

# Creative Barents

Strategy of the Barents Joint Working Group  
on Culture (JWGC) 2019–2023



## Introduction

Cooperation in the field of culture in the Barents region started officially in 1993, when the Ministers of Culture convened for the first time in Kirkenes. The regional Barents cooperation was initiated in 1993 simultaneously with the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) when the Foreign Ministers signed the Kirkenes Declaration on 11 January 1993. The regional representatives signed, together with the indigenous peoples' representative, a cooperation protocol that brought the Regional Council into existence. A new Kirkenes Declaration was issued on 3 June 2013 at a Prime Ministers' meeting of the Barents Member States. It reaffirmed the commitment to the principles of the first one, took stock of accomplishments in the Barents cooperation, and considered its outlook.

The Barents regional cooperation consists of 14 members. Up until 2007, cultural cooperation in the Barents region was promoted and enhanced solely by the regions. In 2007, however, the regional Working Group was transformed into a Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC) of the BEAC and the BRC. Over the past twenty-five years, the cultural sector has been one of the most prominent and active sectors in the Barents cooperation.

The Barents cultural cooperation has enabled public authorities at national and regional levels to establish meeting places and common arenas for project development, information exchange and knowledge building. It has also helped to create personal contacts and networks throughout the region. This, in turn, has been instrumental for many projects in the different fields of art and culture.

The Strategy has been derived from the experiences gained in the implementation of the previous programmes “Voices in the Barents Region”, “New Winds of the Barents Region”, “New Horizons in the Barents Region” and “Cultural Cooperation in the Barents Region”. The Strategy also considers other reference documents accounted for in the next chapter.

The Strategy takes into account wide possibilities to enhance cultural policy dialogue and practical cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC), the Senior Officials Group on Culture (SOGC) of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) as well as with the relevant EU structures such as Creative Europe: the support programme for Europe's cultural and creative sector, and the ENI Cross-Border Cooperation programmes. With this approach, the JWGC wants to strengthen the impact of regional interaction by actively taking part in cooperation between the different processes and actors.

## Reference documents

### The Barents Programme 2019–2023

According to the Barents Programme 2019–2023, adopted by the Barents Regional Council 24 May 2018, the Barents region has a strong potential and opportunities for better and more effective cooperation, basing its potential on, amongst other things, a rich culture and a long tradition of mutual cooperation. **The overall objective of the Barents Programme is to generate social and economic growth through a knowledge-driven economy and the sustainable development of the region’s natural and human resources.**

Amongst the specific goals set out in the Barents Programme, one finds:

- To continue to create and promote the positive and attractive “Barents identity” within and outside the region taking into account our diversity.
- To promote youth cooperation as a key element of the future development of the Barents cooperation.
- To consolidate and further develop the cultural ties between the peoples of the region.
- To contribute to development that takes into consideration the interests of the indigenous peoples including their participation.
- To encourage cultural creativity and innovation for the wellbeing of people and economic development.

One of the four prioritised areas by the Barents Regional Council 2019–2023 is cultural, people-to-people and youth related cooperation. An analysis made of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Barents region puts forward that one strength is the rich and diverse cultural heritage, rich culture and arts, and amongst the opportunities one finds potential to develop culture life and events as well as the potential to develop the Barents region jointly as an attractive nature and cultural heritage tourism destination.

As prioritised tasks, the Barents Programme states that the cultural dimension is to be emphasised and that active work will be carried out for the development of international cultural cooperation. Contribution is given to strengthening partnerships between cultural institutions and facilitating exchanges, as well as creating additional concrete ways of cooperation and promotion of the Barents region by means of art and culture.

## Others

In the Joint Statement of the Ministers of Culture of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Member-States from their meeting in Moscow in November 2016, it is stated that regional cultural cooperation helps to promote intercultural communications, people-to-people contacts and that it provides access to the arts, culture and cultural heritage across borders. The participants expressed their readiness to contribute to further prosperity of the Barents region, to support the efforts aimed at enhancing cultural cooperation, to expand cultural exchanges with a view to strengthening mutual understanding and good-neighbourliness, and to promote a deeper appreciation of the unique social and cultural fabric of the Barents region.

In the Joint Declaration made after the XVI Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in Arkhangelsk, 18-19 October 2017, it is stated that the Council acknowledges the value of a strong and dynamic cultural life and its importance for the sustainable development of the Barents region. The Council also acknowledges the potential of cultural cooperation in promoting a Barents identity characterised by openness and diversity.

In the Resolution of the 8<sup>th</sup> Barents Parliamentary Conference in Naryan-Mar, June 8, 2017, the parliamentarians of state-members of the Conference agreed to acknowledge the central role of cultural cooperation in promoting the Barents identity and contacts between civil society and cultural institutions.

## Conclusion

The frequent highlighting of the importance of cultural cooperation in the reference documents quoted above, further strengthens the conviction of the JWGC that culture and creativity are at the very heart of the Barents cooperation. It is an important task for the JWGC to facilitate the implementation of the visions, objectives and goals stated by stakeholders on different levels in the Barents region.

The contribution of the cultural field to the overall objective of the Barents Programme and other visions found in the reference documents can be reached through continuous, interdisciplinary efforts in the Barents region to extend culture as an integral element of society, cultural diversity and the environment as well as socially and economically sustainable development.

## **Mission**

The overarching mission of the JWGC is to advocate for and promote the role of culture and cultural policies in meeting the overall objective of the Barents Programme on social and economic growth through a knowledge driven economy and the sustainable development of the region's natural and human resources.

## Thematic priorities and objectives of the Barents cultural cooperation 2019–2023

### **Culture and sustainable development**

The Barents region is undergoing various internal and external changes. It is possible to predict that ecological (climate change), cultural, social and economic changes pose challenges for well-being and sustainable development in the region. On the other hand, some of these changes can be seen as possibilities for new innovations, for example of art and science or culture and tourism. It is paramount, that sustainable art and cultural policy is developed in collaboration with all the Barents countries.

With the UN 2030 Agenda, the countries of the world agreed on a common framework for working towards sustainable development. Although rarely mentioned explicitly in the UN 2030 Agenda, there are many ways for culture to contribute to the goals set out, such as Quality education, Reduced inequalities, Sustainable cities and communities, Sustainable consumption and production and Peace, justice and strong institutions. The ability of culture to raise important questions, to address injustices and bring people together must be recognised and nurtured. Culture offers a powerful mechanism to address social, economic, environmental and other challenges for the benefit of sustainable development in the Barents region. From the arctic point of view the aim is to create models for art and cultural policy that support sustainable development. In the Barents context one should focus on similar topics. It is often on the local and the regional level that the changes needed can be made and the work at these levels constitutes the foundation for successful cooperation.

The JWGC will aim to:

- develop and promote sustainable forms of action - widen the spectrum from art and culture to responsible multidisciplinary actions in the creative field including the indigenous art and cultural policy
- explore and promote cooperation possibilities between culture and i.a. the health and education sectors to promote the role of culture for well-being

## **Cultural exchange, intercultural dialogue and diversity**

Positive interactions between humans make life better. In the Barents region, these interactions have persisted for centuries. They have constituted the Barents identity as one characterised by openness and diversity. Art and culture can act as an inspiring method to welcome new Barentsians to the region. Cultural and educational policies can contribute to the development of skills needed to cope with the complexity of contemporary multicultural societies by helping to recognise that each tradition has something valuable to offer. The understanding of cultural diversity and discourse between different cultures should be promoted.

Regional cultural cooperation helps to promote intercultural communications and people-to-people contacts and it provides access to the arts, culture and cultural heritage across borders. Good general conditions for cross-border contacts and cooperation benefit also the cultural field in the Barents region.

The JWGC will aim to:

- maintain and promote the cultural diversity of the Barents region by means of:
  - expanding exchanges and sustainable cooperation structures, including for the youth
  - promoting intercultural dialogue and placing particular focus on the rights of and active participation by the indigenous peoples of the region
  - promoting meetings of and cooperation between the core regional cultural institutions with the aim to initiate mutual activities and projects
  - implementing and coordinating cooperation between cultural minorities, thus contributing to social integration

## **Conditions for and access to creativity**

Accessibility to a rich and developed cultural life is essential for equal and good living. This can serve as an important tool in the branding and marketing of the region to the outside world, but is important also in itself and for the people living in the Barents region. The right conditions to create, take part in and enjoy the arts are a right that should be as taken for granted here, just as anywhere else.

There is no art without an artist. Artistic work and conditions to increase creativity need to be promoted also in the Barents region. Artists need to be encouraged to create in this region and everyone needs to be given the possibility to encounter

their works. The Barents cultural cooperation scholarship, awarded every second year, is an important initiative recognising the creativity, competence and diversity that is inherent to the Barents region. Mobility and residency support is one important tool for connecting the Barents region and the Barents artists with the global art world. Artists' residencies have become intrinsic to many artistic careers. They play an important role in facilitating and catalysing artists' ability to move across the world. Actors in the Barents region also need to make the most of the possibilities of digitalisation, where for example broadband is a prerequisite, not only to economic and social, but also to cultural development.

The JWGC will aim to:

- develop the Barents cultural cooperation scholarship with the objective of making it a permanent, visible and well-reputed part of the European and Arctic cultural landscape
- promote artist mobility, for example through exploring synergies with residency actors and networks, but also through underlining the importance of general conditions for mobility in different for a
- explore and make use of the possibilities of digitalisation for creativity and the accessibility of culture in the Barents region, with the aim to initiate concrete cooperation projects within the field of digitalisation
- promote capacity building, for example within cultural entrepreneurial skills, especially for young people

### **Cultural and creative industries, innovation and tourism**

Cultural creativity is a precondition for increased international competitiveness. Cultural activities and business based on culture have the potential to make the region more creative and dynamic, which again can attract other investments and create more workplaces. There is also a growing market in international tourism based on natural and cultural assets. Branding of the region starts from local strengths and stories, which can be developed into various interesting cultural products and phenomena. It is important that tourism is sustainable, ecologically, socially and culturally, basing on the rich cultural competence of the inhabitants of the Barents region, including of the indigenous peoples.

New innovations are born where different fields of expertise collide. New cultural and creative sector products and innovations are created in this space. In the Barents region there is still a challenge to bring heterogeneous stakeholders together to innovate. Therefore, special attention should be given to creating new interdisciplinary meeting places and platforms. In this way, spaces can be promoted

where new types of creative services and products can be born. The priorities of international funding mechanisms support the creation of such new meeting places.

The JWGC will aim to:

- promote cultural and creative industries as an economic sector enhancing sustainable development in the Barents region
- advocate for strong and relevant international funding mechanisms supporting culture in the Barents Region and utilise the support existing funding mechanisms can offer to new meeting places for creative services and products

### **Cooperation**

Success can only be achieved via cooperation and there is a great variety of important actors for cultural development in the Barents region. Active involvement of non-governmental organisations in relevant fields of the Barents cooperation should be supported and concrete projects and contacts between civil society and cultural institutions should be promoted. Within the BEAC structure, cooperation should be based on the interests of the participating regions and constructive cooperation between the regional and the national level.

The JWGC will aim to:

- promote closer coordination between the northern regional organisations active within cultural cooperation, in order to maximise synergies and avoid duplication of efforts and responsibilities
- especially nurture close contacts to the Barents Regional Youth Council and the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples
- promote the visibility of the Barents cooperation via concrete ventures, such as the Barents cultural cooperation scholarship
- develop information exchange both internally and externally by utilizing new technologies
- integrate evaluative thinking in its actions
- integrate an innovative and explorative approach in its actions, enabling bold ideas to grow
- keep all its activities accessible and open to all, irrespective of gender as well as social, economic and cultural background

## **Funding**

There are many ways to finance Barents cultural cooperation. The JWGC will keep in contact with and seek to obtain support for projects from existing national, Nordic, EU and international sources of financing. Special attention should be paid to ENI Cross-Border Cooperation: Kolarctic and Karelia programmes, which offer realistic funding possibilities for actors and projects in the sphere of cultural and creative industries in the Barents region. The responsibility for raising funds and realising projects rests with the implementers of the projects. The projects, including the financial resources, will be analysed in annual progress reports.

### **Follow-up**

The JWGG will monitor the Strategy on the basis of its objectives. Progress of the activities will be reported at the JWGC meetings. The JWGC will submit an annual report of its activities both to the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council.