

Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC)
Joint Chair: Russia (Natalia Dikova) and Tromsø (Ellen Ostgard)
Annual Report 2007

The mandate of the Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC) was adopted in 2007. The Regional Working Group on Culture, which was subordinate to the Barents Regional Council, became a Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC) of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and Barents Regional Council (BRC). The new mandate consolidates the status of culture in the Barents cooperation structures and engages governments more closely in the cooperation. In addition to the regional cultural administrations, the JWGC includes the representatives of the Finnish, Norwegian, Russian and Swedish ministries responsible for culture and of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples.

According to the mandate the aim of the JWGC is to strengthen Barents cultural identities, and the impact of Barents culture, and to increase knowledge of arts and culture both in the region and outside of it. The means to this end include multilateral and bilateral projects. In order to develop better skills and knowledge, the JWGC encourage new networks, exchange of best practices and the improvement of the culture information.

In 2007 the JWGC was chaired by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the Murmansk Regional Administration Committee of Culture and Arts. The first meeting of the JWGC was held in Helsinki, Finland, in June 2007. At its first meeting the working group outlined priorities for cultural action. The second meeting was held in Lulea, Sweden, in November 2007 where the Programme of Cultural Cooperation 2008-2010 "*New Winds in the Barents Region*" was adopted by the JWGC. The programme is the framework for inter-regional cultural cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. It is structured in two parts: Cultural Policy Programme, which is implemented by means of the Action Plan and projects. The overall objective of the Programme is to further strengthen cultural cooperation and thus increase the impact of culture in the Barents Region. The aim is to promote cultural diversity and multicultural dialogue and culture as a tool for regional, social and economic development and to create new cultural meeting places. The challenge is to boost international visibility and to develop joint projects with partners from outside the Barents Region in the framework of the EU's Northern Dimension Policy and the EU-Russia Cooperation Action Plan for Culture in interaction with other international structures.

"New Winds in the Barents Region" is the second Cultural Programme since Barents cooperation in the field of culture started in 1993. The first Programme "*Voices in the Barents Region*" was implemented in the period of 2003-2006. In 2007 the JWGC started preparing a report on the first programme. The report will be finalised in 2008.

In 2007 the Barents Cultural Cooperation was presented at the Conference on the Northern Dimension and Culture in Kajaani in October 2007 where representatives of the Nordic Baltic countries, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the EU Presidency Portugal, the European Commission, the Russian Federation, other regional councils and different cultural networks convened to discuss the prospects for establishing a Cultural Partnership in the framework of the renewed Northern Dimension. The aim of the conference was also to contribute to the Nordic Council of Ministers' strategy document Priority Area: Cultural Cooperation with North-west Russia and to the EU-Russia Cooperation Action on Culture.