

BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL

JOINT WORKING GROUP ON EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

BACKGROUND

During the past six years JWGER has been hosted by the Northern Arctic Federal University (NArFU) in Arkhangelsk, Russia. From May 2018 the Arctic Research Centre at Umeå University (ARCUM) chairs JWGER. Around 15 universities have constituted the backbone of meeting participants, most of them Russian (Arkhangelsk, Petrozavodsk, Syktyvkar, Murmansk), two Norwegian (Bodø, Tromsø), and one Finnish (Kaajani). Most representatives have positions at International Offices. Few researchers or university leaders have been involved.

Early 2018 members were asked to confirm their continued efforts and participation in JWGER, the response, however, was rather weak.

ACTION: Re-establish the network and locate representatives at all universities.
Call for an autumn meeting (in Sweden).
Improve the engagement of researchers and academic leaders.
Prepare for chairmanship rotation.

THE ARCTIC CONNECTION

The Barents region is basically a (large) part of the Arctic. Arctic research has developed into an internationally prioritized area, especially in the perspective of climate change and global warming. The organizational structure of Arctic research has been substantially strengthened, and now includes numerous actors. Three research organizations have observer status to the Arctic Council (IASSA, IASC, UArctic), and the member universities are very much involved. The holds true also for the different working groups of the Arctic Council. UArctic in particular is an important partner through thematic networks, institutes, congress, education and mobility programs.

ACTION: Include evaluations and discussions on member's engagement in IASSA, IASC, UArctic, and in Arctic Council Working Groups in the agenda.

ACTIVITIES

The JWGER activities during the past years have included reports on ongoing activities, like UArctic Congress and UArctic Thematic Networks. A major activity was Barents Summer School that was co-chaired between all four countries.

ACTION: Continue to collect information on (BEAC related) member activities. Eventually a Barents Summer School 2.0.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Five northern Nordic universities have established the cooperation Arctic Five. The ambition with the design is to establish an organization that can be operational within a short time frame. The unique position and capacity of the five universities is the backbone of action, and general aims are to assist a positive development in the region, and to win synergies for research and education. Initially new initiatives will focus on the European Union, the Barents cooperation, and incorporation of non-academic partners. The International Barents Secretariat has been involved in some JWGER meetings.

ACTION: Establish a JWGER connection to Arctic Five with an ambition to cooperate in education and research.
Strengthen the connection to the International Barents Secretariat.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

The JWGER members are involved in a large number of projects and other academic cooperation. These are sometimes exclusive for two member universities, and sometimes part of larger international initiatives (Russian Security Council, ASIAQ, MASD, INTERACT). Sweden supports the regional youth projects Robota 18 The Next Generation, and Applying Best Practices and Building Capacity in Arctic Indigenous Education.

ACTION: Continue and strengthen ongoing member activities that relate to JWGER.
Establish contact with the two regional youth projects supported by BEAC.
Investigate the opportunity to arrange Umeå Arctic Forum 2019 with a Barents theme.

SDGs

The Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has top international priority. There are many opportunities arising for academic and other initiatives, not least within the EU framework program. There are good reasons to investigate how well the SDGs and their sub-goals and indicators match the situation in the Barents region. The BEAC Declaration of October 2017 highlight these ambitions, and they match the priorities of the Swedish chairmanship of BEAC (environment, economic cooperation, social issues).

ACTION: Add the discussion on SDGs to JWGER meeting agenda.
Arrange a SDG seminar, possibly together with SECEG (Social, Economic and Culture Expert Group) of the Arctic Council.
Include youth and indigenous engagement.

YOUTH

Youth is a priority if BEAC, and the JWGER members are involved in extensive mobility programs and other forms of cooperation.

ACTION: Establish a contact with Joint Working Group on Youth.
Investigate opportunities to cooperate with APECS.

INDIGENOUS

The indigenous peoples are important parts of the Barents region, and their engagement in BEAC activities is encouraged. The JWGER member universities have a strong capacity within indigenous research, especially Sami that live in all four countries.

ACTION: Engage indigenous representation in JWGER.
Investigate possible cooperation with Sami health related projects.

NEW INITIATIVES

It is important that JWGER has an open discussion on new initiatives.

ACTION: Investigate the opportunities to expand JWGER activities within Research Industrial School's, security (PAX Nordica Conference), and Asia relations.

A LARGER VISION

In 2005 BEAC initiated the large Barents 2010 project that included extensive cooperation in different areas, including education and research. Among the deliverables were the recently published Barents History and Barents Encyclopedia.

ACTION: JWGER could discuss the opportunities to seek funding for a large-scale project.

PROJECT DESIGN

There is a growing effort in the circumpolar North to find better ways to have Barents science interact with, and focus on, issues that are important in the public eye as well as to ensure that the insights generated in science are put to better use. An important way to communicate science results is by strengthening the education, and the northern universities here have great expertise and obvious responsibilities to meet these challenges with innovative and solution-oriented research.

JWGER member universities have a long history of northern research and ambitions to play world-leading roles in the development of circumpolar research. These universities have solid positions at the international arena, but a coherent amassing

of efforts and resources would build a consortium that increases the opportunities to meet global and regional challenges, and to promote excellence and create Barents added value. The concept of a Barents University Hub for northern research utilizes the extensive and prominent research that characterizes the universities to advance their long-term capacity building, and implements education, mobility, international networks and outreach activities into an agenda that addresses the priorities stated by the BEAC declarations.

The project endeavors to identify emerging policy-relevant Barents issues and explore innovative ways to address them, to build a network of senior and early-career researchers concerned with these issues, to improve the dialogue between practitioners (including government officials, industry executives, indigenous leaders, and civil society leaders) and analysts. The intention is to develop new strategies for communicating the findings of research to a variety of audiences, and to contribute to the emergence of the next generation of knowledgeable people who will become leaders in dealing with Barents issues in the future.

In the Barents region it is important to understand the impacts of the research itself and of the results of the research, as well as the impact of the communication of research results. The impacts occur on several levels including, but not limited to, the political, economic, cultural, social, and environmental levels, as well as on the research itself. Consequences may be intended and unintended. It is now commonly accepted that new economic activities must undergo social and environmental assessments. There is a need for improved assessments of research impacts or research consequences on local communities or on global systems. Overall, the goal of this type of activity should be to better understand the driving forces behind Barents related science and its relationship to the public interest.

Areas of great interest include:

- Renewable energy and environmental challenges
- Health, welfare and life quality
- Teacher Education for Social Justice and Equality
- Regional Development and Tourism
- Indigenous issues
- Gender
- Urbanization

The initiative could be developed with the addition of activities with a broader purpose:

- The Northern Light Conference
- Barents Seminars
- Barents Mobility Program
- Barents Project Development
- Barents AIMdays
- Barents incubator
- Barents Culture Trade

The research profile of the initiative is solution oriented and strives for a sustainable regional development. Whether that is the largest cities or the remote and small communities, the challenges are often relatively similar for the different parts of the Barents region.