

BART – Public-Private Partnership in Barents Tourism

Task 2.4. Creating Action Plan - Module 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
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- Survey on BR name from incoming tourists and markets of origins
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- 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 threats that have to be neutralized

Priority Task 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 difficulty 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 difficulty 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.

Archangelsk: 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 task 1:

- 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 Task 2: Raising awareness of 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.

Archangelsk: 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 task 2

- 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 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 a 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.

Archangelsk: 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 task 3

- 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.