

BORDERLINE ISSUES CONCERNING THE AUTONOMOUS ISLAND OF ÅLAND IN THE BALTIC SEA

Ida Hughes Tidlund. *Autonomous Åland: A Hundred Years of Borderwork in the Baltic Sea*. Doctoral Thesis. Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Stockholm University, 2021. 219 pp.

Ida Hughes Tidlund presented her doctoral thesis in ethnology at Stockholm University and the Centre for Maritime Studies in Stockholm (CEMAS). The thesis reviews issues regarding the definition of borders surrounding the autonomous archipelago of Åland with more than 30,000 inhabitants as of 2021 and located in the Baltic Sea between Finland and Sweden.

Altogether, there are 6,700 islands, 60 of which are inhabited. A law adopted by the League of Nations prevised that the inhabitants' language, culture, and traditions should be protected. The land of Åland was to be used and owned by the inhabitants of Åland. The right of domicile grants regional citizenship. This is required to permit political activities, business ownership, and ownership of fixed property. The right of domicile as well as the demilitarization are protected by an international treaty. Åland's autonomy includes decisions regarding education, industry, commerce, communications, postal services, health care, radio, TV, police, culture, and museums. The local government has the executive power within the framework of local legislation.

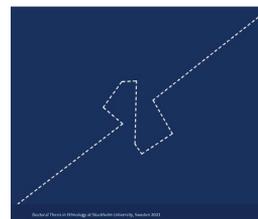
Åland is not required to offer education in languages other than Swedish, which is the only official language. Therefore, Åland is even more Swedish-speaking than Sweden, where several languages can occur as part of education. In 2018, 87% of Ålanders spoke Swedish as their mother tongue. Åland's autonomy is symbolized, among other things, by the Åland flag and its own stamps. The Finnish authority extends to foreign policy, border controls, monetary policy, and civil and criminal law.

This thesis gives an overview of the methods used to establish borders by legal means, which might change over time, and of how they shape everyday life for the individuals affected by them. Micro- as well as macro-perspectives are investigated, bearing in mind that borders and actions are linked to each other.

The theory behind the thesis is inspired by the phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre as well as that of the philosopher and phenomenologist Edward Casey and the social anthropologist Sarah Green, and their view that borders are legal and cultural constructions to convey understanding to the individuals concerned. A border is a point where something begins – and something else ends. A border thus is immaterial. "Here"



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is separated from “there”. Åland can be deemed by its inhabitants to be “here”, while Finland is seen to be “there”.

The author’s material consists of fifteen interviews conducted by her in 2017, and participant observations during 2016–2019. The author lives in Stockholm but has been able to build on having relatives living in Åland during her field studies. Her own experience from field studies is that it is not easy to establish relationships with the inhabitants of Åland. Older archival source material has also been used for the thesis, for example interviews with senior inhabitants between 1952 and 2015, statute books, newspaper articles, maps, and schoolbooks.

Participant observations have been recorded, among others, on the rocky islet Märket and on ferries to and from Åland, on which duty-free commerce takes place. This commerce is an important part of Åland’s economy. Tobacco and alcohol as well as Swedish snuff, which is prohibited in Finland, constitute large sales. Contraband sales of (among other products) Swedish snuff are also made.

After the first, introductory chapter, the second one reviews the legal framework of autonomy. The first law regarding autonomy was enacted in 1921 and the second one in 1952, both strengthening the protection of minorities. The third law was enacted in 1993, further strengthening the protection of the Swedish language.

The third and fourth chapters of the thesis focus on maritime borderlines which are less precise and harder to identify than land borders. There is only one land border on Åland – on the rocky islet Märket. One part of the island belongs to Finland, the other being Swedish. The Skiftet region separates Åland from Finland and the Åland Sea separates Åland from Sweden. The borders need to be reviewed every five or ten years not least due to the strong isostasy in the Baltic Sea. New islets appear. A map in the thesis (p. 78) shows how the rocky islet Märket has grown between 1810 and 1980.

Chapters five and six investigate how the Åland inhabitants deal with the border in their day-to-day life, in connection with hunting seals, fishing, and trade with Finland as well as Sweden. The author uses the concept ‘hodological navigation’ inspired by Sartre’s phenomenology to show how the inhabitants relate to their borders in everyday life. This means that people act to achieve certain objectives. There is a strong awareness of the borders because the inhabitants need to deal with them frequently. The author writes that the border is a recurring issue. Moving over water makes it necessary to consider the weather, waves, and ice conditions. A prolonged personal experience of navigating these border waters adds to this awareness.

Chapter seven summarizes one hundred years of Åland’s autonomy and the expression of this autonomy in handling the borders.

The thesis offers an extensive summary in Swedish (pp. 184–199). This is unusual in Swedish theses written in English, and strengthens the impression that Åland is more Swedish than Finnish.

The thesis is thorough with regard to material, use of theory, and analysis. It constitutes an important contribution to maritime ethnological research. There is plenty of material regarding legal developments and international treaties, as well as the inhabitants' handling of the maritime borders in day-to-day life.

I failed to find, however, comparisons with research concerning other border areas. In the 1990s, I participated in a research project entitled "Cultural Meetings along Borders". The scientists analyzed border relations from the late nineteenth through to the twentieth century in the Swedish regions of Bohuslän and Dalsland along with Østfold fylke on the Norwegian side. The key findings were published in the book titled *Gränsmöten* (Border Meetings, 1999). This is not mentioned or commented on in Tidlund's thesis. Comparisons with other territorial autonomies would also have been useful, not least the Faroe Islands and Greenland. These are islands under Danish authority but are mentioned only in passing in the thesis. For example, ethnologist Jóan Pauli Joensen has conducted several studies of the Faroe Islands from a historical perspective. Another ethnologist who is missing in the references is Nils Storå, former professor at the Åbo Academy, who has strong links with Åland. In 2003, he published a book titled *Fishing and Fishing Culture in Åland*. The Archipelago Research Institute at Åbo Academy University, which was established in 1978, is also missing. Since 1978 the Institute publishes the journal *Skärgård* (Archipelago), in which Nils Storå has had an important role.

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