



THE BARENTS WORKING GROUPS ANNUAL REPORT

Name of the Working Group: **Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT)**

The current Chair and the Chairmanship period: **Monica Lejon, Region Council of Norrbotten, 2018-2019**

1. Priorities of the Chairmanship

Rotation of National Chairmanship

Sweden has taken over the chairmanship and Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation has delegated the chair of the JWGT to the Regional Council of Norrbotten. The ministry support the chair through a person from The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth who is participating in the meetings and in the planning of the meetings. Ms Monica Lejon, Regional Council of Norrbotten (Sweden) has acted as chair of the JWGT in 2018 and John-Steve Linløkken, Director Strategic Marketing, Northern Norway Tourist Board, has acted as co-chair of the group.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region has a great potential to be even more attractive destination for international tourists, 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. It has a great employment effect especially on youth and women. Tourism is very important especially in sparsely populated areas, where it is sometimes the only one bringing income.

The attractive but fragile arctic environment, natural phenomena and cultural diversity are the key factors attracting 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.

The Mandate 2018-2021

The development goals of the mandate are

- stimulating competitiveness of the Barents tourism/visitor sector

- inspiring to innovate more in tourism products, travel concepts and services on offer
- enhancing tourism quality, sustainability, skills and education, and use of digital solutions
- influence to increase better cross border mobility
- increasing sustainable tourism demand by delivering experiences that meet the client's expectations and motivations for travelling.

2. Meetings (meetings held, main topics and outcomes of the meetings)

The Working Group met twice in 2018; First meeting was held in Luleå, 26-27 April, and the second in Riga, on the 13th of November, because of the Baltic Sea tourism forum ongoing 14-15 November and the group members would attend the forum.

Subjects covered in the meetings were as follow: **Rotation of the national chairmanship to Sweden. Current Status for Strategic Development of Tourism in Each Country/Region** with short presentations by each country, discussion on common areas and possible future actions. **Tourism Quality and Sustainability Programmes, Labels and Criteria in the Barents Region.** Developing two informative "one-pagers" that categorize labels and communicates them to customers and companies . **Gastronomic tourism.** Discussions on the meetings about gastronomic tourism development in Russia. Hopefully the discussions will end up in a Kolarctic application for Gastronomic tourism.

The **WG of Transport and logistics (BEATA) has participated in the meetings to clarify how to cooperate.** Both of the groups are working with putting tourism in the Barents Transport plan.

3. Other activities (projects, events, programmes etc.)

Participation in Barents Meetings

Kirkenes Conference: Kairi Pääsuke County Administrative Board of Norrbotten participated in the CSO conference in Kirkenes. CSO in Hemavan: Monica Lejon och Kairi Pääsuke participated in the meeting with Committee of Senior Officials 17 December in Hemavan and informed about the work in the JWGT and the results so far. Monica Lejon also participated in two meetings in Stockholm arranged by Swedish Ministry of foreign affairs, to report on development in the JWGT and to get information about different Barents issues. Participants at the meeting were chairs of the working groups.

4. Results of the year (decisions, new initiatives, improvements)

Contributions to the Barents Transport Plan

In cooperation with the working group on Transport and Logistics (BEATA) the chair has attended meetings with the Swedish Transport agency to increase the implementation of tourism into the Barents Transport plan. The WG on Transport has attended both JWGT meetings to inform about the Barents Transport plan and to get information about the result from the Visit Arctic Europe project(VAE). The outcome of the Interreg project Visit Arctic Europe is very important with a lot of collected data concerning the tourism transports in northern Finland, Sweden and Norway. This data can be used in the Barents transport plan but data from Russia and part of northern regions in Sweden and Finland is missing. Efforts to collect the missing data has started but there is a shortage of time to be able to get

complete data from the Barents region. Hopefully the data from VAE can be used as a start to influence the Barents transport plan with tourism needs and issues.

Tourism Quality and Sustainability Programmes, Labels and Criteria in the Barents Region

The jwgt has decided to produce two informative “one-pagers” that categorize labels and communicates them to customers and companies. The informative brochures are based on the inquiry of tourism quality and sustainability, published by Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment Enterprises and Regional Development Department in Finland.

5. Evaluation of the work (What went well, what needs improvement)

Workshop for a new action plan

During the meeting in Riga the work to revise the actionplan started with the help of an extern consultant.

Planned activities for 2019

- The produce and communicating of two “one-pagers” of Eco labels information
- Meetings with other WG's
- Following the project VAE II
- Following the results of Kolarctic programme
- Meetings concerning tourism in the Barents Transport plan
- Making an updated action plan for the jwgt
- Meeting 11-12 June in Kiruna with study visits