

# Barents Tourism Action Plan



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1<sup>st</sup> Edition

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**Public-Private Partnership in Barents Tourism (BART)**

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# Contents

4	Barents Tourism Action Plan
7	Action area 1: <b>Cooperation</b>
10	Action Area 2: <b>Education and Knowledge</b>
13	Action Area 3: <b>Accessibility and Transportation Infrastructure</b>
16	Action Area 4: <b>Product Development</b>
19	Action Area 5: <b>Place Identity</b>
22	References
23	Appendix 1
24	Appendix 2

# Barents Tourism Action Plan

*"The promotion of tourism across national borders will strengthen human contacts and mutually beneficial economic development with positive effects for employment and business activities."*

Kirkenes Declaration 1993

The *Barents Euro-Arctic Region* is characterized by its diversity and extensive territory. The region consists of 13 municipalities located in the northernmost parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Northwest Russia. Around five and a half million people live in this area, among them indigenous people like Sámi, Nenets, Vepsians and Komi, scattered in an area of 1,755,800 sq. km. The arctic climate, exotic midnight sun, dark polar nights, northern lights, cold winters, vast natural resources and diverse cultural heritage offer both a fertile but also a challenging ground for tourism development.

In 1993 the *Kirkenes Declaration* officially acknowledged the need to improve the conditions for cooperation, security, integration and prosperity between local authorities, institutions, industry and business across the borders of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (henceforth Barents or Barents region). The Barents is nowadays considered one of Europe's largest regions for interregional cooperation. This level of cooperation is partly thanks to the active engagement of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Barents Regional Council (BRC) which, as political entities, are a direct result of the Kirkenes Declaration.

Over the past two decades policy makers and business people have discussed opportu-

nities for collaboration and the future of the region with a particular emphasis on the exploitation of natural resources such as forest, fish, minerals, diamonds, oil and gas. Although the potential of tourism, as a means to foster social and economic development, was also recognized in the Kirkenes Declaration, inter-regional cooperation within the tourism industry has remained underdeveloped.

As a tourism destination, the Barents Region currently attracts millions of visitors every year, generating billions of Euros and tens of thousands of jobs. While tourism continues to grow in the future, visitor arrivals are not equally distributed across the municipalities of the Barents. Indeed, the high degree of heterogeneity – in terms of business culture, levels of tourism development, infrastructure, legislation and human capacity – characterizing the tourism industry in the Barents not only hinders inter-regional cooperation but also prevents some municipalities from the benefits of tourism.

## Public-Private Partnership in Barents Tourism (BART)

Several interregional EU funded projects have been implemented to make use of these opportunities and minimize these challenges by supporting and stimulating interregional



*The Barents region is considered one of the Europe's largest region for interregional cooperation.*

tourism cooperation across the borders of the Barents Region. *Public-Private Partnership in Barents Tourism (BART)* is a concrete example of an EU funded project aiming to strengthen and enhance cross-border tourism cooperation between the public and private tourism sector (Appendix 1). This project, which was funded under the Kolarctic ENPI CBC Programme 2007–2013, aimed to promote tourism development in the Barents by:

- conducting a detailed analysis of the current state of the tourism industry in the Barents Region;
- analysing existing tourism expertise in higher educational institutions in the Barents Region;
- assessing needs and expectations of tourism entrepreneurs regarding tourism knowledge;
- stimulating research and development cooperation by supporting joint research work and initiating joint publications; and
- establishing and monitoring Monchegorsk Tourism Information Center in the Murmansk region as a learning environment for the Public-Private Partnership.

This action plan, which represents one concrete result of BART, is based on extensive research, background material and expert consultations. A total of 71 interviews were conducted among small- and medium-sized Barents tourism enterprises between September 2011 and April 2012. These enterprises were located in Finnish Lapland, Swedish Lapland,

Northern Norway, Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. The interviews provided critical information on the needs and expectations of tourism enterprises regarding tourism development in the Barents.

A careful review of official documents, reports and academic literature was conducted to analyze the data collected through the interviews. The review also helped assess the current level of tourism knowledge in relation to the Barents Region. Data collection and analysis were supported by consultations that took place in the form of workshops organized with tourism experts from Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia. The extensive research and consultations were planned, coordinated and implemented by higher education institutions situated in the Barents Region.

The partners in the Public-Private Partnership in Barents Tourism (BART) - project were

- Multidimensional Tourism Institute as a Lead Partner
- Regional Council of Lapland (Finland)
- Luleå University of Technology (Sweden)
- University of Tromsø: Barents Institute (Norway)
- Ministry of Economic Development of Murmansk Region (Russia)
- Murmansk State Humanities University (Russia)
- Murmansk State Technical University (Russia)
- Monchegorsk Town Authority (Russia)
- Ministry of Youth Affairs, Sports and Tourism of Arkhangelsk Region (Russia)
- Northern (Arctic) Federal University (Russia)





## The Action Plan

The overall intention of this Barents Interregional Tourism Action Plan is to offer an overview of the state of the tourism industry in this Nordic region. By articulating the views, needs and demands of Barents entrepreneurs, the Action Plan aims to encourage policy makers in national ministries, government agencies and EU institutions to provide the resources and improve the conditions needed for promoting interregional tourism development.

In particular, the Action Plan will play a key role in supporting the new mandate for the Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT) – established by the BEAC / Committee of Senior Officials and the BRC / Barents Regional Committee in 2008 – in achieving the objectives set for the period 2013–2017 (see Appendix 2). It will help the JWGT support cooperation between the many public and private organizations that have a role to play in Barents tourism industry. In the long-term, this will enable the tourism industry to grow in a sustainable and responsible way across the Barents Region.

The Action Plan focuses on five key areas which have been identified as vital to promoting interregional tourism development in the Barents Region.

### *Key action areas*

- cooperation
- education and knowledge
- accessibility and transportation infrastructure
- product development
- place identity

Each key area is presented in the following structure: significance, current circumstances, challenges and development needs and recommendations for implementation. The information and suggestions included in the key action areas should help private and public tourism stakeholders plan and implement activities that promote interregional tourism development in the Barents Region.

It is important to note that the Action Plan is a living document, developed to be updated as new needs are identified, gaps are filled, new opportunities emerge and the markets change. The extensive background and research material used in the development of this Action Plan is available on a supporting website. For more information please visit

[www.barentsinfo.org/barentstourism](http://www.barentsinfo.org/barentstourism)

# Action Area 1: **Cooperation**

## Significance

Tourism destinations are complex and dynamic webs of multi-stakeholder relations characterized by multiple and divergent views and values, and a lack of control by any particular stakeholder group. In a rapidly developing tourism destination such as the Barents, these characteristics, combined with four different national contexts, considerably increase complexity and uncertainty, creating a challenging transnational environment. In order to develop tourism in such an environment, there is a need not only to promote specific national and regional objectives but also to determine common goals which maximize the economic, social and cultural well-being of the majority of stakeholders in the Barents. These common goals can only emerge by dealing constructively with differences and promoting cooperation, collaboration and partnerships through a joint decision making process that includes key stakeholder groups from the different municipalities of the Barents.

The terms cooperation, collaboration and partnerships are commonly used as a general descriptor for joint efforts and initiatives. In this action plan, these terms are used in reference to flexible and dynamic processes that evolve over time, enabling multiple stakeholders to jointly manage resources and address common problems and opportunities. Cooper-

ation does not exclude working together with competitors. Indeed, the success of most tourism destinations rests on a harmonious relationship between cooperative and competitive behavior.

While tourism organizations compete over getting a bigger piece of the business once tourists are in the Barents Region, they also need to pool resources and work together to attract the visitors to this Nordic destination. Due to the significant role of public administration in tourism planning, management and marketing, special attention should be given to public-private partnerships as instruments for facilitating cross-border participation, competitive-collaborative interaction and relationships needed to work towards sustainable tourism development in the Barents.

## Current Circumstances

Over the last two decades numerous public and private tourism stakeholders in the Barents have engaged in various forms of cooperation, collaboration and partnerships. The nature of such relationships exists on a continuum ranging from loose and informal linkages to more formal and structured alliances.

- Personal business contacts and interorganizational relationships between educational institutions, tourism industry associations,





*We have to determine common goals which maximize the economic, social and cultural well-being in the Barents area.*

local tourism boards and development agencies among others.

- Clusters of bilateral cross-border cooperation and business-to-business collaboration can be found in different municipalities of the Barents (e.g. Tornio(FI)-Haparanda(SE), Salla(FI), Kirkenes(NO)).
- National and EU financing instruments granting funding to projects promoting collaboration between public and private organizations across the Barents Region.
- Regional tourism development organizations in the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish municipalities of the Barents have gained a strong position in tourism related policies and decision making.
- Tourism marketing organizations and destination management companies in the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish municipalities of the Barents have become drivers of business-to-business collaboration.
- The presence of the Joint Working Group on Tourism formed – incl. representatives from different Barents municipalities – established by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council to develop tourism in the Barents through cooperation and networking.

### Challenges and Development Needs

Despite the existing collaborative practices among Barents tourism stakeholders, the current situation is still insufficient for promoting successful tourism development across the national borders of the Barents. There are certain gaps that need to be filled in order to improve cooperation in this northern European region.

- Lack of channels for identifying and establishing contact with (new) potential business partners, networks and key public organizations especially across the national borders of the Barents.
- Poor information dissemination regarding ongoing and future projects and initiatives for promoting cross-border cooperation and tourism development.
- Lack of information on international events targeted to the tourism entrepreneurs in the Barents Region.
- Lack of resources and organizational structures for assuring the sustainability and use of project results after the termination of project funding.
- Prevailing ad hoc, temporary and loose linkages and collaboration between public and private tourism actors.

- Propensity to plan, coordinate, implement and finance cooperation through temporary project-based structural arrangements.
- Lack of more innovative ways of cooperation that go beyond conventional seminars, conferences, study trips and benchmarking activities.
- Lack of public-private partnership initiatives in the Russian municipalities of the Barents. Tourism entrepreneurs in the Russian municipalities of the Barents feel they need more support from public organizations and local authorities.
- The variety of tax regulations, commercial law and legal systems represents a challenge for cross-border cooperation.
- Need for joint efforts of the tourism industry in order to enable professional specialization.

## Recommendations for Implementation

To further promote cooperation and public-private partnerships among tourism stakeholders across the national borders of the Barents Region, it is necessary to address the gaps mentioned above.

### *Information sharing*

- Creating new, pragmatic ways for finding potential partners (e.g. speed-dating, annual match-making fairs, interactive online channels) and establishing networks.
- Establishing an open information channel regarding potential public-private partnerships.
- Creating a data base for tourism companies and local authorities interested in cross-border cooperation.

### *Cooperation & Networking*

- Promoting lasting and structural arrangements that support partnerships between tourism public and private organizations.
- Strengthening existing – and promoting new – cross-border coalitions and networks that include representatives from educational institutions, tourism companies and local authorities across the Barents.
- Clarifying and systematizing the role and structure of regional tourism organizations in promoting cross-border public-private partnerships, networks and other forms of cooperation.
- Offering concrete ways of cooperating and networking in the Barents Region; supporting benchmarking and professional mobility, organizing seminars and match-making activities.
- Promoting regular cooperation between two or more Barents tourism educational institutions through formal arrangements (e.g. joint study courses, programs or degree) to achieve common educational, research and development objectives.
- Developing cooperation between educational institutions and the tourism industry in the Russian municipalities of the Barents.
- Intensifying and consolidating the role of the Joint Working Group on Tourism by establishing a broad mission and joint and strategically interdependent actions.

# Action Area 2: Education and Knowledge

## Significance

Tourism development and innovation highly depends on the ability to promote education and training that helps create, manage and share knowledge. Sound cooperation among educational, research, development, political and business organizations among others is a basic precondition for knowledge generation and dissemination.

Knowledge can be divided into codified and tacit knowledge. Codified knowledge refers to knowledge that can be easily communicated and recorded, such as statistics, guidelines, historical facts and cultural behavior. In the Barents it is important to create research, educational and development programs for generate codified knowledge that can be used by different tourism stakeholders in the region. Tacit knowledge refers to know how and the ability of tourism stakeholders to “do things” without necessarily being able to describe how or why. Tacit knowledge is difficult to decode and transfer without collaborative practices. In this sense, the development of tacit knowledge requires projects and training that bring actors together and promote cross-border dialogues in the Barents.

Education and knowledge are important for stimulating creativity and new ways of thinking. The multicultural environment of the Barents region offers favorable conditions for promoting such creativity and innovation. It is

through multi-stakeholder processes expanding beyond the borders of a single state that new and more sustainable ways of thinking and practicing tourism business can be fostered. The text below makes reference to the ways education and knowledge have been addressed as well as existing gaps that need to be filled in order to stimulate knowledge capacity building among Barents tourism stakeholders.

## Current Circumstances

Some countries in the Barents have already developed and consolidated practices for creating and sharing knowledge that is relevant to tourism organizations.

- The collection of data for statistical purposes. For example, Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian tourism organizations and local governments collect statistical information in the field of tourism (e.g. room and bed places, overnight stays, tourist flow and economic development, among others) on a monthly, quarterly and yearly basis.
- Initiatives that promote mutual knowledge-building between industry and academia. Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian educational institutions have succeeded in establishing collaborative working relations with public and private tourism or-



*Tourism development and innovation depends on the ability to promote education and training that helps create, manage and share knowledge.*

ganizations that contribute to developing tourism knowledge and expertise.

- Cutting-edge vocational and higher tourism education curricula in Northern Finland, Sweden and Norway.
- Establishment of the Barents Cross-Border University (BCBU) as an entity aiming to develop and coordinate joint educational programs in the fields of sociology, engineering, health and law.
- Existing student and staff exchange programs providing opportunities to educators, researchers and students to visit university campuses in the Barents (e.g. north2north, FIRST program).
- Establishment of the Barents Journal that aims to publish peer-reviewed scientific articles with a focus on the Barents Region.

### Challenges and Development Needs

While the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian areas of the Barents have been successful in developing some practices for the promotion of knowledge, the situation is different on the Russian side. At the same time, there still commonly shared needs among all the Barents countries that have not been addressed yet.

- Lack of knowledge about potential target markets and customer needs, expectations and preferences.
- Lack of skills and proper training for forecasting market trends and identifying emerging issues, events and signs about future changes at the local, regional, national and global level.
- Poor skills and knowledge in information technology, e-commerce and tourism marketing.
- Necessity to improve knowledge about law and regulations applied within specific Barents countries, especially about legislations regulating commercial contracts.
- Lack of knowledge, sensitivity and awareness about the different cultures represented in the Barents Region.
- Poor linguistic competence among public and private tourism organizations in the Barents. Deficient skills in Barents languages and limited English proficiency. The latter tends to prevail in the Russian municipalities of the Barents.
- Underdeveloped Russian tourism education curricula and tourism related training programs.
- Need for training in safety and security among tourism organizations and resorts in the Barents.

## Recommendations for Implementation

To further promote tourism education and knowledge creation across the borders of the Barents Region, the previously mentioned gaps mentioned need to be dealt with. These gaps need to be addressed in order to provide a strong platform for developing a competitive and sustainable destination in the future.

### *Market Knowledge*

- Creating uniform standards, principles and guidelines for statistical data collection of tourism in the Barents.
- Creating uniform standards, principles and guidelines for collecting and analyzing information on market developments and customer trends relevant for the tourism industry in the Barents.
- Defining a responsible body for the coordination of the two previous recommendations and the annual publication of statistical and market trend reports.
- Establishing a reliable and accessible website for providing information on the Barents with a special focus on tourism. This website should also host reports and documents relevant to the tourism industry.
- Establishing a marketing organization for the Barents Region that coordinates common marketing activities and initiatives. This organization should also provide small and medium-sized entrepreneurs with marketing information related to the Barents.

### *Cultural and Language Knowledge*

- Promoting general knowledge about the Barents Region among different tourism stakeholders.
- Creating educational programs for tourism students and practitioners that promote knowledge about Barents cultures, business etiquettes and languages.

### *Tourism Education*

- Developing joint educational programs and study units that bring together tourism students from different educational institutions in the Barents.
- Creating joint training courses/programs that gather tourism entrepreneurs and developers from different municipalities of the Barents. Priority should be given to training in the following areas: tourism marketing, e-commerce, service quality, safety and security, financial management and commercial law.
- Creating training programs for tour operators interested in cross-border tourism development in the Barents.
- Promoting benchmarking, study visits, professional mobility, organizing seminars, match-making activities and other knowledge sharing initiatives for Barents tourism entrepreneurs and developers.



## Action Area 3: **Accessibility and Transportation Infrastructure**

### Significance

Improved accessibility and efficient transportation infrastructure are two central preconditions for tourism development. In this action plan accessibility is understood in terms of facilitating both virtual and physical access to tourism destinations on a global and local scale. The idea of accessibility refers to the effort of making tourism destinations accessible to travelers regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities or age. In this context, a traveler is defined as any individual who is a temporary visitor, traveling or planning to travel for business or leisure purposes.

As the internet and social media play an important role in our society, tourism destinations need to work harder to enable travelers to easily access reliable and accurate information by using information communication technology. The websites of tourism destinations are major information resources for travelers before arrival, during and even after the visit. Also local tourism information centers play an important role as information dissemination channels and places for assisting travelers during their visit.

In relation to mobility, accessibility also refers to the ability of travelers to reach a destination in a relatively safe, fast and reasonably comfortable way. The availability of different transport modes, access routes and a

sound interaction between them are required to support travel into and out of destinations and also their transportation needs within a particular destination. To a great extent the attractiveness of a tourism destination rests on the availability of a high-quality, integrated and reliable transportation system consisting of air services and airports, land transport connections and routes and waterways as well.

A destination such as the Barents, which is not only geographically wide and dispersed but also far away from large population centers, should be easy to get to and around. In fact, the transport infrastructure is responsible for connecting both the traveler's place of origin to the Barents Region and the tourism destination within the Barents itself. For example, road capacity improvements (such as improved safety, road surfacing, wider lanes and better road lighting) reduce fuel consumption, wear and tear and transit time of traffic, thus having a direct impact on the cost and quality of the tourism experience.

### Current Circumstances

There are already good practices among tourism destinations in the Barents concerning the use of information communication technologies and the dissemination of infor-



*Though the level of accessibility and state of transportation infrastructure achieved in the Barents regions, there is still room for improvement.*

mation through visitor centers. The Barents Region has also achieved a certain degree of integration at the level of transport connections.

- A wide range of websites covering general information and news related to the Barents. Good examples of such sites are Barentsinfo.org and Barentsobserver.com.
- A large variety of websites providing information on destinations in the Barents. Websites are available in different languages, English being predominant.
- Tourist Information Centers serving travelers across the different municipalities of the Barents.
- Excellent railway connections in the southern part of the Barents.
- Upgrades in railway connections within the Barents Region are currently being planned and implemented.
- Good north-south road networks offering access to remote northern areas. Especially, in Finland and Norway the maintenance of roads and other transportation infrastructure are managed rather well.
- Continuous road improvements in northern Sweden and between Finland and Russia (e.g. Salla and Lotta). The road system between Murmansk (RU) and Kirkenes (NO) is under construction.
- Existing Barents water ways are currently used for tourism purposes (e.g. Hurtigruten).
- Schengen visa arrangement enabling fluent mobility to and between the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish municipalities of the Barents.

- Special visa-free border-crossing agreement for Norwegians and Russians living close to the Norwegian and Russian border.

### Challenges and Development Needs

Despite the level of accessibility and the state of transportation infrastructure achieved in the Barents Regions, there is still room for improvement.

- Lack of an entity responsible for coordinating information resources about the Barents as a coherent tourism destination.
- Absence of an integrated tourism website disseminating information on the Barents and assisting visitors before and during their visit (e.g. travel advice, offerings, online bookings).
- Lack of roadways, railways, air routes and bus connections in west-east direction.
- Limited number of flight operators and air routes within the Barents Region, most air routes are in north-south direction.
- Limited number of ferries and cruise ships operating within the waterways of the Barents Region.
- High transport prices prevail in the Barents Region.
- Poor road conditions and infrastructure, especially in the Russian municipalities of the Barents.
- Lack of resting places, gas stations and other roadside facilities, especially along the Russian roadways of the Barents.
- Poor border-crossing infrastructure and facilities in the Russian municipalities of the Barents.

- Lack of adjustments of Barents tourism offerings for the needs of disabled travelers.
- High level of bureaucracy and formalities for crossing the borders between the Schengen area and the Russian area of the Barents.
- Complicated visa policies, long and complex application procedures, and expensive visas.

## Recommendations for Implementation

To improve the level of accessibility to and within the Barents Region, it is necessary that companies, public organizations, municipalities and governmental officials join efforts to find solutions to the needs previously addressed.

### *Information*

- Establishing a trans-regional entity responsible for unifying, planning, coordinating and evaluating information resources and marketing activities related to the Barents as a tourism destination.
- Creating a Barents visitor information website providing travel information, assistance and a booking system covering the different municipalities of the Barents.

### *Transportation*

- Improving and expanding the public transport network (bus and railway) connections within the Barents Region.
- Making the Barents attractive for airline companies and working with them to de-

velop affordable and comfortable flight routes connecting the municipalities of the Barents.

- Supporting the development of new Barents Sea routes for tourism purposes.

### *Infrastructure facilities*

- Improving and further developing the road system and infrastructure, especially in west-east direction and in the Russian municipalities of the Barents.
- Improving border-crossing infrastructure especially on the Russian side of the Barents.
- Considering the needs of travelers with physical limitations and disabilities when improving accessibility and the transportation infrastructure in the Barents.

### *Formalities*

- **Simplifying the visa regime between Russia and the Schengen area** of the Barents, arranging faster and less expensive visa application procedures, introducing short-term visas (e.g. a visa valid for 72 hours).
- **Working towards a visa-free agreement for representatives of regional organizations** engaged in cross-border cooperation in the Barents.
- **Diminishing the bureaucracy** of customs regulations in the Barents.

# Action Area 4: **Product Development**

## Significance

The relevance of product development for the strategic planning of tourism destinations is usually highlighted in most tourism strategies and action plans. Both the attractiveness and competitiveness of touristic places are based on the ability of private and public organizations to collaboratively develop economically, socially and ecologically sustainable tourism products. The term product development refers here to both the development of new and existing products. Accordingly, tourism products are understood not only in terms of natural or man-made attractions, hotels, resorts, restaurants, activities, festival and events but also in terms of meaningful experiences. In particular, experimentalism, storytelling, meaning and value co-creation and the rise of social media have changed and are changing the way tourism products are produced and consumed.

In the Barents Region, which can be categorized as a peripheral destination, product development represents a central instrument for promoting economic development, environmental quality and social wellbeing. Indeed, while product development has a direct impact on profitability, competitiveness, employment and tourist expenditure, it can also contribute to preserving traditional industries, local heritage and the natural environment of this northern European region. Due to the stra-

tegic nature of product development, it is clear that the development of tourism products cannot be done in isolation from – or without the engagement of – the main tourism stakeholders of the Barents.

As the global economy grows and more choices become available to tourists, the level of uncertainty and complexity characterizing the tourism industry continues to increase. Not only economic crises but also environmental degradation, climate change and loss of traditional ways of life are among the major challenges that can bring significant monetary and non-monetary losses for any tourism destination. From this perspective, it is important that product development is used in the Barents Region as a proactive and forward-looking strategy that enables tourism organizations to develop an understanding of contemporary trends and up-coming changes before they occur. A good understanding of the past, present and future is needed to develop both competitive and sustainable tourism products that can be positioned and maintained in a global marketplace.

## Current Circumstances

There is an extensive variety of attractive and competitive tourism products and services



*There is an extensive variety of attractive and competitive tourism products and services across the Barents Region.*

across the Barents Region. The strong market positions achieved by Finnish Lapland, Swedish Lapland and Northern Norway clearly demonstrate that the Barents as a tourism destination has maintained sustained growth over the last decades.

- A high level of quality and safety prevails among tourism products and services offered in the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish municipalities of the Barents Region.
- A wide variety of major international and local events hosted throughout Barents municipalities on a regular basis.
- A vast diversity of tourism offerings, resorts, destinations, attractions and other facilities for both leisure and business travelers.
- Historical heritage, cultural diversity and natural resources have to a certain degree been used as core attributes of tourism offering.
- A large variety of different forms of tourism (e.g. nature-based, experience-based, adventure, and work-related tourism).
- Highly developed winter tourism in Finland and Sweden.
- Highly developed summer tourism in Norway.
- Existing cross-border tourism products across the different national borders of the Barents.
- Initiatives aiming to develop year-round tourism in different municipalities of the Barents.

- Currently implemented Finnish foresight tourism projects with direct implications for product development.
- Product development collaboration between tourism educational institutions and tourism organizations in the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian municipalities of the Barents.

### Challenges and Development Needs

Despite the achievements made in terms of product development, there are still some municipalities in the Barents where tourism products are nonexistent or in need of enhancing existent products. There are also commonly shared product development gaps across the different municipalities of the Barents that need to be addressed.

- Absence of a common vision and goals guiding product development in the Barents.
- Absence of cultural tourism and heritage tourism products; meetings industry tourism still at an underdeveloped stage.
- Lack of private and public resources targeting tourism product development.
- Lack of harmonized quality and safety standards needed to support cross-border tourism product development in the Barents.
- Large variation in the level of quality and safety of tourism offerings in the Russian municipalities of the Barents.



- Lack of differentiation among the tourism products offered by the different municipalities of the Barents.
- Lack of consistency in the planning, implementation and commercialization of cross-border tourism products
- Different levels of product development expertise across the different countries of the Barents.
- Different work cultures, business customs and practices among tourism stakeholders in the Barents; different ways of understanding key tourism concepts (e.g. hospitality, sustainability, branding, nature-based, experiences).
- Different legal and environmental regulations across the Barents countries undermining cross-border tourism product development initiatives.

## Recommendations for Implementation

There is still much that can be done to enhance the competitiveness, attractiveness and sustainability of tourism products and services in the Barents Region.

### *Unique selling proposition*

- Defining a common vision and goal for product development within and between destinations in the Barents.
- Developing cross-border thematic tourism products for the Barents.
- Supporting the development of alternative tourism products such as cultural, heritage

and meetings industry tourism offerings.

- Promoting the further development of existing tourism offerings such as nature-based, experience-based, adventure and work-related tourism products.
- Working toward year-round tourism by developing new products and promoting co-operation between the different municipalities of the Barents.
- Promoting the differentiation and uniqueness of tourism offerings among tourism destinations situated in the Barents.

### *Expertise*

- Promoting product development expertise through joint educational tourism programs in the Barents.
- Expanding tourism foresight expertise developed in Finnish Lapland across the Barents.

### *Preconditions*

- Allocating public funding for (cross-border) tourism product development purposes.
- Supporting the creation of public-private partnerships and networks for cross-border tourism product development and innovation in the Barents.
- Working towards standardized quality and safety certifications for the Barents Region.
- Working towards more harmonized legal and environmental regulations that facilitate the development of cross-border tourism offerings and ensure the responsible use of natural resources within the Barents.

# Action Area 5: **Place Identity**

## Significance

The perceptions and feelings held by people about a place have become an essential issue that needs to be considered in the marketing strategy of tourism destinations. The ability to make a place special and unique for both local inhabitants and travelers is a key precondition for successfully positioning a destination within a globally competitive tourism market. Indeed, the meanings and values attached to a destination (e.g. village, town and country) and its people are critical differentiation elements.

The branding of transnational geographical areas, which has become popular in Europe (e.g. the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Balkans), reveals the importance of developing a commonly shared identity and sense of place that is visible to both local inhabitants and potential visitors. Especially in such transnational destinations, the creation of a common place identity has become indispensable for achieving a certain level of differentiation and representing a value proposition that evokes lifestyle statements, social belonging, personal values, emotional relationships and beliefs.

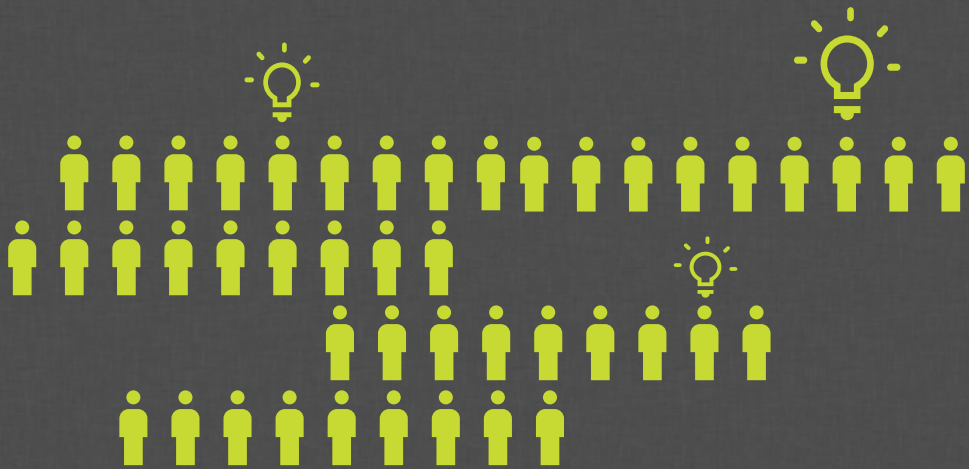
Outstanding accommodation, attractions, services, facilities and accessibility are no longer differentiators in today's global marketplace, unless they are connected to the socio-cultural context of the place. Critical to the creation of a transnational destination such as the Barents Region is the identification of

the place values and meanings, the translation of those into a suitably emotionally appealing personality and the targeted and efficient delivery of that message to people living in it and visiting it. That does not mean, however, that it is easy to build a robust common place identity for a region like the Barents. It takes time to work towards commonly shared values and meanings.

Working towards a common place identity for a destination that includes different national borders requires strong political commitment and a vision founded on intensive stakeholder engagement. Many stakeholder groups may have vested interests in the promotion of local place identities (many of which may be in conflict with the interest of others) and much work may be needed on defining how these interests overlap.

## Current Circumstances

- A strong sense of national (Finnish, Norwegian, Russian and Swedish) and numerous regional identities within the national borders of the countries comprising the Barents.
- Rich heritage of indigenous peoples, including the Sámi, the Nenets and the Vepsians, and the minority group of the Komi people.
- Similar place images prevail among the member areas of the Barents Region (e.g.



*It takes time to work towards commonly shared values and meanings.*

polar nights, midnight sun, Sámi culture, northern lights, untouched nature, remoteness).

- Traditional livelihoods such as agriculture, fishing, hunting and reindeer husbandry are existent and to some extent protected across the different municipalities of the Barents.
- Sámi Council and Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish Sámi Parliaments dealing with Sámi affairs. Ongoing attempts to create a similar political institution in Russia.
- Existing indigenous people associations in the Russian municipalities of the Barents.
- Annual Sámi Parliamentary Conference gathering all national Sámi parliaments, representatives from the Sámi Council and the Russian Sámi associations.
- Interregional cooperation in border region upper secondary schools (e.g. Tornio-Haparanda and Salla-Kandalaksha).
- A wide range of museums preserving and disseminating information on cultural heritage at the local and national level as well as the Barents Euro-Arctic Region in general.

- Strong tourism destination brands in northern Finland (Lapland), Sweden (Swedish Lapland) and Norway (Northern Norway), which to some degree make use of the culture and heritage of the place.

### Challenges and Development Needs

- Unawareness of the Barents as a socio-cultural geographical area among local inhabitants and visitors.
- Different understandings of the Barents tend to prevail among the inhabitants of and visitors to this northern European region.
- The word Barents has negative connotations as far as the general public is concerned. It is associated not with tourism and cultural heritage but with an image of post-Soviet politics, exploitation of natural resources and nuclear contamination.
- Lack of a common regional identity and a sense of belonging to the Barents Region.
- Cultural differences and prejudices about neighboring countries still represent an ob-

stacle to mutual understanding and working towards shared values.

- Geopolitical borderlines (e.g. the EU and non-EU countries, Euro zone and non-Euro zone, Scandinavia and Russia, NATO and non-NATO countries, the Nordic commonwealth and Russia, the Sámi region) contribute to creating subdivisions within the Barents Region.
- Increased competition among the tourism industry of the Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish and Russian municipalities of the Barents contribute to emphasizing differences – at the expenses of commonalities – in order to make their places unique and more attractive to the visitors.
- Resistance to positioning existing regional brands under a Barents brand.

## Recommendations for Implementation

### *Identity*

- Working towards a common regional identity in the Barents that is based on strong shared values and a clear sense of belonging. This should be done by promoting cooperation and respecting the diversity of cultural identities within the region.
- Assuring the protection of cultural heritage, indigenous peoples, languages and traditional livelihoods across the Barents.
- Introducing education about the Barents and its society in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools situated in the municipalities of the Barents.
- Supporting teacher and student exchange programs at the level of secondary education.
- Supporting interregional upper secondary schools and other similar primary/secondary educational programs situated in municipalities along the national borders of the Barents.
- Building and promoting mutual understanding and place identity through cross-border cultural events and festivals targeted at local inhabitants.

### *Image*

- Creating policy roundtables, consisting of members of local governments, tourism development agencies, tourism companies and local communities to facilitate dialogues towards common agreements on how local brands can achieve benefits and synergies through closer cooperation.
- Developing collaboration among the local destination brands to help them promote global visibility and compete more effectively against other regions that are putting effort on branding themselves (e.g. the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Balkans).
- Working towards a common strategy to improve the image of the Barents at the local, regional, national and international level.
- Fostering collaboration and dialogue among tourism organizations by organizing joint workshops and meetings focusing on the promotion of tourism destinations situated in the Barents Region.

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# BART - PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN BARENTS TOURISM



## Introduction

Today tourism as an industry plays an important role in the economy of each country of the Barents region and its importance is increasing every day. BART project activities reinforce the cross-border cooperation of Barents region's tourism stakeholders (educational organizations, regional authorities, businesses and business support organization). The project is joining together tourism stakeholders from the northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway as well as Murmansk region and Arkhangelsk region.

## Overall objective

Contributing to the regional and economic development of the Barents region

## Specific objective

Creation and initiation of development mechanisms in long term public-private partnership for the tourism industry on all stakeholders levels

## Activities and results

- Current tourism development work (strategies and projects) is mapped
- Existing tourism business knowledge among stakeholder is mapped
- Stakeholders' needs for knowledge and tourism research and training are assessed
- A research and training Action plan for tourism development in public-private partnership cooperation is created
- International core working team seminars are organized and results of the work so far are disseminated; Research and development cooperation in public-private partnership is activated
- A Tourism Information Center in Monchegorsk is established and monitored during the project.

## Funding

- Kolarctic ENPI CBC programme 2007-2013, economic and social development.
- Total budget is 921 525 €
- Project implementation time 24 months

## Project Partners

- **LEAD PARTNER** Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences
- **PARTNERS IN FINLAND** University of Lapland, Regional Council of Lapland.
- **IN RUSSIA** Murmansk State Humanities University, Murmansk State Technical University, Ministry of Economic Development of Murmansk Region, Monchegorsk Town Authorities, Ministry of Youth Affairs, Sport and Tourism of Arkhangelsk Region and Northern Arctic Federal University
- **IN SWEDEN** Luleå University of Technology
- **IN NORWAY** Barents Institute

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Multidimensional Tourism Institute (MTI)





Committee of Senior Officials of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council  
Barents Regional Committee

### **Mandate for the Joint Working Group on Tourism 2013-2017**

#### **Introduction**

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region has great potential to be even more attractive destination for international tourism. The significance of tourism as a source of livelihood has grown considerably during the past decades. The tourism industry has a significant employment effect especially on youth and women. This is very important especially in sparsely populated areas, tourism is sometimes the only one bringing income.

The attractive but fragile arctic environment, natural phenomena and cultural diversity are the key factors that attract tourists to the Barents region. The tourism business needs to be developed in sustainable way; ecological, economic, social, cultural and political, and therefore maintain these tourism resources. Sustainability is especially important when facing the challenges caused by climate change, which can affect as well promote tourism industry considerably.

Competition in the tourism business is getting tougher. The major improvements needed are related to the availability level of transportation and visa handling procedures between Russia and Nordic countries. Today's and tomorrow's visitors require fast and flexible solutions. Access to fast east-west communications and smooth visa handling are necessary.

The development of tourism in Barents area is still in various stages. Through cooperation, learning and increasing knowhow exchange can we develop together tourism industry in Barents and build a strong tourism region.

#### **Objectives and tasks**

The Joint Working Group on Tourism develops multilateral and interdisciplinary cooperation in the field of tourism in the Barents Region. The objectives and tasks of the Working Group will be:

- to influence preconditions for tourism development in the BEAR when improving traffic connection
- to identify and define authentic common values in order to build common identity in tourism development
- to co-operate in the fields of tourism education and research in order to achieve common criteria in quality, safety and sustainability
- to promote proactive development and realization of high quality joint products and thematic product families
- to promote synergies between parallel industries to ensure competitiveness of tourism industry

