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Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism (Friends of the Presidency) in Oulu 5th of the June 2024

Time: 5th June at 14.00–17.00 (Finnish time, UTC +3)

Venue: Regional Council of Oulu, Poratie 5 A, meeting room “Tiimitoimitila” + Teams

Participant, WGT:

Kairi Pääsuke (Norrbotten), Chair of the meeting

Minna Komulainen (Kainuu)

Hanna-Mari Kuhmonen (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland)

Satu Luiro (Lapland)

Heikki Ojala (Oulu Region)

Egil Ørjan Thorsen (Troms and Finnmark)

Other participants:

Nina Forsell (Finnish Lapland Tourism Board)

Hanna Honkamäkilä (Oulu Region)

Marianne Sjöström (Kvarken Council EGTC)

Jenni Spring (IBS)

Anna-Maija Toivonen (Oulu Region)

1. Opening of the meeting

Chair Kairi Pääsuke opened the meeting. Participants presented themselves. Agenda was approved. Minutes from the last meeting will be distributed later by the chair. Minutes of this meeting will be written by Hanna-Mari.

2. The current situation about Barents Cooperation

Jenni Spring, Head of the International Barents Secretariat, presented the current situation of the Barents Cooperation. After the Finnish chairmanship there has been trio chairmanship between Finland, Norway and Sweden. There are 12 working groups. Norway would like to continue all of them, Sweden and Finland are not sure. Trio will discuss with all of the working groups about the future. In the International Barents Secretariat there are very limited resources at the moment. Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs will no more fund the Secretariat, Sweden and Norway are considering the situation, which is challenging. Different options are being considered, there are no final decisions. Sweden would like to continue the cooperation and give more responsibility for the regions. Norway see close cooperation and dialogue important. By the end of October the decisions need to be made.

Future of the Barents Regional Youth Council is also unsure. Secretariat has helped the Youth Council so far, but the uncertainty of funding is a problem.

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3. Overview and presentation of 2 Interreg Aurora projects

- Arctic Europe Tourism Cluster [Arctic Europe Tourism Cluster - Interreg Aurora](#)

Nina Forsell presented the Arctic Europe Tourism Cluster project (see presentation attached).

- Bothnian Coastal Route [Bothnian Coastal Route - Interreg Aurora](#)

Marianne Sjöström, Kvarken Council EGTC, presented the Bothnian Coastal Route project (see presentation attached).

4. A short summery over ongoing cross-border tourism projects

- Appendix 2 – the list of cross-border tourism projects

Arctic Tourism in 2027 + (start appr 16.00 at Finnish time)

5. Cohesion Policy 2027 + (discussion)

- Which should be the important cornerstones from the point of view of tourism development in the future cohesion policy? The discussion will be postponed for the next meeting. See attached file.

6. Policy Area Tourism – Baltic Sea Strategy, as one of the cornerstones for EU Cohesion Policy

- The State of Play presented by, Hanna Mari Kuhmonen, Hanna Honkamäkilä (tbc) and Anna-Maija Toivonen

7. Future work of WGT

There will be a common discussion about the future of the working group with the CSO members and WGT on 17 June at 12 Swedish/Norwegian time and at 13 Finnish time

WGT discussed the situation:

- From the Finnish Lapland side common projects are seen important and reason for the existence of the WGT. It is a pity if the group would be lost. Work has to change anyway. It is important that the national level is involved in some way. For the regions it is not possible to take more responsibility because there are no resources.
- Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment will follow the guideline of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. There are no resources to contribute to the cooperation. Interreg Aurora is a good tool for the regions. In the working group there are no representatives from the Norwegian nor Sweden ministries either.

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- Finnmark sees the platform important. There are important themes for cooperation in the area, for instance transportation, educational system etc. Operational focus is essential. Resources have to be found for the cooperation. If there is no money, the working group should be finished.
- Norrbotten sees the project cooperation very good. Before the projects there was no good cooperation. Visit Arctic Europe project was born because of this working group. It is important to coordinate the projects as well to avoid overlap. It would be important to continue open conversation in the group, the meetings could be digital and not too often. Contact to national level is important. Nordkalott Council could be possible partner as well.
- Hanna Honkamäkilä, Oulu Region, pointed out that different councils have own agreements. It is not possible to transfer working groups from one council to another.
- Oulu Region wants to invest in tourism. Ministries' presence in the cooperation is seen important. Cooperation is needed in some form. Barents cooperation might be too heavy form in the future. New and light system for the cooperation could be formed. Baltic Sea Region cooperation could be one option for the future cooperation. Some structure for cooperation is needed.
- Kainuu would like to continue cooperation and make it stronger. Kainuu has benefited a lot of the international cooperation.
- As a conclusion: Regions have strong will to continue cooperation, but only at regional level the challenge is to have no money and no structure. Maybe the cooperation could be continued for instance as some kind of advisory board.

8. Other matters

9. Conclusions - Closing of the meeting

Chair closed the meeting.

A joint dinner by own expenses: Restaurant VENN, Pakkahuoneenkatu 16, at 19.