

## **Joint Working Group on Tourism - Annual Report for 2013**

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

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

### **Actions in 2013**

There was a change of chairs during the reporting year. The new chairs till the end of February 2015 are Ms Nina Vesterinen, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland and Ms Kairi Pääsuke, Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden.

#### *The New Mandate 2013-2017*

One of the main tasks at the first part of the reporting year was to compose a new mandate. The Barents Interregional Tourism Action Plan (see below) played a key role in supporting the work. The objectives and tasks are

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

#### *Meetings*

The Working Group met four times in 2013; in Stockholm, in Rovaniemi, in Arkhangelsk and in Tromsø. Subjects covered in the meetings were the content of the new mandate, Barents Interregional Tourism Action Plan, exchange of information related to the current statuses of strategic development of tourism in each country/region, importance of tourism in the region and the preparations of future funding instruments such ENI CBC program. The first steps were taken to promote synergies between other industries. The meetings have been well attended. In addition to the meetings members of the group have commented documents and exchanged ideas via email.

#### *Action Plan*

The Barents Interregional Tourism Action Plan was conducted part of the BART-project. It will help the JWGT support cooperation between the many public and private organizations that have a role to play in Barents tourism industry. In the long-term, it will enable the tourism industry to grow in a sustainable and responsible way across the Barents region. The overall intention of this Barents Interregional Tourism Action Plan is to offer an overview of the state of the tourism industry in this Nordic region. By articulating the views, needs and demands of Barents entrepreneurs, the Action Plan aims to encourage policy makers

in national ministries, government agencies and EU institutions to provide the resources and improve the conditions needed for promoting interregional tourism development. The Plan was presented in the BART Closing Seminar April 17-18 in Rovaniemi.

Singing procedure of the Action Plan was held in the connection of the II International Tourist Forum in Arkhangelsk in June 18-19.

#### *Program Work Preparations*

The JWGT members have put their opinions forward related to the content of the forthcoming program guidelines (ENI and Interreg) so that they would better support the promotion and execution of the mandate and especially the Action Plan.

#### *Traffic Connections*

The JWGT decided to start the implementation of its mandate by influencing preconditions for better accessibility, especially East-West flight traffic connections in the region. Concrete goals were set to execute this task. In 2013 the JWGT commented on the Joint Barents Transport Plan from the tourism point of view and discussions were started with various partners such as Finnish Aviation Strategy steering group, Barents Regional Committee, CSO and Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics.

#### *Importance of Tourism*

In order to raise the status and better communicate the significance of tourism industry in the Barents region, collection of data for Barents tourism fact sheet was launched at the end of the reporting year.

#### *Participation in Barents Meetings*

Regional Chairman Kairi Pääsuke has participated in the CSO meeting and in the Barents Regional Committee. National Chairman Nina Vesterinen has participated in Finland's BEAC chairmanship preparation and Finnish Barents co-ordination meetings.