

# ISLAND MAGIC AND THE MAKING OF A TRANSNATIONAL REGION\*

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**ABSTRACT.** How can an artificial island and a bridge-building project shape the dreams and plans for a transnational region? In this article I examine the making of the Öresund region of Denmark and Sweden by analyzing the intertwining of bridge construction and region building, from the early dreams and plans, to the actual construction phase, to the ceremonial opening in 2000, and to the difficult transition into an everyday transportation system. The ways in which the construction was organized and staged came to mirror some important trends of the so-called new economy and many of its buzzwords. Engineering and imagineering were combined in new ways. *Keywords:* islands, national identity, new economy, Öresund, transnational regions.

Flying into Copenhagen airport takes you over the broad straits of Öresund that separate Denmark from Sweden. The waters are shallow, with a smattering of islands. Some of them are natural, like Saltholmen, a marshy bird sanctuary, and Hven, the only populated island, with around 350 inhabitants; others are artificial, like Flackfortet and Pepparholmen, each of which was built to serve a specific purpose. What interests me here are the ways in which these isolated islands, in the middle of a densely urbanized coastal region, were drawn into the world of “the new economy” in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The island of Hven was in the 1960s part of a plan to build a gigantic international airport, complete with casinos and resorts, but a heightened environmental consciousness blocked the development. Today the island survives mainly as a small-scale tourist destination: Local artists and innkeepers have turned it into a retreat for busy urbanites in search of solitude and a quiet weekend of coastal walks and biking.

Flackfortet began its existence as a fort built before World War I, and it continued to be used by the military until 1968. After that, the abandoned military installations and buildings were plundered and wrecked, while weather and wind destroyed much of the island. It came to life again in the 1990s thanks to the growing market for packaged adventures. A Swedish consortium bought Flackfortet and turned it into an event space for corporate kickoffs, adventure experiences, and team-building sessions. The project was modeled on television reality shows, where groups of people were abandoned on uninhabited islands to compete in survival games. In Europe this genre became popular through the use of Fort Boyard, an isolated nineteenth century island fortress on the west coast of France, where a reality show called *The*

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