



BART – Public-Private Partnership in Barents Tourism

Action Plan – Roadmap to Tourism Development in the Barents Region

General background

- The Barents Euro Arctic Region's portfolio is as diverse and filled with contrasts as it is geographically dispersed. The arctic climate, tough winters and the seasonal darkness of the Northern hemisphere, rich natural and cultural resources as well as an eventful history are amalgamated in this geopolitical area.
- The characteristic features of the Barents region are its heterogeneity, its sparse population of 5,5 million, amongst them indigenous people like Saami, Nenets, Vepsians and Komi, scattered on an area of 1755 800 sq km and its abundance of resources, which offer great opportunities but at the same time they are challenging ecological, social and political systems.(2.).
- This post-cold war construct ties together parts of the European Union, the Russian Federation and Norway (1). The official inauguration for the Barents region is the Kirkenes Declaration from 1993, ensuring cooperation, security, integration and prosperity in all its four member countries.
- The Kirkenes Declaration states that tourism holds the potential to play a major role in the Barents region, not only because of the industry's multiplier economical effect but also for its strengths to bring people together and to encourage human contacts (1).
- Cross-border EU funded projects support and stimulate the tourism development at international, national, regional and local levels in the Barents region.
- The BART project is one example for establishing cross-border tourism cooperation.
- One of the project's major tasks was the creation of this Roadmap for Tourism development in the Barents region based on extensive research among tourism entrepreneurs in Finnish Lapland, Swedish Lapland, Northern Norway, Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. The roadmap presents the five focus areas detected in the analysis of the conducted interviews, the needs of the industry and recommendations for implementation.
- Until now, the Barents region is a non-concept in international tourism. However, the area has much to offer for tourism with the inherent diversity in terms of peoples and culture together with its rich natural and historical heritage. In return, tourism business is, as the

Kirkenes declaration states, a promising industry for economic- as well as socio-cultural development (2).

Objectives

- This Roadmap to Tourism development in the Barents region is not a detailed action plan, nor is it a comprehensive list of initiatives with a preassigned budget which will be implemented in a certain period. The overall intention of the Roadmap to Tourism Development in the Barents region is to demonstrate the current state of tourism and to articulate the perceptions, needs and interests of the entrepreneurs in the area to encourage policy makers in national ministries, government agencies and EU institutions to provide the prerequisites for joint tourism development.
- This roadmap is divided into five thematic focus areas, which depict the strategic key development areas and the recommendations for implementation provide guidelines and suggestions for courses of action to facilitate tourism across the Barents region. These focus areas, namely cooperation, infrastructure, knowledge, product development and branding are deeply intertwined.
- Once the preconditions for tourism cooperation are established, an action plan for guiding, visioning and directing tourism development in the Barents region can be launched.
- A possible vision for the Barents region as a tourism destination could be: a collaborative setting with key tourism actors from research, educational institutions, public authorities, the private sector and other related stakeholders. The multiplier effect of tourism will bring benefits to the region and the tourism infrastructure will expand with the continuing globalization process.

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Action Area 1: Knowledge

Priority 1.1: Tourism stakeholders need reliable and comparable statistics in order to forecast trends, needs, demands and services

ARKHANGELSK REGION

The tourism stakeholders operating in Arkhangelsk Region are oriented towards obtaining the statistics describing the incoming and outgoing tourist flows, the price-formation, infrastructural and economic factors, the target customers' preferences and competitors' performance. To forecast own development, the companies should be able to trace inter-regional, Russian and international statistics, to keep their customers and business partners registers. Among other data in demand is the special knowledge of allowable recreational payloads, of scientific research outcomes, of situational analysis and of the opportunities available at regional and international tourist markets.

The growing need in precise and comparable data requires further improvement of statistical data collection systems utilized both in Russia and its regions. It is presently difficult to obtain data from the region's travel companies.

Given the changes on the tourism market, there grows the need in studying statistical indices necessary for comprehensive monitoring of the tourism sector. It is thus relevant and logical that additional data be obtained pertaining to geography and structure of incoming tourism and purposes of visits; duration of stay; quality, types and capacity of infrastructural facilities – accommodation, catering, car parking, stations, MICE venues; number of travel companies and other tourism-related businesses; the number of the personnel employed in tourism; scope of services rendered by tourism-related businesses; volume of investments in tourism; tourists' spending; consumer price indices for such internal tourism services as accommodation, catering, excursion, transportation; extent of maximum allowable recreational load on environment in summer and winter seasons; regional and municipal budget revenues from tourism-related businesses.

To satisfy the need in reliable and exhaustive statistics, it is necessary that a number of measures be implemented. Namely, to develop harmonized methods for information collection at the regional and federal levels that can be comparable to international methods (for instance, through Barents Region's Annual Informational and Analytical Review, or through tailored web-portal); to develop the advanced methods and software enabling timely corrections and introduction of new factors; to develop a uniform procedure and a format for statistical data collection; to introduce new factors into the statistical analysis; to have legal provisions for compulsory communication by the region's travel agencies of statistical data to public bodies; and to make the information available to the stakeholders. It appears promising for the purposes of forecasting trends and demand in knowledge, to apply the model methods used by tourist companies operating in various activity lines and thus obtain the average statistics.

SWEDEN

In Sweden tourism stakeholders get reliable tourism statistics both on a monthly, quaternary and yearly basis. Swedish Lapland provides a monthly report on guest night statistics per destination and accommodation form and market. This makes it easy for stakeholders and entrepreneurs to compare own development with the local and regional destination development and trends over time. In addition the annual TEM-report, Tourist Economical Model (*TuristEkonomiska Modellen*) for Norrbotten (Swedish Lapland) compares development and trends in Swedish Lapland to the overall development and trends in Sweden during the last year and trends over the last 14-15 years. TEM uses statistics from SCB, Statistical Central Bureau (*Statistiska Centralbyrån*) about accommodation and shopping/restaurants/transport, regarding numbers, tax incomes, employments and turnover, as well as a general trend analysis for Swedish tourism. The TEM report is ordered by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, SAERG (*Tillväxtverket*) and data is collected by SCB through reports from all registered accommodations and trade business in Sweden, and analyzed and reported by a specialized company, Resurs AB. In addition, Resurs AB does an annual market analysis where 24 000 Swedes are asked about their traveling habits. The data is collected in the TDB-data base, a Travel and Tourism data base (*Rese- och TuristDataBasen*) that started in 1989 and has over 400 000 documented travels in the data base. Travel statistics is also collected from the Swedish Transport Administration (*Vägverket/ Trafikverket*), the Swedish Transport Agency (*Transportstyrelsen*) LfV Aviation Consulting (*Luftfarsverket*) and Cruise Ferry info. Also TRIP, Tourism Development Centre (*Turismnäringens Utvecklingscenter*) managed by RTS, the Swedish travel and tourism industry Federation (*Rese- och Turistnäringen i Sverige*), publishes a monthly and quaternary report about Swedish tourism development and prognosis, to facilitate for tourism stakeholders to plan development and investments. In addition SAERG (*Tillväxtverket*) gives an annual report "Facts about Swedish Tourism" with facts and statistics, national and international trends and the effects of tourism on Swedish economy. These different reports give tourism stakeholders valuable and actual up to date data and prognosis for tourism development. Thus in Sweden educational institutions have less significance for collecting tourism statistics compared to other countries. In a Barents perspective it would be interesting to have a similar TEM-report for the Barents area to detect and react on regional and global trends. But such Barents regional statistics need improved data collection in some areas and countries and synchronization in data collection and statistic analysis. Less developed is trends and statistics of target markets and their travel behavior and travel needs, such as the Swedish TDB-data base. An international common TDB-database would be valuable for national, regional and local tourism stakeholders in predicting market and segment trends in travel and tourism activities. Business intelligence and environmental analysis about competitors and potential business partners within the Barents region is desired by entrepreneurs in Swedish Lapland. This lack of business information about the Barents area became obvious in the low knowledge level among Swedish entrepreneurs about competitors and potential partners in Barents. But today there is no obvious organization to collect and distribute such information.

FINLAND

In Finland, tourism operators utilize information that helps them forecast trends, future needs and demand that affect their line of business. National and international tourism statistics are quite actively observed. Also, economic indicators, competitors' prices, hotel nights, different company registers and weak signals highly interest Finnish operators. Some even collect different

comparable data from their customers and competitors to have a comprehensive understanding of their own position and current state of the business. There is also interest in seeing how different economies affecting tourism have developed side by side. The production of statistics, company registers, price analyses and other comparable and reliable data from tourism industry is important for entrepreneurs in Finnish Lapland. Entrepreneurs expect research, educational and development organizations to play a crucial role in the production of this material. The data show that it is important to maintain the production of such reports and research also in the future and make them even more accessible to practitioners.

MURMANSK

It is necessary to have common information space which would cover tourism in the Barents region (common web-site, for example).

Some respondents mentioned that “if it would be possible to arrange exchange of information in the Barents region, which opportunities they have, needs, which services they would like to get”. They also mentioned that “In order to orient in this field, they should have information about those types of tourism which are present in each region”.

As the research revealed, during the process of realizing tourism services different types of information are used – historical resources, mass media, partner resources, the Internet, personal communication, advertisements and others. In general, the information is obtained independently. At the same time, lack of information is considered one of the most essential problems of tour operators. According to the respondents’ opinion, there is much information, but it is scattered, there is no common information space on the Kola Peninsula.

For development of tourism organizations it is necessary to have information about educational services, peculiarities of tourism services provisions in other countries, statistical data reflecting development of MICE tourism.

Summary

In their daily business, tourist companies source information by using all kinds of channels – from historical backgrounds, mass media and Internet to personal contacts. The information that they get is often scattered and obtained independently.

Understanding by the tourist companies of their own vision, market situation and trends in the demand and services would be incomplete and complicated without reliable and trustworthy statistics. It is necessary that the system used in the Barents Region to collect the information should be uniform and timed with seasons. There are several sources of such information, such as company reporting (monthly, quarterly, annual); monitoring and benchmarking data (kept by companies to compare their performance with that of the competitors and in other regions); regularly held dedicated surveys into public and tourists’ preferences. It is advised that a regional body be established to run the information gathering, as may be instructed by the region’s administration.

The most in-demand info should cover such issues as the number of the tourist companies/agencies and the number of their staff; amount of tourism-related investment; geography and structure of travel, type-wise; nationalities, duration of stay, accommodation and services. Additional info may be general and reflect the state of things in the regions, like tourism-related changes in the legislation, the region’s participation in the international and interregional

tourism-related activities over the reporting period, tourist informational centers operating in the region, MICE services, investment projects, tourism-related NGOs, number of schools that train employees for tourism industry at different levels and the number of their graduates. The scope of the analysis should include the service markets, development potential, companies' demand in personnel training and services that can be outsourced.

It is suggested that the basic format for delivery of information should be a web portal, where the company reports could be placed and database replenished. Among additional sources of the information there could be the annual public report "Tourism in ... in Facts" that would cover facts, statistics, inside and international trends and the effect of tourism of regional economy (238).

Priority 1.2: Operators need flexible and interactive training programs

ARKHANGELSK REGION

Tourism sector in Arkhangelsk Region requires the enhancement of existing and introduction of new curricula and educational and advanced training/re-training programs. The research has proved that the regional tour operators need flexible and interactive programs meeting the employers' and the students' needs. Such programs should take into consideration geographical distance from educational centers; limited availability of funding for training the officials in remoter municipalities; trainees' inability to attend full-time courses; need in practical skills. The development of educational products should rely on current monitoring results; forecast trends in travel companies' demand in personnel; PPP principles and partnerships with tourism stakeholders targeting Arkhangelsk tourism sector's need in personnel advanced training and re-training; more dynamic involvement of the travel companies managers and regional authorities into program and course elaboration process. Among the most in-demand and viable are the short-term advanced training courses in hospitality and hotel business that target better service quality. The programs should be practically-oriented and provide for on-site training at tourism companies. Such programs should also rely on problem-based learning methods. Promising in this regard are distance learning formats and module approach. The employees of travel companies highlight the growing need in learning foreign languages (English and Scandinavian languages), enhanced cross-cultural and multimedia competencies, project management and fund-raising skills. Universities are keenly interested in developing the joint tourism-related educational programs and courses in partnership with foreign high schools. It is necessary to further support professional mobility and arrange traineeships for travel companies' managers and employees in Arkhangelsk Region and abroad, for instance within the framework of Erasmus Mundus EU Program.

SWEDEN

Tourist entrepreneurs are in strong need for flexible and interactive training programmes in several areas about the Barents tourism, such as cultural knowledge, business operators, business culture, and language. But also opportunities to meet potential business partners as well as

benchmarking competitors. To enhance cross-border business and cooperation, a major obstacle was the lack of a common language as many tourism operators in Finland and Russia are understood to have limited English language skills. But also cultural business skills are needed to facilitate cross-border cooperation. Many entrepreneurs also desire training in technology development of information technology and e-commerce, as well as marketing and management skills. Staff training in service quality, hospitality and hostmanship (*värdskap*) as well as experience production is also expressed. Larger tourism operators usually have internal educational programs, but an overall need of flexible, easily accessible and near practice based is expressed. Here partly universities could contribute, but also other public or private educational organizations. In strong need in Sweden is an overall structure of educational programs and curriculums as there are many educational stakeholders with little coordination and information exchange, and in many cases locally based.

FINLAND

Operators in Finnish Lapland need flexible training in several fields. Especially culture knowledge and linguistic competence on Barents countries could contribute to enhanced cross-border cooperation and easier communication between partners. In particular, Russian language is seen as an important asset in customer service as well as in business-to-business cooperation. Furthermore, cultural skills are seen vital for mutual understanding and cooperation. Thus, training in cultural issues could lead to less misunderstandings and misinterpretations between cross-border partners. Also, information technology, e-commerce and tourism marketing are fields in which the operators need further training in order to succeed and excel in the contemporary business environment. As information technology is a field of constant change and evolution, the operators need updating and further training in IT-related issues. Similarly, safety is stated to be an area in which the operators still need training and updating as safety is an imperative in tourism field of Finnish Lapland. In addition, interpreting contracts and legislation are valuable skills in tourism sector as the nature of business gets ever more international and the amount of cross-border partnerships are increasing. In Finnish Lapland, many operators sign big contracts with foreign travel operators whose legislation and business customs are different and unfamiliar to Finnish entrepreneurs. Thus, training in legislation and contractual issues would improve their stand in the contract-making. Lastly, many entrepreneurs need also training in financial management and economics in order to manage their business more efficiently. All in all, the entrepreneurs in Finnish Lapland need contemporary training programs as to be innovative and up-to-date in their business operations.

MURMANSK

Tour operators need a system of training programs with focus on the regional demands.

Representatives of tourism companies mentioned that *“what education can suggest us is advanced training in English, trainings on how to serve clients, forecast the clients’ demands, make correct prognoses so that they justified themselves”*.

The range of needs, listed by the participants, is rather wide:

- Lack of English language competence (regardless the specifics of professional activities: guides, museum staff, top managers of tourism companies, hotel managers, restaurant managers and others;

- Basics of marketing activities (lack of accessible information about the population's needs in the concrete tourism services) creates the need in independent calculations and prognoses of the services in need.
- Basics of communication psychology and development of intercultural communication skills

Summary

BARENTS tourism requires undated and newly developed training programs covering several core knowledge areas. Such programs should be region-focused, up-to-date, flexible, i.e. able to meet the customer's preferences and capacity, interactive, available in terms of geographical location of the school and tuition fee and immediately applicable to practical experience. Among the most in-demand are the short-term crash courses and on-the job training. Such programs would also have to be delivered with use of methods focusing on teaching problem-solving skills. One of the promising formats is the distance learning mode with module-based training.

Core knowledge areas include BARENTS cultures and languages. Knowing these would facilitate efficiency of intercultural contacts and cross-border cooperation. Many entrepreneurs would like to see an upgrade in their employees' knowledge of customer service techniques and quality; corporate demand forecast; accommodation business; information technologies in tourism; e-commerce; marketing and management; emergency management; legislation; execution of contracts; financial and project management; principles of communication psychology and cross-cultural communication.

The process of upgrading the available training products should rely on the on-going monitoring data, progress forecasts and companies' demand in personnel training.

Educational programs are expected to be delivered in universities, public and private schools. Universities have already expressed their interest in developing curricula and training courses jointly with the dedicated schools in the BARENTS region. Professional mobility requires the support in such format as the study trips for travel managers provided for by the joint international programs. It is suggested that the major tourist companies should also function as the centers for personnel on-hands training in cooperating with school (230).

Priority 1.3: Tourism entrepreneurs need to know how to co-operate in profitable ways, and to get concrete ways of cooperating

ARKHANGELSK REGION

Travel companies in Arkhangelsk Region are maintaining and interested in expanding their partnership relations with foreign companies. Among key barriers in the international tourism cooperation are shortage of information about potential partners; Arkhangelsk Region's weak status in the international market; poor knowledge of foreign languages and cross-cultural aspects

of interaction; poor knowledge of project management; competition; underdeveloped image of the region's tourist products; logistical challenges (unavailability of direct flight connection, for instance). Potentially, the international cooperation could be activated through the newly established web portal offering the details of the companies and tourism-related international events calendar; more active support by the authorities; representation of Arkhangelsk travel companies' interests in relevant international associations; arrangement and coordination of relations and experience exchange between stakeholders in Arkhangelsk Region and respective state- and region-level bodies, partnerships and associations, foreign companies; active participation in the development and implementation of international projects coordinated by such organizations as UNO, UNESCO, UNWTO, EU, NCM and relevant offices in foreign countries.

SWEDEN

The interest in expanding their partnership and cooperation in the Barents Region among Swedish tourism entrepreneurs is generally weak. This is in some cases due to specialization in markets and segments, but in most cases due to lack of knowledge about the Barents region, even adjacent countries such as Norway and Finland. In addition, lot of time and effort is put into organizing local and regional destination networks and cooperation, thus the International perspective has less priority until local destination cooperation has taken off.

In many cases they see no business in cooperation, but rather obstacles such as language and time due to long travel distances. Also administrative and bureaucratic obstacles such as travel visas, different taxation and law systems lessen the interest to cooperate. Many operators rather see new markets within the Barents rather than new business partners. This "mental mountain" to climb to become interested in cross-border cooperation need facilitators such as BART and other Barents projects direct aimed at entrepreneurs, their education about Barents and giving opportunities to learn how to overcome the "mental mountain", as well as giving them effective ways of interact with potential partners. The incentives for international cooperation is thus experiences as low, although most see a potential for cooperation in the Barents. But before starting to develop "Barents products" and marketing the Barents area instead of the Swedish Lapland or local destination brand, they would like to see the benefits of a Barents destination brand, that would not compete with the now used destination brands.

FINLAND

Some tourism operators in Finnish Lapland express that clarifying and improving the interregional cooperation is a challenge to be tackled. Also, networking between the operators is said to be a form of cooperation that should be strengthened. In the data, it was mentioned that the spirit of cooperation on local and global level should be comprehended better. Currently, the cooperation is seen to be too narrow-minded as the operators do not see the mutual benefits of working in cooperation but only perceive other operators in the field as competitors. Disseminating information on how to cooperate in profitable ways and efficiently among different tourism operators could contribute to greater mutual benefits. The data also reveals that creating networks and cooperation partnerships is challenging especially with Russian partners as finding and engaging with them must happen through personal networking activities and visits. This process should be made easier for the practitioners through providing concrete ways of cooperating and networking.

MURMANSK

It is necessary to carry out sociological monitoring, aimed at the tourism industry.

The respondents mentioned that *"It is necessary to study our needs in the development..."*

The respondents mentioned the following conditions of tourism development: sociological research, aimed not only at revealing the needs of population in recreation, preferences in this sphere, but also needs and problems of arranging the tourism sector. In this case the object of monitoring can be:

- The level of available information among heads and employees of tourism organizations about the state of tourism sphere;
- Need in contacts with international partners;

Necessity in advanced training studies.

Summary

The survey shows that company-to-company cooperation is very limited, due to companies specifics, and is inhibited by the lack of knowledge of the Barents cooperation, where the companies see competition and no mutual benefit. The focus is rather laid on the inside cooperation, not on international. This, in turn, is explained by language barrier, distance and transport infrastructure, red tape (fees and legislation). Not least important are the underdeveloped tourism businesses in certain regions and poor image of the local tourist products. Another obstacle to cooperation is the lack of knowledge of project management and logistics in the regions (unavailability of direct connections).

At the same time, regional tourist companies would like to expand their partnership relations with the foreign companies. Barents Region is seen by many as a promising partner.

The efficiency of tour operators' interaction could possibly be fostered through circulating the best practices and cases of the mutually beneficial projects, cross-cultural communication, competitive tourist brands promotion, advanced training studies.

Another tool to activate the international cooperation could be a unified web portal featuring the calendar of tourism landmarks and events and detailed accounts of certain companies. It is necessary that the cooperation in the Barents tourism be fostered through exchange of visits and experience for tourist companies to manifest themselves in relevant international associations (208).

Priority 1.4: Tourism stakeholders need to know how to promote product and tourism package information in appealing forms to appropriate targets

ARKHANGELSK REGION

As noted by the travel agencies operating in Arkhangelsk Region, the local tourism sector suffers from the lack of knowledge and insufficient marketing research enabling to forecast market trends, risks and target audience's preferences, to timely respond to the market changes and to

identify and areas most promising tourism-wise. The agencies further noted the high cost of marketing services and the necessity to involve science and education in marketing research. In this respect, of growing value is the study of Russia's and other countries' best practices and innovative techniques for tourism products marketing and promotion through traineeships, international topical round tables, conferences, trainings and study trips. It appears relevant, when it comes to obtaining knowledge of tourist product sales techniques, to review companies' case studies of customer attraction, to analyze travel companies' sales flowcharts, to do the benchmarking, to identify the weaknesses and logistics' strengths and downsides, to identify and circulate typical case studies and best practices (for instance, IT marketing techniques, etc.).

SWEDEN

In Swedish Lapland, major tourism operators on the international market have good product and market skills, while many operators not yet established on the international market need to develop their skills in product development, marketing and selling to the international markets. Through Visit Sweden's marketing strategy, also adapted by the regional Swedish Lapland destination and most local destinations, tourism operators and other stakeholders are very clear of the markets and segments the national and regional marketing is focused on. Also the TEM reports and reports from the SAERG (*Tillväxtverket*) give information about where the international markets are and which market segments visit Sweden. Still cultural information on demands, habits, and service expectations for the different markets are in strong need. The major problems for smaller entrepreneurs and not yet internationally established operators, is to find the customers and international tour operators. A lack of incoming tour operators leaves the tourist entrepreneur to find international guests on his own. With limited marketing resources other marketing strategies except webpages are limited. Also opportunities to meet international tour operators are limited, unless destinations invite tour operators or send entrepreneurs on tourism conventions. Other major issues to develop are quality related such as information on different languages, staff language skills, and business logics on an international market.

FINLAND

Tourism entrepreneurs in Finnish Lapland feel that it is important to know who they ought to attract in the market and to understand the target customer for whom they design products. Entrepreneurs see also that it is important to know that there is enough demand in the market for a product before starting to produce it. Interest in joint research on the target customers and customer structure is also expressed. Hence, market information is important for the practitioners and they need feasible research data of their markets. More knowledge of product and service marketing is obviously needed among the practitioners in order to enable them to recognize potential target customers and appreciate their needs and interests.

MURMANSK

It is necessary to have systematized information about the region's demand in MICE-services. The respondents mentioned that *"They would like to have more information about MICE and would like to get all the information"*. According to the respondents' opinion, the development of MICE-tourism is significant for both the region and the company from the economical and social points of view. Interest in developing MICE tourism among tour operators is based on the readiness of organizations to create new additional forms of work. An important factor is available necessary preliminary information about business meetings, held in the region, events, conferences (terms, venue, number of participants

and so on). Besides, the organizations, realizing services of MICE-tourism, need competently organized information (advertisement) about its activities.

Summary

Viability in the international tourism market means having a good product and professional team. A company's marketing strategy should be clear and transparent. Knowing your product user is essential and it is therefore advised that joint surveys be conducted into the existing and, if possible, potential demand in a given service or a product. It is also essential to have the information of the preferences of local tourists, of their expectations of the services in different tourism sectors and of the region's need in MICE activities.

The biggest challenge faced by smaller companies is to find international tour operators and foreign customers. The only source of information they dispose of is the Internet.

To be able to timely respond to tourism market changes, to discern a promising cooperation trend and to project possible risks, it is necessary that social surveys and market research should be carried out with participation of relevant research and educational institutions. It is in this respect essential to go deeper into best practices, success stories and innovative techniques already applied in tourist product marketing (such as e-marketing, for instance) and promotion through study visits, international round tables, workshops and conferences. Among most relevant techniques to identify the strengths and weaknesses of tourist product sales logistics would be case studies, flow charts and best sales practices (175).

Action Area 3: Cooperation

Background

In 2013, the Barents Region will celebrate its 20th year as the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). The founding document of the Barents Region was the Kirkenes Declaration signed among the Barents countries –Norway, Russia, Finland, and Sweden, in January 1993. One of the more ambitious goals of the declaration was to create, sustain, and develop the economic diversity and economic cooperation among the Barents Region countries. Out of all of the visionary goals of the agreement, economic cooperation in the region has been the least developed. There are a myriad reasons for this, not least different economic priorities, taxation regimes, and cross-border policies. Thus, for the tourism industry to develop economic cooperation across the Barents borders, it will not only be the industry that must be involved, but also local and national political actors, especially vis-à-vis Russia.

Nevertheless, there have been ways that local-level actors have been successful at developing cooperation around tourism. People-to-people cooperation has been one of the major strengths of the Barents Region.

Priority 3.1: Increasing the Barents knowledge: Barents prospects should be included in existing study programs at all levels

ARKHANGELSK REGION

As the study in the Arkhangelsk Region shows, half of the surveyed companies are familiar with the Barents Region idea. They understand geographical location of the Barents cooperating countries but not counties or districts. The companies have experience of joint international and inter-regional tourism projects and some interest in cooperation and in more contacts to exchange information, tourists to make vacations in the Russian North more popular. Acquiring more knowledge about the Barents Region will lead to higher motivation for partnership in tourism. Successful twenty-year Barents cooperation experience in different spheres can be well positioned in joint seminars, conferences, exhibitions, forums. Tourism associations, regional authorities and BEAR Joint Working Group on tourism can become the key stakeholders in disseminating information and knowledge about Barents cooperation in tourism.

It is advisable to include the following subjects in the study programmes of tourism training: external economic activities of tourism operators; strategy for the Barents countries to enter the national and international tourism market; tourist services market of the Barents countries; economic potential and development factors of tourism business in the Barents countries; intercultural aspects of tourism development in the Barents Region; methods of preparing international routes; project management, work with grants and business planning in tourism; state-private partnership in tourism.

FINLAND

Increasing the Barents knowledge: Barents perspective should be included in existing study programs in all levels (Seminars, training, Barents perspective in education programs)

Finnish entrepreneurs are not familiar with the accurate definition of Barents region nor do they perceive the region in a similar way. Hence, there is a lot of room for improvement in the Barents knowledge of the practitioners. In order to establish partnerships and cooperation between the Barents region operators, it is crucial for the stakeholders to comprehend the region in a similar way. Also, general knowledge of the region in geographical, political as well as legal terms would create more solid basis for joint tourism activities between the region's practitioners. Subsequently, more specialized training on the Barents region as a distinctive tourism area and in terms of its strengths and opportunities would enable the tourism operators to better exploit and utilize the full potential of the area in cooperation with each other.

MURMANSK

It is necessary to have sustainable cooperation between state structures, business, public organizations and the system of professional education (secondary and higher).

During the interview informants were asked about the role of regional authorities and regional organizations in the tourism development in the Barents region, on the whole, and in the Murmansk region, in particular. The following opinions were received:

"The main task (of governmental authorities) is not to hinder entrepreneurs, to support them with methodical materials, ... unite all the stakeholders."

"Regional organizations should become mediators between entrepreneurs and authorities..."

"It is necessary to combine efforts of all organizations. Someone carries out research, someone establishes partnerships, someone forms, organizes tourism products, .. together this can give positive results"

While analyzing the interviews it was revealed that there is no sustainable partnership among regional authorities and tourism-related enterprises and organizations; public organizations and the system of secondary and higher vocational educational education. This resulted in:

the low level of information among business and authorities representative about establishments and directions of vocational training of tourism and hotel business staff ;

Representatives of public managing structures don't have any ideas about specialists and their need in the labour market.

There is no dialogue among educational establishments and employers. Interaction with business is realized through organization of student practices and single invitations of tourism companies' representatives as lecturers.

There is no regular connections between educational establishments. Interaction has accidental individual character. Cooperation with the Ministry of education is realized, to a bigger extent, by collecting statistical data about employment of graduates.

Thus it is necessary to create the common organizational body, including representatives of above-mentioned organizations.

NORWAY

See Norwegian section on Education

SWEDEN

Swedish entrepreneurs have only a vague perception of the Barents region, and associate it mostly with Russia, and do not see themselves as part of it. Therefore specific training programs for Barents tourism awareness are needed for tourism stakeholders and operators. Also curriculums in traditional tourism education on all levels need to address the Barents as a common tourism area with its touristic resources. As there are no national curricula for tourism education at any level, awareness of Barents tourism should be addressed to educators directly on all levels within tourism education programs. This need that public stakeholders in Barents tourism development take active responsibility to increase the awareness of the Barents as a destination among all tourism educators.

Priority 3.2: Encouraging companies for cooperation - B2B: good examples and best practices should be visible (sustainability and updating)

ARKHANGELSK REGION

The Arkhangelsk Region operators express their interest in partnership and cooperation with counterparts in Norway, Finland and Sweden. Cooperation can be focused on joint projects aimed at finding the needs of the European North tourism market, promising kinds of tourism, marketing research, establishing the joint brand of the Barents Region, exchange of experience and practices of tourism product developing and marketing, area infrastructure development, planning and offering the joint travel itineraries. Launch of a joint travel portal of the Barents Region with a database of its tourism companies could become an effective tool of finding partners and promoting project ideas. An annual international tourism forum of the Barents Region can become a good channel for sharing the best practices, exchanging experience, searching for partners, offering new projects.

FINLAND

In Finnish Lapland, networking between different tourism operators is seen very crucial and advantageous. The tourism practitioners are highly interested in interregional business-to-business cooperation and networking. They are eager to find suitable business partners from Sweden, Norway and Russia. However, so far it has been difficult to find partners for co-operation, especially from abroad. The entrepreneurs state that they do not have adequate information on whom to contact nor what kind of possibilities and interest for cooperation there exists. Creation of a register or database for companies interested in cooperation was suggested. The database could supply contact information and short description of the companies in order to provide an intermediary channel for finding cooperation partners. Also, joint Barents travel fair or forum was suggested for making personal contacts and finding potential business partners from within the Barents region. Many Finnish operators are interested in cooperation especially with travel organizers and agencies. All in all, the entrepreneurs feel that it is beneficial to co-operate as each practitioner can hence specialize into more specific operations – yet, they need more support for finding the cooperation opportunities.

MURMANSK

It is necessary to spread information about the best practices of cooperation in the sphere of tourism.

“Our entrepreneurs lack knowledge, skills and marketing, they can not present themselves”

“We need help not in arranging activities, but in propaganda of our opportunities”

“We would like to learn details. We learn from mistakes. We would like to get information about how to do it better.”

Because of absence of system of sustainable interaction among all tourism stakeholders and taking into consideration the needs of tourism organizations in developing tourism products, it is necessary to increase access to vocational information through translation of the best practices of cooperation in the sphere of cooperation.

For this purpose, it is better

to use the best practices as objects of analytical research while training specialists in the system of secondary and higher vocational education;

To arrange annual scientific and practice seminars and conferences and attract tourism practitioner;

To develop the system of short-time courses, training, master-classes in the Barents region.

NORWAY

The regional tourism industry in Northern Norway highlights an increased and facilitated cross-border cooperation within the Barents region as an important priority in order to further develop this industry. Fifty (50) percent of the companies interviewed said that they already have a considerable cross-border cooperation within the Barents Region, and 6/10 of the interviewees said that they see great potential and many possibilities in developing, or further developing, this kind of cooperation.

An increased cooperation between tourism companies in all the Barents countries would make it easier to sell the region as a whole, and to fully exploit its' possibilities. As one of the interviewees put it: “I think the market is interested in experiencing the whole Barents Region”.

SWEDEN

Tourism operators in Swedish Lapland have and are engaged in different networking processes and projects on the local and regional destination level. Many express fear that an additional process on the Barents level would be too much, before local and regional networks and cooperation's have developed and stabilized. But instead of pressing entrepreneurs with additional time consuming processes, new innovative ways to facilitate cooperation has to be developed. Speed-dating, benchmarking trips, etc. are suggested instead of traditional workshops and seminars. To interest tourist operators in cross border cooperation, not only best practice has to be presented, but actual business opportunities, such as actual international customers within MICE. Thus public projects with the aim of promoting cooperation also need to involve matchmaking with actual and potential customers for such cross border ventures.

Priority 3.3: Encouraging public management for cooperation: JWGT should intensify its work (tourism associations, universities, authorities, other public tourism organizations)

ARKHANGELSK REGION

Regional authorities coordinate tourism development in the Arkhangelsk Region, its promotion at the national and international tourism markets. In order to facilitate international cooperation in tourism the responsible departments should advance the following activities: consulting and information assisting of companies willing to enter the international market, administrative support, material incentives as co-financing from the national and regional target programmes, covering some expenses of international exhibitions and forums participants, promoting investment projects, searching for sponsors, information and advertising support, holding international seminars, conferences, forums, providing joint and overseas enterprises with favourable business conditions including tax breaks and business incubators.

It is advisable for the authorities to pay attention to forming the regional demand for tourism personnel training, that is, meeting the employers' needs in highly qualified personnel. The public HR policy should be based on social partnership of the state, the society, business and educational establishments in training personnel for tourism.

In order to provide complex solution to the existing challenges and problems in tourism Joint Working Group on Tourism in the Barents Region (JWGT) should cooperate effectively with BEAR Working Groups on economic cooperation, investment, transport and education. Activities of JWGT as the inter-government and inter-regional coordinating body in the Barents Region should be more pragmatic and aimed at attaining the following results: initiating, planning, finding financial support and coordinating a joint travel portal of the Barents Region; holding an international tourism forum of the Barents Region at least once in two years (rotating the place and the responsible organization depending on the chairing country in JWGT), supporting promising international projects, supporting networking and financing tools identification, arranging international training seminars and training courses for the business.

FINLAND

Regional organizations seem to have a big role in assisting and advancing networking and cooperation in Finnish Lapland. The public authorities are said to have a significant intermediary power in assembling tourism operators together. Especially regional marketing organizations are experienced to be beneficial for their stakeholders. Also, different projects and cooperation with educational institutions have been positive experiences for the entrepreneurs but, at the same time, more pragmatic and concrete results are expected from the cooperation. As the entrepreneurs' resources for finding suitable projects and actors for student cooperation are limited, the entrepreneurs expect more active stand from their counterparties in the initiation of the cooperation. What is more, the practitioners feel that the challenges can be overcome by developing tourism industry in tandem with the region's public and private sector. However, it is suggested that the regional organizations and authorities should only have a managing role as the actual cooperation should be of business-to-business nature. The current activity of the public sector is claimed to be too bureaucratic and preventing tourism businesses from succeeding in their business operations due to, for instance, complex legislation and taxation. The involvement of regional organizations and public authorities is important also in the future. Yet, their work

should be intensified, clarified and the results made more pragmatic in order to serve the practitioners' on a daily level.

NORWAY

The tourism companies interviewed highlighted an increased and facilitated cooperation with the public sector, and especially with regional development organizations, as an important priority in order to further develop this industry.

As many as 8/10 of the interviewees consider that the regional development organizations have a very important role in tourism development. It was mentioned that "the municipalities have a huge responsibility" and that "cooperation with the public sector is an absolute necessity". But only one of the interviewees said that he had good cooperation with the public sector. It was mentioned that the current actions of the public sector in regards of tourism are not good enough. One of the interviewees said: "There are no municipalities today that have a real strategy for tourism development (...) and this is alarming".

A better cooperation with the public sector is very important for these small tourism companies that are in a vulnerable position, especially from an economic point of view. It was mentioned in the interviews that they need financial backing, and one of the interviewees said: "In fact no one, neither the county nor the municipality, is backing us financially". Cooperation with regional development organizations is also very important in order to facilitate the practical organization of tourism activities.

SWEDEN

As many entrepreneurs do not have any academic education, many are skeptical to the traditional academy for facilitating tourism development. At the same time LTU has initiated new forms of cooperation with private business through student projects which have been very rewarding for involved tourism operators. Entrepreneurs are also expressing that they are fed-up of projects and project leaders not getting business to take off, but rather producing reports and endless workshops and educations. This skeptic attitude towards "tourism developers" has to be considered carefully when planning development processes and projects addressing tourist entrepreneurs, at least in Sweden.

Authorities could encourage co-operation by specifically canalizing resources and findings to such cooperation processes. But funding should also be less bureaucratic with simpler application forms, more trust in the processes and participants and less paperwork, so that hard working entrepreneurs find it worth to take part in such funding and projects.

Summary

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, in order for cooperation to be developed and to succeed transnationally and translocally in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, there must be a great deal of public-private partnerships. This means that both local and national governing authorities must be involved in the creation and development of an industry such as tourism if it should cross the borders of the Region. This is particularly important for the engaging Russia in a cross-border industry such as tourism, which is only marginally developed in the border regions with the other Barents countries.

Challenges and some solutions

Rationalising the economic goals across all of the Barents Region countries. Tourism is highly developed and an important economic driver in Northern Finland, but less so in Norway, Sweden, and Russia. This asymmetry in tourism development has both good and negative consequences that may be overcome through more cooperation and learning from the best practices of Finland.

Economic priorities, varying taxation regimes, limited offerings, high costs, bureaucratic control over partnerships and resources, low level availability of transportation and logistics are all challenges to the development of tourism and specifically the cooperation around the tourism industry in the Barents North. Again an asymmetric development with Finland far ahead of the other Barents countries may present challenges for cooperation. The model of industrialised tourism, moreover, may not always be the model that many small tour operators in Northern Sweden, Norway, and Russia would like to follow. Nevertheless, the Finnish model can offer knowledge and expertise around the delivery of tourism products.

Tourism education is limited in all of the Barents countries except for Finland, and with marginally more development in Northern Sweden. Basic tourism and hospitality education is still in its infancy in Northern Norway and especially in Northwest Russia, but this may be a way to develop more cooperation around tourism education. Again, Finland has the opportunity and expertise to lead in this education cooperation around tourism and hospitality management education.

Project such as Kolarctic BART is important for cooperation, but as with most project funding, it is necessary to have mechanism to continue the work and recommendations valuable for the economic goals of the Barents Region. Perhaps the Barents Euro-Arctic Council's Joint Working Group on Barents Tourism may play a role in its continuity.

- As tourism will rely largely on private-public partnerships, it will be a major challenge for the Barents governments especially at the local level to invest in the development of the tourism industry. Local-level governments have very little resources to develop such financially demanding activities. National governments would have to give support in the short run for the development of a tourism industry that spans the across the Barents Region, and that goes beyond project funding.

Action Area 4: Product Development

Background

The majority of the interviewed Barents regions entrepreneurs highlighted their interest in developing joint tourism products. New products are the essential element for businesses to expand and trips and activities that include visits in more than one Barents country are likely to attract more tourists to the region, enrich the range of the service offerings and complement their uniqueness. However, it is important to consider and subsequently eliminate obstacles and barriers in order to ensure and facilitate joint cross-border tourism product development. A mutual and common understanding of cooperation, shared by all the actors in the tourism field in the Barents region, is fundamentally important.

To be able to commence cross-border tourism product development, the entrepreneurs expressed their needs for:

- An in-depth tourism related review of all the Barents countries providing profound information about legislation, infrastructure and natural as well as cultural resources for tourism.
- An assessment of the current tourism offerings and the market prospects for the Barents region.
- Easily retrievable statistical tourism related data from the organizations in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia for optimizing and comparing supplied services.
- Public funding for supporting essential groundwork activities and subsidies for developing cross- border tourism products.
- United safety regulations as well as equivalent levels of service- and product quality. Barents wide certifications and service quality standards have to be created with regard of the individuality of each country. The introduction of such service quality and safety standards will not only serve as a competitive advantage but also as a step forward to prepare the Barents region entrepreneurs for the demands of the international markets.

The idea of common tourism product development among the actors in the region is to generate product packages, interregional round tours and MICE tourism in the Barents. These tourism commodities are built upon the natural and cultural resources of each region and reflect every destination's specific values. The MICE sector was identified as a fruitful branch for the tourism industry. However, the level of MICE involvement differs heavily among the Barents regions; some are hosting large scale MICE, e.g. Norway, while others lack the necessary infrastructure.

Through strategic packaging and cooperation, seasonality gaps can be reduced, market demands can be met and copycatting and streamlining similar products across the Barents, resulting in unnecessary competition between the areas and different tourism operators, can be avoided. Benchmarking, matchmaking activities and learning from best practices are countenancing the entrepreneurs' development.

The new products have to complement and facilitate each other for being profitable for the tourism practitioners and the whole region.

Altogether, innovative and seminal product development based on local resources needs the cooperation of the private- and the public sector as well as educational- and financial institutions; thus, public-private partnership is a major contributor for tourism in the Barents region.

FINLAND

In Finland, Safety and quality of tourism products and services are of a fairly good standard and the need for constant progress is commonly acknowledged. Market- and potential customer knowledge plus a comprehensive understanding of the current tourism offerings in the Barents region are vital first steps for the creation of joint tourism products. Furthermore, the central role of the operating environment was pointed out. Regarding the multiplier effect and the economic significance of the sector in Finnish Lapland, the entrepreneurs favor minimized negative competition and bureaucratic restrictions.

In Finnish Lapland, the weak summer season is a major problem for the tourism industry. Work-related tourism, MICE tourism and round tours in cooperation with other Barents region operators are a possible remedy.

Joint product packages, combining different features and areas of the Barents region offer an expedient to more easily salable and feasible solutions in order to serve both, the seller's goals and the buyer's needs. Benchmarking and matchmaking activities are tools to provide opportunities for learning from each other's best practices and for finding future business partners.

MURMANSK

The majority of tourism organizations in the Murmansk region are concerned with remaining competitive, what can be sustained by cooperative tourism products. Furthermore, there is a need for common legislative base for the tourism industry to simplify processes and joint development of new tourism activities requires the study of regional resources (cultural, ethnical, historical, natural and ecological) and the knowledge about available services (transport, objects of public catering). The companies need profound information about tourism services provided in the other Barents countries. It is suggested to make use of public funding since tourism enterprises are mainly small and lack capital to finance large market based research.

The directions of tourism development in the Murmansk region are ecotourism, active leisure-slalom and extreme tourism, historical and cultural tourism, fishing, diving, MICE-tourism and different forms of individual and family tourism. Nevertheless, there are several internal and external factors hindering the creation of new tourism products: the low level of the linguistic competence, the absence of self-presentation skills, minimal product advertisement, the insufficient level of tourism infrastructure and the lack of sharing information.

MICE tourism is seen as a fruitful branch from the economic and social points of view. Nevertheless, major developments have to be made in the regions based on research in furtherance to be an attractive host destination.

NORWAY

The goals of the tourism industry in Northern Norway are to expand the service- and product offering and to increase the volume of incoming tourists. Joint tourism products augment the

quality and uniqueness of the activities and consequently attract more visitors. Therefore, it is crucial to intensify the cooperation among the regional actors and stakeholders and “develop a dialogue in order to be able to sell a cross-border product”. The entrepreneurs request that the public sector supports joint product development actions. Norwegian entrepreneurs are familiar with MICE tourism and want to prioritize its development throughout the whole Barents region in the future. Especially the incentive trips are prospectus and profitable. Since the sector is in a sophisticated level in Norway, the actors propose that the country could function as a hallmark and help to increase the trend of MICE-tourism in the whole Barents region.

SWEDEN

The different levels of service quality and host-manship (värdskap) are considered as an obstacle within the Barents region when developing joint cross-border products of high quality for the export level. The same holds for safety, ecotourism and sustainability as no common Nordic or Barents certifications and regulations exist, e.g., for different adventure-,experience- and nature activities, which are popular forms of tourism in Sweden. From the entrepreneur’s perspective, legal, logistical and infrastructural knowledge is the indispensable basis for developing common products. Many Swedish micro firms are not familiar with the markets and the guest’s cultures. Furthermore, since there are serious differences between the Barents countries, the entrepreneurs expressed their concern towards common development in the nearer future.

By facilitating cooperation through public organizations, the obstacles will be reduced and new opportunities will arise. Barents cooperation projects for specific tourism areas such as MICE, Nature based tourism, adventure tourism, fishing tourism, etc., are exemplaric.

Ideally, joint Barents tourism products are on the one hand based on the natural resources, the destination values and the market needs but on the other hand copycatting and similar offerings are avoided.

ARKANGELSK REGION

The current tourism offering in Arkhangelsk is centered on tours with Arctic, cultural, educational, eventful and active content and businesses focus on the standardization of services in order to raise the service quality for meeting international customers’ expectations. For further development and innovations, tourism companies need a combination of know-how and resources, such as market information and forecasts, integrated studies of the tourist flows, improved use of information technology plus a developed tourism infrastructure.

Prospective for the future are ATV and snowmobile tours, business related tourism, river- and sea cruises and strategic mega-events.

Tourist companies located in the Arkhangelsk Region are interested in the development of Barents region tourism products, which are based on already existing tours and services. Regional government authorities, interregional organizations, tourism associations and the private sector could facilitate joint promotion of these tours for the regional and the global market.

The utilization of the previous international projects in Barents Region contributes to the ongoing Barents cooperation. However, in order to create prosperous cross-border tourism products, the obstacles such as accessibility, visa issues, affordability of services, the education of personnel and linguistic as well as socio-cultural barriers, are in an urgent need to be solved.

There is interest towards the development of MICE tourism. Prerequisites for this business expansion are a functional infrastructure, a service standard and professional host organizations.

Promising for MICE tourism in the Arkhangelsk region are events connected with the Arctic, peculiarities of the North, culture of the local and indigenous people, and annual traditional business events.

Recommendations for implementation

1. Creation of IDMO (International destination management organization) for Barents region

→Promoting participatory decision-making and information transparency to enhance the benefits for the countries within the Barents region.

→Tourism stakeholder networking has to be activated and involving all the actors from the top to the bottom: government agencies, tourism researchers, institutions, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, commercial enterprises and local communities.

2. Barents region tourism databank: Retrievable bookshelf data for everyone

→The databank can be a tangible feature representing the regional cooperation. The databank can be a huge storage and information space for Barents region countries and the actors.

→The sharing of trans-border information will be catalytic for the Barents region to be a unified destination.

3. Tourism map for the Barents region

→Presenting the region's individual highlights, natural- and cultural sights in a collective context.

4. "Barents Tourism Agreement"- Common standards in quality, safety and sustainability

→Guidelines to be adopted gradually by member countries in fulfilling common quality, safety and sustainability tourism product standards.

→Quality and safety tourism standards are the key to gain and maintain visitors' trust and confidence.

→The member countries of the Barents region must decide the minimum level from where the standards are developed.

→All levels of the local governments and communities have to participate for gradually adopting not only environmental management standards and certification programs for sustainable tourism but also for assessing and monitoring the impact of tourism on local communities, culture and nature, especially in environmental and cultural sensitive areas.

5. Public funding

→A long-term funding strategy must be developed to ensure that major public/private activities and projects have available resources for development and future expansions.

6. Benchmarking

→Benchmarking, as a learning method from the others' best practices in product development, should be actively utilized.

7. Integrated packaged seasonal products

→ Integrated packaged seasonal products should be the starting point for the promotion of the Barents region. The “tourism product” should be developed by the partners in a coordinated manner, taking the individual seasonal needs and opportunities of each region into account.
→ Thematic tours that cover several countries, supported by a network of complementary clusters for investment attraction.

8. Collective trans-border activities

→ Collective trans-border activities for exchanging information and experiences among actors and coordination and/or harmonization of tourism policies and programs.

→ Marketing, training, research, information dissemination and promotion of tourism incentives should guide and facilitate the development of the tourism infrastructure. Public-private collaboration should be enhanced throughout the region.

Action Area 5: Branding

Background

“Every place has a Brand! If you don’t actively define it, the market will do it for you.”

Branding a new tourism region such as the Barents region is a challenge in many dimensions involving stakeholders such as tourism entrepreneurs and tour operators, DMO’s (local and regional), public organizations and governments as well as educational institutions. An action plan for branding a region should therefore address these stakeholders with differentiated message and actions.

Before addressing the challenge of a common brand for the Barents area, we have to understand what we mean by branding:

“Brands that really work have soul. They come alive thanks to the authentic values and people behind them. The best places actively build their brands from the 'inside out'—showcasing local talents and features to create a sense of belonging, strengthen community prosperity and fashion a bright future. Done well, place branding can make a big difference to both the internal pride and the external performance of a place.” (www.placebrand.ca).

The word "*brand*" is derived from the Old Norse *brandr* meaning "to burn." It refers to the practice of producers burning their mark (or brand) onto their products. A brand is a "*Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.*" Proper branding can result in higher sales of not only products and services, but on other products and services associated with that brand. Brand is the personality that identifies a product, service, company or place (name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them) and how it relates to key constituencies: customers, staff, partners, investors etc. Some distinguish the psychological aspect, *brand associations* like thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and so on that become linked to the brand, of a brand from the experiential aspect. The experiential aspect consists of the sum of all points of contact with the brand and is known as the *brand experience*. The brand experience is a brand's action perceived by a person. The psychological aspect, sometimes referred to as the *brand image*, is a symbolic construct created within the minds of people, consisting of all the information and expectations associated with a product, service or the company providing them.

When branding we seek to develop or align the expectations behind the brand experience, creating the impression that a brand associated with a product, service or place has certain qualities or characteristics that make it special or unique. A brand is therefore one of the most valuable elements in an advertising theme, as it demonstrates what the brand owner is able to offer in the marketplace. The art of creating and maintaining a brand is called *brand management*. Orientation of the whole organization towards its brand is called *brand orientation*, which in this

case means orientating all the tourism stakeholders towards the Barents brand. Careful brand management seeks to make the product or services relevant to the target audience.

Brand awareness refers to customers' ability to recall and recognize the brand under different conditions and link to the brand name, logo, jingles and so on to certain associations in memory. It consists of both *brand recognition* and *brand recall*. It helps the customers to understand to which product or service category the particular brand belongs and what products and services are sold under the brand name. It also ensures that customers know which of their needs are satisfied by the brand through its products.

Brands typically are made up of various elements:

- Name: The word or words used to identify a company, product, service, place or concept.
- Logo: The visual trademark that identifies the brand.
- Tagline or Catchphrase:
- Graphics, Shapes and Colors:
- Specific sensations such as tastes, scents and sounds or movements: A unique tune or set of notes can denote a brand and Lamborghini has trademarked the upward motion of its car doors.

The outward expression of a brand – including its name, trademark, communications, and visual appearance – is *brand identity*. Because the identity is assembled by the brand owner, it reflects how the owner wants the consumer to perceive the brand – and by extension the branded company, organization, product, service or place. This is in contrast to the *brand image*, which is a customer's mental picture of a brand. The brand owner will seek to bridge the gap between the brand image and the brand identity. Sustainable brand names are easy to remember, transcend trends and have positive connotations. Brand identity is fundamental to consumer recognition and symbolizes the brand's differentiation from competitors. Brand identity needs to focus on authentic qualities – real characteristics of the value and brand promise being provided and sustained by organizational and/or production characteristics.

This short theoretical presentation of “branding” indicates the complexity and many dimensions of branding a region. Place branding is even more complex than product branding as the “place” and its multidimensional qualities has to be defined before a brand definition, orientation and management can be implemented. This was also obvious at the BART Learning Café workshop on branding in Murmansk. Here some key concepts were identified in regard to branding the Barents region in a tourism context. These were:

- Agreeing on a common brand name – challenging and extreme
- Branding of tourism destinations based on local heritage
- No Swedish or Finnish connection to Barents Sea
- Barents region is too similar and expensive for domestic markets
- Content image of what BR stands for
- Re-think BR profile not matching with image
- BR in Finland associated with North-West Russia
- Br disadvantages turned into attractions
- Arctic easier to understand than Barents
- Arctic – difficult for Swedish sub-arctic destinations
- Change name completely
- Survey on BR name from incoming tourists and markets of origins
- “...Lapland” as a name for BR
- Term Lapland has negative connotation in Norway
- Barents region is more political than tourism brand
- BR requires a lot of work to transfer to tourism from political brand
- Barents as political construction
- Visual symbol of BR needed
- Northern Lights as visual symbol
- IPR, patents, copyrights
- Long term media plan
- Resistance of existing regional brands to re-branding
- Meta-branding instead of re-branding
- Russian Lapland part of Barents
- Local brands promoted under Barents “umbrella”

From these comments a SWOT analysis of branding the Barents for tourism will give the following results:

Strength

- Change name completely
- Term Lapland has negative connotation in Norway
- Russian Lapland part of Barents

Weakness

- No Swedish or Finnish connection to Barents Sea
- BR in Finland associated with North-West Russia
- Arctic easier to understand than Barents
- Arctic – difficult for Swedish sub-arctic destinations
- Barents region is more political than tourism brand
- Barents as political construction
- Long term media plan

Opportunities

- Agreeing on a common brand name – challenging and extreme
- Branding of tourism destinations based on local heritage
- Content image of what BR stands for
- Re-think BR profile not matching with image
- Br disadvantages turned into attractions
- Survey on BR name from incoming tourists and markets of origins
- Visual symbol of BR needed
- Northern Lights as visual symbol
- Meta-branding instead of re-branding
- Local brands promoted under Barents “umbrella”

Threats

- Barents region is too similar and expensive for domestic markets
- “...Lapland” as a name for BR
- IPR, patents, copyrights
- Resistance of existing regional brands to re-branding

Conclusions Learning café:

- Few and weak strength of the brand
- Several weaknesses that have to be fixed:
 - Feeling connected to the region by common values and image
 - Competing brand Arctic turned into a strength
 - Adding to the political image of Barents and image of touristic experiences in the Barents
- Many opportunities and potential for a common brand
- Strong treats that have to be neutralized

Priority 5.1: Create common identity for people in the north to promote tourism (Cross-border tourism products, adapt products to different culture)

SWEDEN

Tourism entrepreneurs in Sweden have difficult to see a common identity in the Barents, due to different cultures and language, although we share many similarities, such as nature and climate, remoteness, sami culture etc. It's important to fill the brand with a common value. They also have difficult to think themselves as part of Barents or its destination brand, as it associates with the high Arctic. It's important that no country claims the name or are strongly associated to the brand

(such as Russia). There need substantial public investments to create a common basis for understanding and knowledge of the Barents area, and investment that private entrepreneurs are not interested in or do not have the resources for.

NORWAY

Priority: The Barents Region as an international tourist destination today and in the future;

Justification of the priority: "This region is very interesting, and especially in winter-time. We see a huge increase in winter-tourism, especially related to the northern lights". "I think it will become an interesting destination, and that a new market is emerging in Asia".

FINLAND

Tourism operators in Finnish Lapland see that the different areas in Barents have their own distinctive characteristics, Russia in particular. Thus, common identity for the Barents region could be rather hard to form naturally. The practitioners see that joint cross-border products and joint marketing efforts could be one opportunity for promoting tourism. Indigenous peoples, traditional livelihoods and exciting cultures of the Barents region could be emphasized as the original and distinguishable assets. Hunting, fishing and reindeer husbandry are also mentioned by the entrepreneurs as an appealing selling point for the region.

MURMANSK

The respondents do not have common understanding of the Barents region and vision of a concrete organization's place in the space of the Barents region. All this needs the development of the Action Plan on Barents ideas among all tourism stakeholders. Exchange of experience, trainings, creation of a common web-site can promote this.

ARKHANGELSK REGION

The northern areas are becoming more and more attractive and popular among tourists who had enough of hot climate of the southern countries and are eager to explore the sights of the North. The world's attention to the northern territories and close to the Arctic territories creates favorable conditions for effective positioning of the Barents Region and for increasing the tourist flow to the North. Positive political image of the Barents Region in a global context, its 20-year history of success, and the best examples of good neighborliness also provide the foundations for sustainable development in all areas of cooperation and have a positive impact on the development of tourism in the region. Taking into consideration that in the near future the interest to the North will grow steadily, geographic and political concept of the "Barents Region" could become an efficient and relevant umbrella brand for the promotion of regional tourist destinations. In this context it is reasonable to study in detail foreign countries experience in establishing inter-regional brands (for example, the countries of the Balkan region.)

Summary

- difficult to see a common identity in the Barents
- fill the brand with a common value
- difficult to think themselves as part of Barents
- associates with the high Arctic
- no country claims the name or are strongly associated to the brand
- need substantial public investments to create a common basis
- region is very interesting, winter-time, the northern lights
- interesting destination
- new market is emerging in Asia
- different areas in Barents have their own distinctive characteristics
- common identity hard to form naturally
- cross-border products and joint marketing opportunity for promoting tourism
- Indigenous peoples, traditional livelihoods and exciting cultures original and distinguishable assets
- Hunting, fishing and reindeer husbandry appealing selling point
- do not have common understanding
- Action Plan on Barents ideas among all tourism stakeholders
- becoming more and more attractive and popular
- close to the Arctic creates favorable conditions for effective
- interest to the North will grow steadily
- efficient and relevant umbrella brand
- study in detail foreign countries experience in establishing inter-regional brands

Commentary and analysis

- Barents region as a brand has a high potential, especially in new markets such as Asia and China, but will probably be less attractive for the US and European markets.
- The Barents brand has to find a common identity by finding common values building the brand, such as;
 - Arctic region with high infrastructure and assessability compared to other Arctic areas
 - Brand based on common images of the region, not distinct (cultural) differences, images that tourism stakeholders can stand for by their regional and local destinations.
 - Identify unique selling points such as polar winter, Northern lights, ingenious people and culture, reindeer herding, politically safe area, etc.

- Common identity and values will probably not evolve by a bottom-up process, but must identified and induced by common public investments and common Action Plan
- A Barents brand need to be a meta-brand (umbrella brand) to existing regional brands – and learn how other such meta-brands work in relation to regional and local brands.

Recommendations for implementation

- Create a story (Story Telling) for residents and entrepreneurs in the Barents Region to find common values and construct a common identity.
- To find a common brand for the Barents, an analysis of brand identity among stakeholders and brand image among presumptive visitors should be conducted identifying brand associations.
- Brands are judged by what they do (deliver) not by what they say and promise, thus authenticity will be important.
- An action plan should include “platforms” for developing a common value and identity such as a common webpage for residents, tourism stakeholders and visitors, events (such as festivals) for residents and tourism entrepreneurs with clear objectives (such as what is Barents for you?)

Priority 5.2: Raising awareness of the possibility of common Barents Region tourism brand among stakeholders (decision-makers)

SWEDEN

There is a substantial lack of knowledge about the Barents area and its tourism business among the Swedish entrepreneurs. They have therefore today difficult to relate to a Barents tourism brand, as many operators still are working with the local and regional Swedish Lapland brand. Many see the launch of a Barents tourism brand as a political question managed on a level above the regional destination organizations. A new brand can also be perceived as a competition to existing brands and become confusing on an international market. It needs a lot of challenging work to get the brand known both within Barents tourism and internationally.

NORWAY

Priority: Reconcile challenges to using Barents Region as a brand; *Justification of the priority:* “This concept hasn’t been much used in tourism development”, “From the point of view of tourism, no

one understands what the Barents Region is”, “Barents Region is a non-concept when it comes to tourism”.

FINLAND

As there is a lack of accurate Barents knowledge among Finnish respondents, suggesting creation of a common brand name for the whole Barents region generates confusion. The Finnish operators perceive themselves easily as belonging to the Scandinavia and Lapland brand. Many respondents are interested in interregional marketing and the creation of a common brand name on a theoretical level. However, there are opinions both for and against and the operators are mutually puzzled on how to execute the idea in practice. To conclude, for the time being, it may be too complex an agenda for the region to take up such an engaging and laborious plan of creating a common Barents brand.

ARKHANGELSK REGION

The idea itself of creating a single brand in the Barents Region is interesting and promising. However, the stage of creating such brand must be preceded by implementation of a whole set of measures for collection of information and analysis of the current situation in the field of tourism in the Barents Region; awareness-raising campaigns; study of geographical, ethnic and cultural identity in the context of tourism development; identification of potential areas for development; implementation market research and finding funds for the realization of the concept (*see also Action Point Cooperation*).

Summary

- lack of knowledge
- difficult to relate to a Barents tourism brand
- still are working with the local and regional brand
- a political question managed on a level above the regional destination
- perceived as a competition to existing brands confusing on an international market
- concept hasn't been much used in tourism development
- no one understands what the Barents Region is
- non-concept to tourism
- a lack of accurate Barents knowledge
- a common brand name generates confusion
- interested in interregional marketing and the creation of a common brand name on a theoretical level
- puzzled on how to execute the idea in practice.
- may be too complex an agenda

- interesting and promising
- preceded by implementation of a whole set of measures for collection of information and analysis, awareness-raising campaigns, implementation market research
- finding funds for the realization

Commentary and analysis

- Lack of knowledge of the Barents region among tourism stakeholders, public and private, need to be addressed
- Branding process should not be experienced as competing to local and regional brandings to avoid confusion among tourist operators and tourists
- A careful branding process has to be designed with inter-governmental funding
- Awareness of the brand and region has to be naturally incorporated into tourism educations and tourism development projects in the area.

Recommendations for implementation

- The Branding process and Brand Management as well as brand implementation should be transparent for all stakeholders on the region, including residents
- Public stakeholders should fund resources needed to conduct a brand development and brand implementation including educational and identity building activities.

Priority Task 5.3: Make tourism actors aware of added value of Barents region tourism cooperation

SWEDEN

It is regarded as important that the destination brand is associated with a shared value for tourism actors to act on Barents tourism development. Most Swedish entrepreneurs see a potential for cross-border cooperation, although many interpretate this as obtaining a new market (the Barents) rather than border-cross cooperate on existing markets and products. Although there exists a potential for a cross-border production, these are seen rather as narrow products such as snowmobiling along a cross-border trail, or cross-border bus tours, which in addition require complicated logistics. The potential for common MICE products are regarded as limited, due to the facts that conferences and conventions usually are place specific for certain conference facilities, and for cross-border MICE activities and events, the distances are too large. Some see however,

marketing advantages if the MICE operators within Barents combine their marketing efforts by showing the common pool of exclusive MICE facilities of the north. But as many MICE operators indeed are competitors, competing for big conferences and events, such marketing cooperation need to be handled by an incoming operator on the Barents level.

NORWAY

Priority: Make tourism actors aware of added value of Barents region tourism cooperation.

Justification of the priority: “It is a concept that is unknown for many people”, “No one cares about the Barents Region-concept in Europe”→ “We do not use Barents Region in marketing”.

FINLAND

Despite the differences in cultures and nature of business-making, many Finnish respondents see potential in the cross-border cooperation. However, some state that the challenge is to fit all the interests and views together. It is also mentioned that the practitioners do not possess adequate resources for maintaining interregional operations. Some respondents are more skeptical about the added value of interregional cooperation, yet many see that the area is very interesting entity that has a potential to sell as a unified tourism destination. In case branding is to be taken further by the ongoing project, it could be beneficial to further investigate the opinions of the practitioners on the issue as there were no direct questions related to branding in the conducted interview.

ARKHANGELSK REGION

The Arkhangelsk Region respondents state that the Barents Region is attractive due to its nature potential, virgin forests, ecological safety, close proximity to the Arctic, possibilities of developing sports and extreme tourism. They state that in the near future the interest in the Region will grow sustainably. There is a need in fostering cultural, pilgrim and scientific tours. The Arkhangelsk Region cooperation should be developed with the neighbouring regions (for example, Republic of Karelia, Komi Republic, Murmansk and Vologda Regions, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Leningrad Region) and with the strategic countries of Europe and Barents Region. However, key challenges of tourism development in the Barents Region are to be taken into consideration, among them: relatively high tour prices (an average Russian tourist from the Barents Region is more likely to travel to Turkey or Egypt. Tours to Scandinavian countries are for wealthy people, tours to the Arctic are for exceptionally rich), need for overseas tourists to seek permission for entering the border zones (for the Arctic tourism), lack of knowledge about offering services at the international level.

MURMANSK

Development of the common brand of the Barents region brand:

The development of a common brand of the Barents region should base on the peculiarities of the region (places of interest, natural and climatic peculiarities) and should take into consideration not only the available tourism product but also perspectives of its development. "Only the brand of the Arctic means so much!!!"

Summary

- important brand is associated with a shared value for tourism actors
- potential for cross-border cooperation, seen rather as a narrow products
- potential for common MICE products are regarded as limited
- cross-border MICE activities and events, the distances are too large
- marketing advantages if the MICE operators within Barents combine their marketing efforts
- unknown for many people
- No one cares about the Barents Region-concept in Europe
- see potential in the cross-border cooperation
- practitioners do not possess adequate resources for maintaining interregional operations
- skeptical about the added value of interregional cooperation
- a potential to sell as a unified tourism destination
- Barents Region is attractive, ecological safety, need in fostering cultural, pilgrim and scientific tours, developing sports and extreme tourism
- cooperation should be developed with the neighboring regions
- key challenges of tourism development, high tour prices, permission for entering the border zones, lack of knowledge about offering services

Commentary and analysis

- The Barents area and its brand will not be for the mainstream tourists, but rather adventurous tourism (nature, culture, history), which go by themselves with car (need an area permit pass) or well-defined round-tour packages.
- It will be a difficult challenge to generate cooperation and see the added value for tourism operators with such cooperation, which will need specific public actions to stimulate cooperation within special narrow tourist products, and not general tourism product development.
- MICE not suitable for cross-border products.

- Largest benefit for tourist operators is not cross-border products (with challenging logistics) but rather meta-region branding and marketing, that can enhance interest for the local products on a international (and new) market

Recommendations for implementation

- Identify specific tourism segments that will gain most from a common Barents Brand, such as adventure and special interest tourism for cross-border cooperation activities among tourism operators.
- Identifying market segments such as WHOPs and LOHAS that will have a potential interest in Barents tourism and imitate cooperative marketing for such tourism operators that have potential and interest in cooperation.
- Quality assurance of tourism operators and tourist products through regional DMO's.
- Cooperation between tourism operators should be initiated in a "high" level with regional DMO's and DMC's to set up strategies to implement action plans with clear milestones to secure step-by-step deliveries of actions in developing a common brand and cooperation. Then tourism entrepreneurs and tour operators can be activated.
- Important "actors" for promoting a common brand are educational institutions in each country

Summary and general conclusions and recommendations for branding Barents as a tourism destination

- A common brand for tourism within the Barents area is a serious challenge to develop and implement, but the opportunities will outcome the threats and problems associated with the development of such a brand. But an action plan and strategy for this had to be developed among both public and private stakeholders.
- Implementing a common brand has to be a top-down process that has to be associated with resources to implement the actions necessary for the action plan and strategy implementation.
- The benefits of a common brand for the Barents tourism has to be identified and clearly communicated to stakeholders, and the development process transparent and open and inclusive.
- A common brand for the Barents must be authentically recognized by both stakeholders and target tourists so that brand identity and brand image harmonizes with the brand experience.