

Minutes for the Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Tourism of the Barents Euro Arctic Council

Date: November 4-5, 2019

Venue: Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket)

Address: Västgötagatan 5, Stockholm

Chair: Monica Lejon, County Council of Norrbotten

Minutes: Erika Rosander, Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth

Time: Monday Nov 4 12.00 – 17.00 + dinner at 18.00, Tuesday Nov 5 9.00 – 11.30, including lunch both days.

Participants:

Monica Lejon, Regional Council of Norrbotten (SE)

Erika Rosander, Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (SE)

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

Tuomo Tahvanainen, Kainuun Etu (FI)

Andrey Dubovtsev, Agricultural Cooperative Tundra (RU)

Annelie Mannertorn, Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation (SE) (item 5)

1. Opening of the meeting November 4

Chair Monica Lejon opened the meeting with a warm welcome to Sweden. Minutes decided to be written by Erika Rosander.

Participants: Monica Lejon noted that the JWGT lacks participation from Norway. Since John Steve Linlökken left the group Norway has not been present. She also noted that Thomas Hallberg, Head of the International Barents secretariat, had been prevented from participation, and that Konstantin Baranov (RU) was absent. Also, Linda Nöremark from the Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation had been prevented from participation.

The minutes from last meeting in Kiruna in June 10-12 was approved. The agenda was approved.

2. Introduction and welcome

As a start, the meeting took part of two recently produced short films about the Barents co-operation – one short film about the JWGT's work, that was recorded during the meeting in Kiruna, and the Swedish chairmanship film that was released in October and gives a short overview of what has been achieved during the chairmanship and in the different working groups.

Erika Rosander welcomed everyone to Stockholm and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. She informed about the Agency's assignments and the current status of the national work on tourism in Sweden, including the ongoing work with a national tourism strategy. She informed briefly about the working process from the governmental inquiry on tourism which was initiated three years ago, up until today. The national strategy, which is expected to have a focus on sustainability, is supposed to be launched by the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation in the end of the year.

Decision: To be noted for information.

3. The State of Play from countries

Each participant shared some news from their region/country:

Kainuu: Tuomo informed about the growing tourism sector in Kainuu and the spirit of Arctic Lakeland Kainuu. The Finnish identity is very strong in Kainuu, which offers a good possibility for tourism.

He informed about the Sustainable Travel Finland Program where Wild Taiga has been selected as one of the pioneers in the 7-step program. Visit Finland owns the national working process in the program

He also informed about the educational ambitions in the Service Design Master's Degree Programme (Pama), which aims at increasing the competitiveness of the companies in the northern Finland. The 2-year programme is developing individual learning paths and models and includes 20 students' groups whereof 20 students in Kajani.

Finland, national level: Hanna-Mari informed about the tourism numbers from September, with a +9% growth in the foreign overnights and a 2% growth in domestic overnights.

The national tourism strategy will be published in two weeks. Sustainability will be strongly highlighted, as will digitalization and year-round tourism. The budget for tourism will be increased by 5 million EUR/year, mainly to Visit Finland.

Murmansk/Agricultural Cooperative Tundra : Andrey informed about the Murmansk region having a new governor, who supports tourism. A ministry for tourism has been established, replacing the former tourism committee. The regional strategy includes closing a coal mine and invest in tourism infrastructure. The aim is to stop people moving from the north and creating new jobs. A possibility for individual entrepreneurs to search for funding has

been put in place, but unfortunately the initiative, which is very limited, does not work very well. Young people prefer to work individually.

Decision: To be noted for information.

4. Report from the Ministerial Meeting of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council

In the absence of Thomas Hallberg, Monica Lejon reported shortly about the Ministerial Meeting of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. She noted that the meeting was much about formalities regarding the shift of the chairmanship, as well as focus on youth. The conference EU Arctic Forum which was organized back-to-back to the ministerial meeting had focus on sustainability and presented a number of high-level speakers.

Decision: To be noted for information.

5. Action plan for JWGT - Progress report

The action plan and progress made was discussed.

It was noted that the plan does not include information about the photo competition Discover Barents that was decided in the Russian chairmanship and implemented in the Kainuu chairmanship. Further final notes from the Swedish JWGT chairmanship should be complemented with this.

Andrey informed about ongoing work in Arctic gastronomy and local food in the Murmansk region. The work includes the Sami cuisine, with a Sami restaurant in Murmansk, and a festival in Teriberka (13-14 July 2019).

Ways to exchange best practices and disseminate information was discussed. Finland mentioned that information regarding the JWGT is spread to a network for tourism in different Ministries as well as mentioned in the Finnish tourism strategy.

Regarding cross-border obstacles, it was noted that the possibilities regarding electronic visas will be developed further, which is positive.

The meeting thanked Sweden for a well-structured action plan and a systematic work and wanted some points to be taken further into the Norwegian chairmanship:

Decision: The importance of co-operation between working groups should be communicated to the following chairmanship, as should information about photo competition Discover Barents.

6. Results from cooperation with Working Group on Transport

Monica showed the Joint Barents Transport Plan (JBTP), which is also found on the Barents web:

https://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/JBTP2019_MAIN_REPORT_190910.pdf
now part of the plan

Tourism is now an integrated part of the plan, and this would not have been the case without the work in the JWGT and the co-operation established between the transport plan process, the JGWT and the project Visit Arctic Europe. This must be regarded as a substantial progress.

Annelie Mannertorn, chair of BEATA during the Swedish chairmanship, informed about JBTP and the process. The co-operation on transports originally started in 1998 with the aim to strengthen co-operation in order to create an efficient transport system in the Barents region that integrates the different means of transport.

The plans status is that *it is a draft*, not an agreement. It works as voluntary input for the governments and is also used as a tool for agencies and other experts. The focus in the JBTP is on freights, but it also includes background information and recommendations for passenger and tourism transports. Annelie stressed that working together is often the key in developing the transport system, rather than building new infrastructure.

The first draft plan was 2013 by Norway, the second by Russia 2016, and now, the third by Sweden 2019. Regarding this latest plan and tourism input, Russia must be highlighted, due to its ambitious work, finding “hotspots” regarding tourism, facts and statistics.

In the coming years Norway has planned to highlight some points in the plan, and it is of course possible for the JWGT to keep the dialogue and bring forward key questions regarding the tourism transport system.

Decision: To be noted for information.

7. Networking dinner kl 18.00 (Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth)

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

The group discussed how should to communicate the leaflet. Monica had brought a number of printed copies for everyone to spread, and the leaflet is

also available on the web and as a PDF.

Decision: It was decided that it is everyone's responsibility to spread and inform about the leaflet in networks and web sites. One major group to contact is tourism boards who are in contact with both the enterprises in the Barents region and have access to visitor's information. Russia will have the leaflet translated and Monica will help with contact information to the consultants who has the original file.

9. Tourism in the EU during the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Hanna-Mari informed about how tourism will be handled during the Finnish EU presidency; Ensuring data-driven tourism economy , enabling the digital innovation uptake in the tourism sector and investing in reskilling and upskilling tourism workforce for digital Europe.

Decision: For information only.

10. Norway Chairmanship

The group discussed how to pass on and continue the work of JWGT during the Norwegian chairmanship. From the secretariat the recommendation is to write a note and send to the responsible national and regional agencies in Norway, highlighting the groups work, the action plan, and possibilities for further work.

Decision: Monica will develop a note to send to the Norwegian chairmanship with recommendations from the Swedish chairmanship in the JWGT. The note will be sent to the group for consultancy and thereafter distributed from Monica to the relevant Norwegian agencies.

11. Other matters

No other matters were brought forward.

12. Date and place of the next meeting

No meeting date was set, but the group look forward to a possible invitation from Norway.

13. Summary and close

14. Lunch