


Result report
The Barents Youth Cooperation
Office
2002-2009



Our objective:

To ensure a well functioning multilateral cooperation in the youth field, that contributes to an improved situation for young people in the Barents Region, as well as a sustainable development of the region.

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Background

The cooperation in the Barents Region is based on the principles drawn up in the Kirkenes Declaration of 11th January 1993. Youth policy was included in the work of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Working Group on Youth Policy (WGYP) was established in 1999 – 10 years ago.

The ministers responsible for youth policy met in Tromsø, Norway, on 14-16 May 2001, to discuss and to adopt a plan of action with the purpose to promote increased cooperation in the youth field in the Barents Region.

In the plan of action it is stated that young people are an important resource in the development of the region. In implementing the principles of the plan of action, the ministers also presented some priorities such as development of exchanges and contact between local youth groups and associations based on multilateral cooperation and development of a variety of local youth initiatives and projects based on the interests of the young people themselves.

One of the proposals was also to ensure that mechanisms are established for giving information and guidance to youth groups and networks in developing multilateral youth projects and activities, and in taking advantage of existing national and international funds available for support to such projects and activities.

To implement the plan of action the Barents Youth Cooperation Office (BYCO) was established in Murmansk in November 2002.

The overall objective for the establishment of the office is:
to ensure a well functioning multilateral cooperation in the youth field, that contributes to an improved situation for young people in the Barents Region, as well as a sustainable development of the region.

The office is financed by the ministries responsible for youth affairs in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia.

Coordinators for youth cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region are appointed by the Barents Euro-Arctic Working Group on Youth Policy. These coordinators provide information and guidance for youth groups, organisations and networks regarding:

- national and international resources for funding of projects,
- education in project planning for the youth groups,
- implementation and follow-up of the work-plan,
- possible cooperation partners for projects, nationally and internationally,
- help to plan and arrange youth projects and meetings in the Barents Region.

BYCO's past achievements and future opportunities

The Barents Youth Cooperation Office has during its 7 years of its existence become a vital factor for the youth cooperation in the Barents region. BYCO aims at being a recourse centre for developing of new project ideas, a competence and support centre for all young people in the Barents Region.

In 7 years BYCO has facilitated 204 international Barents youth projects, with participation of more than 5 000 young people. Projects embrace a wide range of fields and cross-sectorial topics and vary from small and concrete school projects to several years long projects with several hundreds people involved. Projects in such fields as culture, youth policy development, health and social issues, education, environment, entrepreneurship, sport, etc. are in great demand by the young people.

Young people, that took part in the projects supported by BYCO, have now "grown up" and moved on to positions in regional and local administrations and other state bodies, educational institutions, international businesses or started their companies.

The staff of the Barents Youth Cooperation Office is available for all kinds of requests concerning youth projects in the BEAR and is eager to contribute with our knowledge and expertise. This competence we try to pass on through web sites, publications and reports and through lectures and presentations.

In 2007 an evaluation of the work of BYCO was made by an independent expert, professor Julia Zubok of the Dept. for Sociology of Youth, Institute of Socio-Political Research, Russian Academy of Sciences. In the research the importance of support of youth initiatives and giving equal opportunities to the youth with various backgrounds for the development of society was underlined. Experts involved in the research showed satisfaction with the results of BYCOs activities and desire for continued work in the future.

The role of BYCO has also been mentioned in the Declaration of Barents Euro-Arctic Conference of Ministers responsible for youth policy (Murmansk, 23 – 24 September 2009): "The Conference welcomed the cooperation in the field of youth policy carried out by the Barents Youth Cooperation Office. The BYCO has played an important role in facilitating youth exchange and youth cooperation projects in the region."

After the establishment of BYCO in 2002 there have been noticed a considerable growth in the number of youth projects in the region, which is continuing to increase. The important role BYCO plays in facilitating and improving youth cooperation in the Barents Region is expressed by many the actors involved, such as central, regional and local authorities, international organisations and, youth NGOs.)

BYCO has furthermore become a meeting point for youth groups and authorities, from different countries seeking for project partners in Russia and abroad. BYCO is acknowledged as a successful mechanism for achieving the goals stated in the plan of action.

Main principles in BYCOs work are giving the initiative to young people and encouraging them to fulfil their project. Projects should be done by young people and not for young people. The work of BYCO has a very high degree of cost-efficiency and using limited resources in a sensible and efficient way.

Already now BYCO is involved in preparation and supports a number of projects for the coming year. Among them there are projects taking place for the first time, but having good preconditions for becoming successful and traditional projects in the future. Here we can mention such projects as "The Reggae Rock and Rights Tour", "Sides of identity: Barents, Youth and Rock'n'Roll", "Barents Youth Film Festival", "Hyperborea 2010", etc.

It is absolutely sure that the creative potential of young people and their interest in international cooperation will give us a lot more new innovative projects in the future.

In the future it is important to work out a new information strategy for BYCO that would allow to reach even more young people, to intensify the usage of the website, to find a specialisation for it that would make it different from other existing websites. New ways of broadening and strengthening work, giving more resources to gain leverage effect should be investigated.

The scope of BYCOs work in the future a huge growth potential. Young people are the most important "renewable" resource the countries have. New projects ideas need support and assistants of highly qualified personnel. There is still a great need for such mechanism in the region because the interest for international projects and international activity of the youth groups are growing and they will need expertise, counselling and assistance in finding sources of financing, making applications, contacting local and regional authorities, taking care of practical issues and project planning and logistics. Young people have a lot of ideas and desire to cooperate internationally but many youth projects would not be carried out just because it is difficult for them to find partners abroad, to find financing institution and make applications in the right way, to handle visa and transport issues, to maintain contacts with each other.

There are several hundreds young people in the region, so to reach the goals of the national policies, as well as the goal of improving the life of young people, economic growth, building an innovative society in the region it is vital that young people stay and work in the region. For that it is vital that to join efforts and draw synergy from work and investments of the actors, working with the young people, by exchange of information, coordination and harmonising the activities. BYCO has been doing it since its establishment and intends to do so in the future.

Support of youth initiatives

Support of youth initiatives is the main direction of our work. Support and facilitation of initiatives coming from the young people is crucial for functioning of innovation and sustainable social development. Each year BYCO support in average 30 youth initiatives, about 60 % of them are multilateral, involving 3 or more countries of the Barents region.

Initiatives of young people reflect their biggest fields of interest. They can be roughly divided into several areas: culture, youth policy and development of youth NGOs, environment, education, youth entrepreneurship, health and social issues, sport, and there is a number of cross-sectoral projects. Special attention is also paid to the initiatives of and for indigenous peoples of the region.

With the support of BYCO many projects that started as local youth initiatives have developed into traditional annual events, widely known in the whole Barents region. For example, here can be mentioned such projects as "Rajarock" (a project for young rock musicians from small towns of the region), Barents Sea Youth Conference (a conference for students of energy related university faculties), Barents Gathering (a project for schools pupils), etc.

Below we would like to mention just some of the projects in different fields - to give you a feeling of the variety of youth initiatives supported in the region.

Culture

Youth Culture Train has grown from a local initiative to an annual youth culture event attracting participants from all the countries of the Barents Region. The objective of the event is to prevent drug and toxic addictions and to promote healthy life style among the youth of the Barents region. The project aims at offering the youth music, theater and other sorts of creativity as an alternative to drug abuse. Each year about 50 participants from Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway have shows in different cities in Finland (Inari, Rovaniemi, Ranua, Salla) and Russia (Murmansk, Apatity) during 6 days to attract as many people as possible. The project has taken place in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006. Trassa – the biggest regional festival of young culture held in Murmansk region has been developed from this project.

Golden Cloudberry dance festival takes place every other year in Ranua (Finland), with support of BYCO since 2004. The theme of the festival was traditional folk dance and music. Groups from different countries perform and have workshops in folk dances and culture.

Rajarock – youth rock festival that has been held almost every year since 1989. The aim of this traditional annual festival is to gather together young rockplayers to one common happening to play in same concerts and to learn something new. The event is meant for young players between the age 14 years up to about 18 –years. The theme of this whole event is work against drug and alcohol addiction among young people.

Youth policy and development of youth NGOs

Barents Youth Expo 2004, which was held in Murmansk and organized with assistance from the office. The objective of the expo was to strengthen and improve cooperation between youth NGOs, youth workers and youth structures and to develop youth initiatives in the Barents region. It was the first EXPO of youth NGO's and youth workers of the Barents region. The aim was furthermore to establish a network of youth organizations in the Barents region, to stimulate international youth projects, to attract attention of the public to the activities of youth organizations of the region.

Barents Youth Conference 2005 The target group of the conference was regional and central youth authorities of the Barents region countries, as well as youth NGOs and regional youth councils. There were given lectures by youth researchers from different countries. Due to the year of indigenous people special attention was given to indigenous youths in the Barents region. Group work resulted in suggestions for concrete actions for improving and developing the youth cooperation and the youth policy in the Barents region.

"Youth in the Barents Region - a lottery win or bad luck?". Seminar that was held in Rovaniemi during 2 years of the Finnish chaimenship in the WGYP (2006 and 2007). There was a wide range of topics and working methods: from a scientific conference during the first year to an interactive process during the second. Key issues of the seminar: 1. Active young citizenship 2. Social empowerment 3. Young people's living conditions 4. Promotion of mobility. .

Barents Youth Conference 2006 .Objective was to give a chance to youths from all the counties of the Barents Region to meet and discuss their interests for cooperation and give project ideas and send a message to the authorities. This was an interactive conference, through the bottleneck system the results of brain storming of participants were shaped into suggestions for more than 60 concrete projects and some political messages to the authorities.

Yeah Right! Barents Youth Seminar on human rights (2008) was arranged of and for young active and interested youths in the Barents region aged between 18 and 25 and will become an arena where the young people meet over cultural and geographical borders to discuss human rights seen from a youth perspective.

"Barents Euro-Arctic Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth policy" that took place in Murmansk, Russia, 23-25 September 2009. The aim of the conference was that representatives of regional and national youth authorities, youth researchers, together with representatives of national youth council, Barents Regional Youth Council, representatives of youth organizations from all 13 counties of the Barents region, as well as representatives of indigenous youth should meet together and work out common policy on how to make Barents region attractive for young people and how to use young people as a resource

and a driving force of the social and economical development of the region. The Conference started with a Youth Event for the youth representatives 23 September, and the results of the event were presented to the officials, youth workers and scientists at the Barents Euro-Arctic Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth policy 24 September.

Education

During the years of work close cooperation with educational institutions on different levels (schools, colleges, universities) has been established in the whole region. It is very important to use their resources to reach the young people and to provide them with the information about projects and possibilities.

Barents Builders. The aim of the project is to build up a group of youngsters (24 persons) who have gone through specialized project management education and will be able to implement projects and be project leaders. The education will take place via 4 study sessions. At the second stage of the project is the participants will plan, implement and evaluate one of their projects, and also become resource persons for 5-10 other youth from their home town.

Barents Sea Youth Conference is an event for students currently taking their education in petroleum-related studies. The conference focuses on expertise, career opportunities and networking. The high Arctic projects create an experimentation and learning environment for both governments and energy companies, together with other petroleum-related industries and the research community. It marks a change in our way of thinking about opportunities and development activities in the Arctic. One of our main challenges is a lack of qualified expertise within petroleum-related professions. The conference offers High-profile speakers from the petroleum industry, knowledge about future petroleum technologies, an extended tour of the Melkøya LNG facility in Hammerfest, constructive discussion with the petroleum industry, important contacts for future career opportunities and network of students from the entire Barents Region.

Mathematics project the project has been organized in two parts and took place in two years (2007 and 2009) with the main aim to attract youths to studying applied mathematics, to show the practical use of theory.

Environment

Fenology of the Northern Calotte (2007) .Objective was to attract youths to study environmental issues, observe nature. It was a 3-day seminar for school children interested in environmental issues and ecology, participants learned about nature of the region, made water and soil analyses, observed plants and animals of the region. Teachers exchanged experiences of teaching nature related subjects and making children interested in them.

Environmental Youth Conference_for activists of environmental and political youth organizations. Youths from the Barents countries will gather to discuss what they want the politicians to do to protect the environment in order to make it a good future for the young generation to live in the North. Such problems as oil and gas activity, nuclear waste, loss of biodiversity, pirate fishing and the effects of changing climate will be discussed during the conference

North Calotte Youth Summit_gathered together for 2 days young people from various environmental organizations of Russia (Murmansk region), Sweden, Norway and Finland and gave them a opportunity to learn more about environmental threats and global warming, as well as to discuss environmental problems acute for the young people and to communicate with the leading politicians of the region, to discuss environmental issues in the North Calotte, especially the threat of global warming, and to prepare a message for the The UN summit in Copenhagen November 2009.

Jokkmokk winter conference was held for several years already and the intention is to continue cooperation in the future. The objective is to discuss environmental challenges in the north, with special focus on climate change. This is an environmental conference about climate change, with inspiring lectures and group work, in the end of the conference participants have an opportunity meet top politicians from Sweden, Finland, Norway and Canada and give them their message and discuss climate change.

Health and social issues

In the sphere of health and promoting healthy life style for the youth it is worth mentioning is projects as “**Murmansk and Rovaniemi – together against drugs**” (Russian-Finnish seminars about the problem of drug abuse among the youths in order to establish friendly connections between volunteers of two countries, exchange of experience of work under the sold preventive programs, joint training to methods of antinarcotics work) ,

“**AIDS Alarm in North West Russia**” (creating a documentary about the AIDS situation in North West Russia, made by youth and for youth, launched at the Mandela concert in Tromso and which will be used at AIDS prophylaxis lectures at schools).

Youth entrepreneurship

Innovation circle – the main aim of the project was strengthening influence of youth in development of local society, transnational promotion of institution building, strengthening the capacity for spatial development activities. The project focused on how young people can influence the local and regional development. The aim was to attract and engage the younger generation in democratic processes, being aware that they are an important resource of new ideas and energy. The project included training programs to provide knowledge and skill for regional development, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Young Entrepreneurs in the Barents region. The main objective was to improve youth entrepreneurship in the Barents, to increase knowledge of international business, to give young entrepreneurs special education and contacts. The primary aim of the project was to give young entrepreneurs increased opportunities for international business development. This was to be achieved through strengthening contacts between young entrepreneurs and businessmen, and improving knowledge of cultural differences within the Barents Region.

Barents Trade Fair (2006) - a trade fair for student companies from upper secondary schools (16-20 years old). During 2 days young entrepreneurs from the Barents region and Finnmark had the possibility to present their companies, exchange experiences with the other companies and compete. The main objective was to strengthen youth cooperation in the sphere of entrepreneurship, to exchange ideas and experiences.

Workshop for young sami entrepreneurs. Main goal was to expand the network of business contacts, to have inspiring lectures and discussions, to develop a common marketing strategy for young sami entrepreneurs in the region.

Youth entrepreneurship in tourism. The seminar will brought together representatives of regional authorities from the Nordic Countries and North-West Russia, business structures, youth representatives, international organizations and media institutions. The seminar focused on creative ways of regional tourism development and youth and media roles in this process as well as on opportunities of cooperation between the Nordic Countries and the Barents region. During the seminar the participants were be able to establish new contacts and develop new business ideas together with their colleagues.

Other fields

Yukigassen sports festival has become a traditional event both in Murmansk and in Vardo. The main goal is to promote healthy life style and the spirit of the fair play, to establish stronger contacts between the youth of Vardø and Murmansk. Yukigassen is a traditional Japanese snowball fight, very popular in Northern Norway and Finland. The programme of the festival also included some cultural performances and events.

Murmansk 2016 – Capital of the Arctic. The main idea was to investigate and to propose some ideas of making Murmansk a better place to live – to make it the capital of the Arctic by 2016. Youths led by professional architects explored possibilities and made concrete suggestions on how to make Murmansk a better place, suggestions included renovating the old houses, taking care of the harbor area, making some pedestrian streets and opening more cafes.

Breaking Stereotypes .The main goal of the project was to create conditions for a common informational space where people from two countries could get a true and objective information about each other, not based on false stereotypes and further spreading of this informational space.

Counselling and education

BYCO provides counseling and guidance for youth groups interested in international cooperation and provides education in such issues as project planning and project management, as well as information and counseling on possible sources for financing of youth projects and application writing. Assistance in finding possible project partners or participants is also among the daily work of BYCO. In some projects it is even involved in such practical matters as visas, hotel and conference arrangements, and transportation. In average about 40 % of working time of BYCO is devoted to counseling.

The average percentage of successfully implemented projects that have been organized after received consultation can be roughly estimated as 30 %. This shows have huge interest for cooperation and project work there is in the region, and of course not all projects can be financed with the existing financial resources, only the best ones are selected. But even if the project does not get any grant financing, youth organizations gain a lot of experience and new knowledge by getting information of how to start a project, how to work with the partners, how to make budgets and apply for financing, and so on. As international cooperation grows, they will surely be able to benefit from this knowledge in the future and will spread it among their counterparts, that would create a multiplying effect.

Counseling concerning studies abroad and possibilities for getting grants for long term studies or short summer courses provided by BYCO is also in great demand by the youths and their parents. The office also gets enquiries about possibilities to go on a traineeship or voluntary service to the Nordic countries or Europe. Now we are researching the opportunities of getting an EVS volunteer for BYCO.

Information and networking

The staff is eager to participate in regional youth forums where BYCO provides the information about cooperation possibilities, but also creates a wider contact network of youth organizations. Office representative travels around the Barents region, meeting both youth authorities and youth organizations, spreading the information about cooperation and funding possibilities and encouraging them to international cooperation.

We actively participate in various conferences and forums organized for example by such organizations as the Council of Europe, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, etc. We consider this part of work very important because the Office representative not only plays a role of experts, providing information about youth cooperation in the BEAR, but also gets new contacts, finds potential project partners and supports their projects.

BYCO also works with mass media – mostly local and regional channels, newspapers, radio stations.

Besides project support the daily work of the Office includes maintenance of the web-site www.byco.ru, where the news from the regions and various youth projects as well as information about coming projects is published. One can also find there useful information about project finding and links to funding organizations and youth organizations of the Barents region. Information support also includes constant update of information concerning sources of project funding for international youth projects.

For example, in 2009 there has been 36 entries published at the website. The average amount of unique visitors per month is about 900, the greater part of the visitors is from North-West Russia (ca 70 %), and the Nordic countries (ca 28 %), the rest is from other countries.

The intention for future is to further develop the web site with news, information about the coming events, articles on advice for project planning and implementation, requirements of financing institutions, and whatever else in demand.

In the future it is important to work out a new information strategy for BYCO that would allow to reach even more young people, to intensify the usage of the website, to find a specialisation for it that would make it different from other existing websites.

Besides there have been published two brochures on the issues the belong to the frequently asked questions: "Sources of financing of international youth projects in the Barents region" and "Visa matters", a book about requirements for receiving a visa to Russia. The books were in great demand by the young people and now we are working on a second updated edition of the book about the sources of financing and advice on project management.

Involved actors

During the years BYCO has developed an extensive contact and cooperation network with national, regional and local authorities of Russia, Norway, Sweden and Finland. BYCO is closely cooperating with international structures such as the International Barents Secretariat, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Youth Committee, Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs , the Council of Europe.

After the establishment of the International Barents Secretariat good contact and working relations have been established with the new organization.

In order to obtain synergy and create added value from the activities, BYCO has close cooperation with the regional structures responsible for youth issues, such as the Barents Regional Working Group on Youth Issues, consisting of representatives of regional youth authorities from Murmansk and Archangelsk regions (Russia), Finnmark and Troms (Norway), Västerbotten (Sweden) and Oulu (Finland). BYCO's staff takes part in the meetings and serves as a recourse of aid and expertise for the WGYI.

BYCO has as well developed good working relations with regional administrative boards in Norrbotten and Västerbotten in Sweden, Finnmark and Troms in Norway, Murmansk, Karelia, Komi, Arhangelsk and Nenets in Russia and Lappland and Kainuu in Finland, as well as with local youth authorities in all the Barents regions.

Over the passed years a broad network of youth NGOs from all regions of the Barents region and outside the Barents Region has been established. BYCO is also actively participating in various meetings and seminars to provide information about youth activities and possibilities of their financing in the Barents Region.

BYCO has also been involved and is actively supporting a new youth network – the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC). This is a council consisting of 14 youth representatives (1 from each region + 1 indigenous representative), which was created in 2004. The tasks of the council are: to strengthen the youth cooperation in the Barents region, to influence regional authorities in questions concerning youths and their future in the Barents region, to empower young people to actively participate in the shaping of the Barents region and the society in which they live. The council meets 2 times a year to discuss youth activities in the Barents region, to inform other representatives about the news from their regions and to plan and arrange a big youth event every year.

Key figures

Diagram 1. Number of projects in various fields

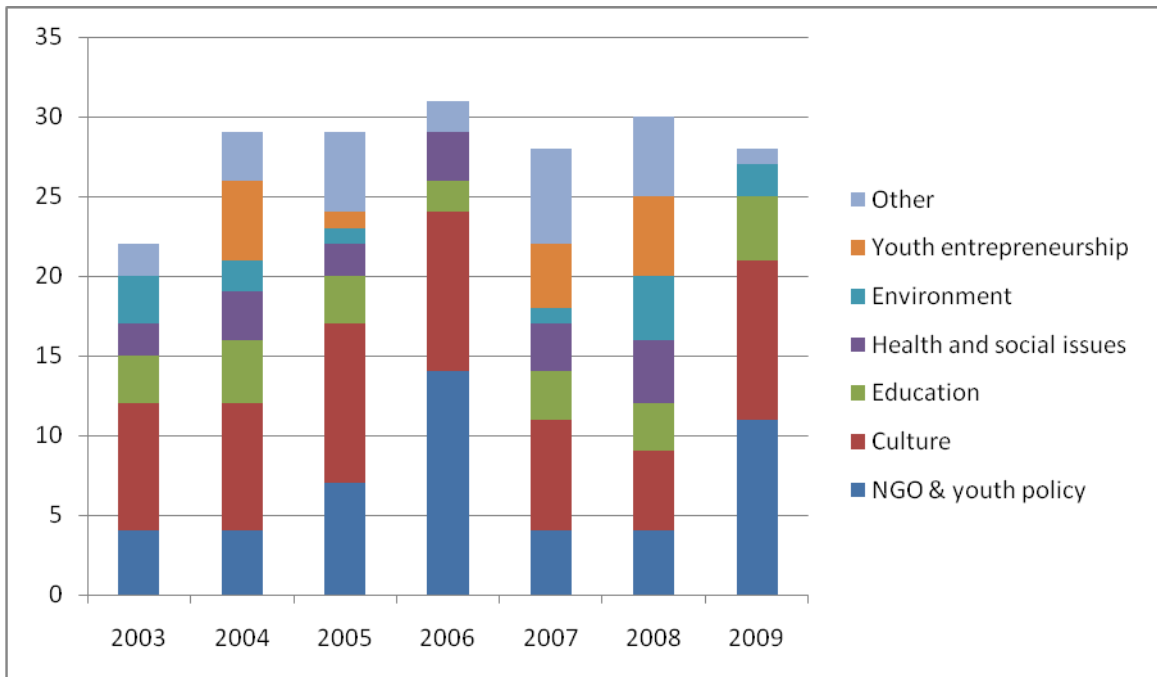


Diagram 2. Correlation of multilateral and bilateral projects

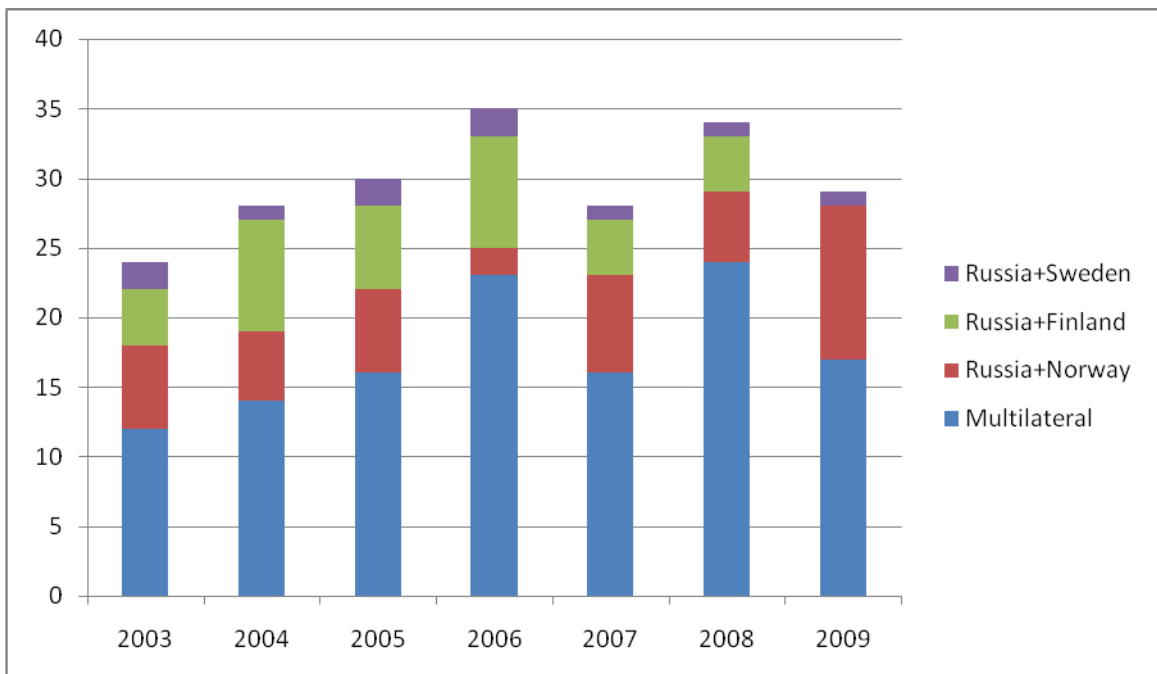


Diagram 3. Correlation between successfully completed, cancelled and on-going projects.

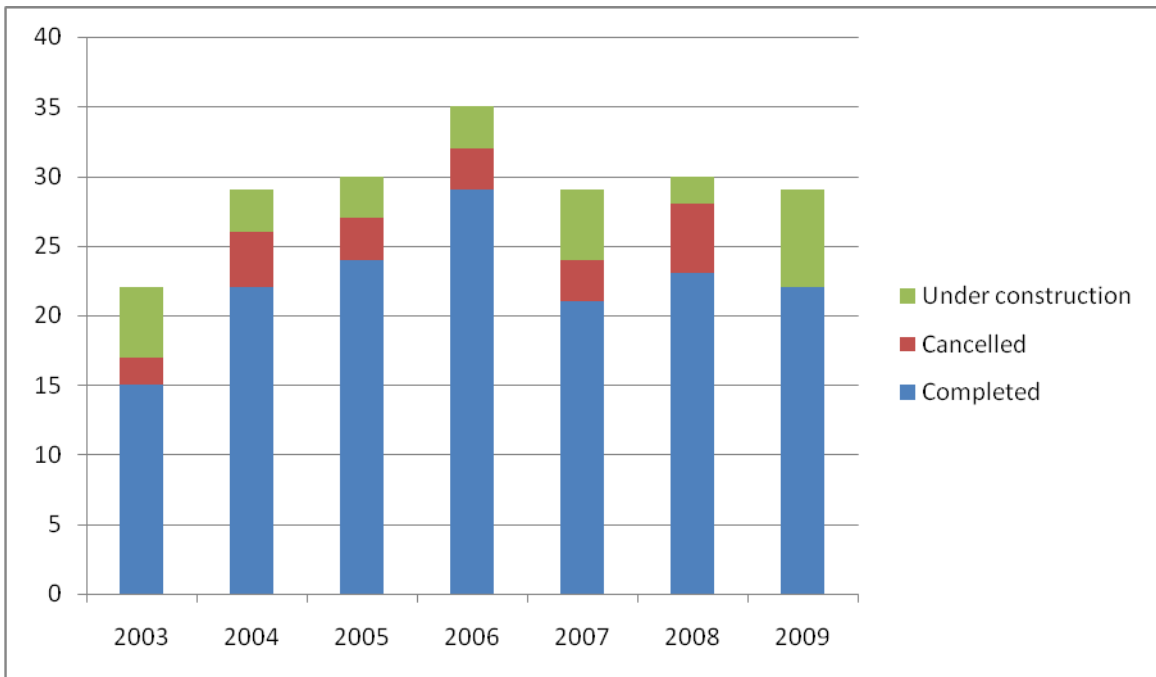


Diagram 4. National distribution of the participants of youth projects supported by BYCO.

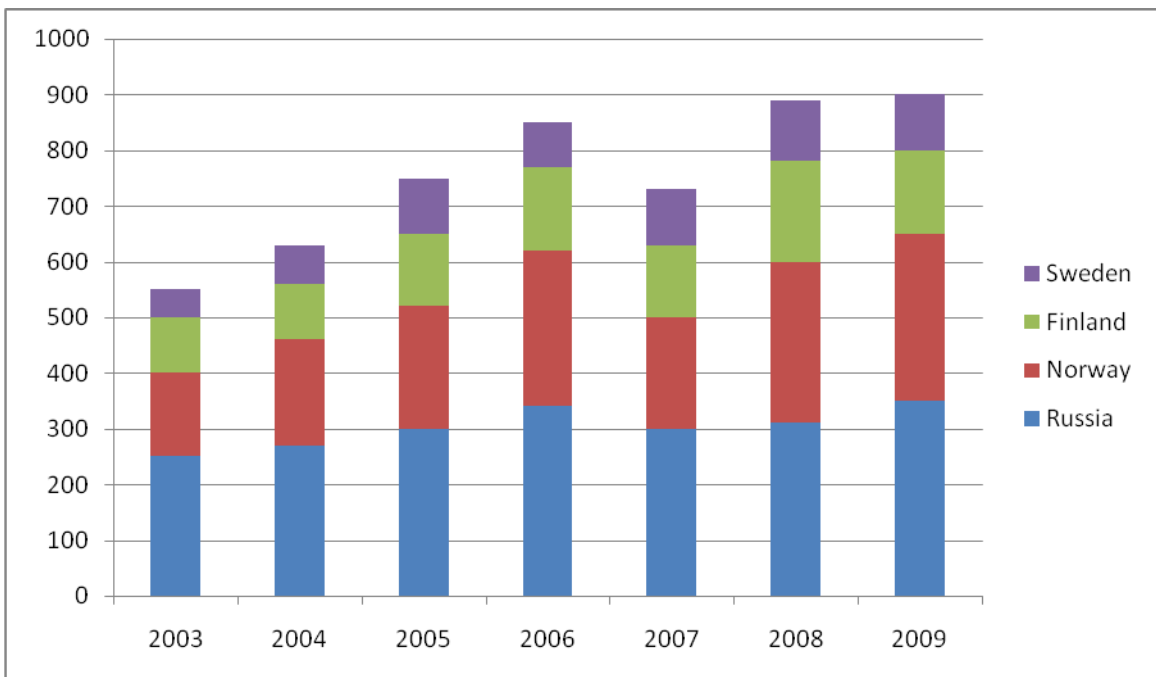


Diagram 5. Approximate distribution of working time on various types of work.

