into the project are very hard to evaluate in terms of efficiency as well as effectiveness. It is very difficult for investors to follow-up on the initiatives taken concerning effect criteria. Instead investors are compelled to set up standards of efficiency evaluating the use of resources rather than evaluating the effect of performance as criteria of resource effect (ex. Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). This experimentation opens up for institutional as well as organizational exploration (ex. March, 1994: p. 79-91) making space for new participants, ideas and resources in the conversation and organization concerning the Öresund Region.

### **Concepts and events as strategic disposals**

Traditionally decisions have been seen as the primary social arrangements in organizations and eventually the actions regarded as vehicles for organizations (ex. Simon, 1945; March & Simon, 1958; Cyert & March, 1963; March, 1994). As an organizational phenomenon it is not assumable that decisions have not had any important role in organizing the Öresund Region. After all I have already proclaimed that it was an important decision that energized the organization of the Öresund Region, when the Danish and Swedish government decided to build a fixed link between Denmark and Sweden. Nevertheless, I will argue that concepts and events are even more important as social arrangements in organizing social phenomenon like the Öresund Region, which is difficult to grasp in strictly teleological manners.

Many important decisions have of course taken place, which I will not neglect, but concepts and events are here regarded as fundamentally arrangements making it possible to make and even more important to use decisions in organizations. Concepts and events are creating attention - attention, which for years has been seen as important in decision-making (ex. Simon, 1945; March & Simon, 1958; Cyert & March, 1963). Another important property is that actors and resources are mobilized by concepts and events because they make it possible to create coherency and space of orientation. This is also close connected to the fact that human action in large rests on representations making imagination into being and existence.

### Concepts in action

Imagine a conversation between two persons, one with a comprehensive and a more or less thoroughly knowledge of the Öresund Region and the other person with a vague interest in the region. The latter person asks the first one about the Öresund Region, what it is and what is the use of it. It is very difficult for the "expert" to point at the Öresund Region, and more likely she will turn to explain some of the arguments supporting the region and maybe explain in more detail about a specific project like the *Medicon Valley Academy*. With this project at hand it gets easier to explain and maybe to convince the other person about all the opportunities such an Öresund Region will bring forth. This very short fictive case should illustrate that metaphors are important in organizing actors (ex. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) because it makes it possible to communicate the Öresund Region in a more tangible way. Another important property of metaphors in organizations is that they create a focus of action reflecting coherence in organizing.

Not surprisingly concepts has from the start been very important social arrangements in organizing the Öresund Region (ex. Tangkjær, 1997; Boye, 1997), and still it is possible to observe how actors positioning themselves and their ideas of an Öresund Region using concepts. Some concepts are getting more and more institutionalized and new concepts are developed with a hope to be one of the arrangements that possibly can turn in to be one of the important organizations in organizing the Öresund Region.

This *conceptual innovation* should not be neglected because it brings dynamics into the organizing process, but of course with a danger of bewildering in organizing the region. However, in a process of organizing the Öresund Region it is important that actors are in a position to create a feeling of ownership towards the Öresund Region and maybe more important that they get the feeling of control or mastering some part of the process. In these manners it is possible to look at conceptual innovations as a strategic act for domain creation (ex. Thompson, 1967; Normann, 1975).

### Events in action

It would be a mistake to treat events as something new to strategy and organization thinking, because organizations and strategy almost are considered in a context of events affecting organizational behavior. Nevertheless, events in these terms have a more implicit status or at least another social position in action than what I find interesting. In my perspective events are not just some situations constituting the organizational environment as traditionally focused on in organization studies. Rather than being something “out there” events are properties of the action and organization.

Looking at the organization of the Öresund Region it could be stated that the Öresund Region is a chain of events presented and represented time to time in actors way of organizing their activities towards the Öresund Region. Going back to the fictive story above another strategy to be used when explaining the Öresund Region is to present selected events in a comprehensive way, and simply to tell a story of the Öresund Region and its development. By this strategy of narratives (ex. Barry & Elmes, 1997) it is possible to bring some kind of causality into being, and especially why the Öresund Region is needed or expected. Looking into documents from the eighties it is easily seen how the Öresund Region was presented in a causal way by pointing to historical events showing the need of a dynamic and strong region. This storytelling was both used in Denmark and Sweden to create a context wherein decision-making could take place. For example it was stated in a report in 1989 that Copenhagen needed the fixed link because of decisions taken regarding regional development in the seventies and the Danish governments change of political attitude during the seventies and eighties towards the Danish capital.<sup>4</sup> The narrative told in the report shows that a context of decision-making was made through the use a narrative rationality, which is something very different from formal rationality (Czarniawska, 1997: p. 22). The *poetic of events* presented here has an aesthetic property and makes it possible to be creative in organizing people and resources. This is what Shotter (1994: p. 148-59) discuss as management as practical authoring meaning that management is about making reality rather than finding reality in scientific manners. Events can be linked in different plausible ways making up different action contexts presenting different kinds of causality that organizations have to act according to. Rather than emphasizing the production of a context of decision-making in the poetic of events it is often the case that events are presented in a line just to show a quality of progress in organization.

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<sup>4</sup> Initiativgruppen om Hovedstadsregionen, “Hovedstaden – Hvad vil vi med den?”, 1989

Beneath a line of events are shown representing a history of the Öresund project from an infrastructural perspective, but it is quite easy to see how progress is the very idea of presenting the different events.

## Milestones in the history of the Öresund project<sup>5</sup>

23/3-91 The Danish and Swedish governments agree to build a fixed link across Øresund.	constructed on Swedish territory on conditions that certain environmental requirements are met.	The first caisson for the pylons is towed to the bridge alignment	Øresund Marine Joint Venture finishes dredging in Øresund operations in Øresund.
12/6 1991 The Swedish Parliament ratifies the agreement for the Øresund Fixed Link.	8/7 1994 The Danish Ministry of Transport approves the design, alignment and environmental conditions for the Øresund Fixed Link on Danish territory.	16/7 1997 "Svanen" places the first bridge pier in position at the abutment at Lernacken.	3/12 1998 The final element for the Øresund tunnel is cast.
14/8 1991 The Danish Parliament ratifies the agreement for the Øresund Fixed Link.	17/7 1995 Contracts are signed with Øresund Tunnel Contractors (for the tunnel) and Øresund Marine Joint Venture (for the dredging and reclamation works).	27/9 1997 The Øresund motorway between West Amager and Copenhagen Airport is opened.	6/1 1999 The Øresund tunnel's 20th and final element is placed in the tunnel trench.
27/1 1992 Øresundskonsortiet is established under the terms of the consortium agreement between A/S Øresund and Svensk-Danska Broförbindelsen SVEDAB AB.	18/10 1995 Dredging begins in Øresund.	3/11 1997 The first bridge section is towed from Dragados Offshore in Cadiz, Spain to Sundlink Contractor's harbour in Malmö.	18/1 1999 The first pylon leg for the Øresund Bridge is completed.
1/2 1993 Six selected consulting groups are invited to participate in competition for the link's design.	27/11 1995 Øresundskonsortiet signs the contract for the high bridge and the approach bridges with the contractor Sundlink Contractors.	11/12 1997 The first bridge section is placed in position at the abutment at Lernacken.	16/2 1999 The eastern pylon on the Øresund Bridge reaches its final height of 204 metres
23/6 1993 Øresund Link Consultants (ØLC) and the ASO Group are invited to expand on their solutions submitted for the competition. ØLC's proposal is for a single deck bridge, whereas ASO suggests a two-deck solution for the road and rail sections.	30/7 1996 Casting of the first caisson for the pylons begins.	26/6 1998 The first high bridge section in position in Øresund.	16/3 1999 The first vehicle drives through the Øresund tunnel.
16/6 1994 The Swedish Government determines that the Øresund Link can be	2/12 1996 Casting of the elements for the Øresund Tunnel begins at Copenhagen's North Harbour.	1/9 1998 Assembly of the Øresund Bridge's cables begins.	8/5 1999 The western pylon reaches its final height of 204 m.
	1/4 1997	27/9 1998 The Danish landworks for the Øresund Fixed Link completed. The Øresund Line between Copenhagen Central Station and Kastrup Airport opens.	3/6 1999 Cable installations completed.
		3/12 1998	14/8 1999 The final bridge section is placed in position. The basic construction of the Øresund Link has now been completed.
			1/7 2000 The Øresund Link opens to traffic

Now I discussed the poetic of events in manners of presenting an action context and as a way of showing progress in organization as two important strategies in organizing the Öresund Region. A last category representing *strategies of events* are those concerned with production of events or in a more popular term *event management*. Event Management has developed into an extremely hot area of strategy (ex. Kestner, 1996; Goldblatt, 1997; Betteridge, 1997), and it could be termed a kind of temporary organizational management. Events which falls into this category of strategy regarding the organization of the Öresund Region are for example conferences and seminars where people have been gathered with the purpose of informing and discussing the very idea of region. During the last six years approximately 15-20 public conferences and seminars every year have been held. Conferences and seminars are important social arrangements for mobilization of actors and resources towards the organization of the Öresund Region. Event Management is in these manners a useful strategy for bringing forth more narrowed arguments and reasoning in example by arranging a conference on the theme of research and education in the Öresund Region.

<sup>5</sup> These milestones are here shown representing the Øresund project, but primarily with a focus on the events concerning infrastructural part of the project. These data are taken from the

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have discussed the organization of the Öresund Region presenting the organizing process as an opened form of organization. The Öresund Region is basically a social phenomenon organized by the many organizations and institutions acting towards the imagination of a future Öresund Region. The Öresund Region is not only an institutionalized concept, but it appears as a strategic opportunity for many organizations and institutions in the way that it is a legitimated discourse mobilizing resources - political as well as economical resources. As a transnational phenomenon it means that no legitimated authority is possible to identify, who can overview and control what is happening. At the same time the Öresund Region is very extensive in its nature meaning that it is a huge project both in scope and scale, which makes it possible for many actors, interests, ambitions etc. to participate in the organization. Furthermore it is not possible to identify any clear scripts of how to do a transnational region. I have summarized these characteristics in manners of *ambiguity*, *accessibility*, *extensiveness* and *experimentation*. These characteristics are presented as properties of the “Open House Strategy”.

This very opened kind of organization is driven by the use of concepts and events rather than the traditionally focus on decisions in organizations. This is the case because the Öresund Region basically rests on the continuously mobilization of actors and resources in organizing the region. Concepts and events create attention, mobilize actors and resources and represent the imagined Öresund Region in ways making it possible to organize towards. I have furthermore discussed these two social arrangements in more detail.



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