1. **Introduction**

Although nation states are modelled around vertical thinking, one can today speak of a broadening of the statehood concept.¹ This is reflected in the states partly by a diffusion of power caused by internal phenomena such as privatisation and deregulation, and partly by external phenomena such as globalisation.² To begin with, it is important to understand what is meant by globalisation in this context. Foremost, it refers here to such things as the international mobility of capital, businesses and goods; the emergence and growth of global, regional and transnational political institutions; the new types of social networks created by information technology, and finally, the presence, accessibility and assimilation of other cultures.³ The consequences of this globalisation include, among

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other things, new problems regarding the drawing of boundaries.\textsuperscript{4} States are participants in other activities than purely national ones and are, together with other actors, embedded and limited by these. This applies to everything from the subnational and regional levels to the international level. As a consequence, national agencies today are constantly involved in negotiations and cooperation with, for example: organisations, other states’ agencies, international organisations, standardisation organisations and private companies. This is also true for agency cooperation inside nation states: it is extensive and radiates in all directions. One way of framing the area has been to talk about multilevel governance.

Particularly in Europe it has been possible to discern a movement away from national central control, which has expressed itself in a number of different ways, among other things, in the distribution of decision-making power. From the 1980s onwards, this movement has gone in three distinct directions, which in part have been touched upon above: upwards, to institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU); sideways, in connection with, for example, the creation of new government institutions; and downwards, in the form of decentralised power to regional, municipal and other levels. In addition, as mentioned above, privatisations and deregulations have created a new landscape and have contributed to a diffusion of power.

The “network society” is a fact today in the Western world.\textsuperscript{5} For example, many of the public tasks that used to be managed by one single agency are today managed in cooperation with several authorities, or in cooperation with other actors. This cooperation tends to create complex hierarchies. Understanding how these new configurations work is a fundamental challenge for research today.
