

Northern Dimension Institute | Background Paper 3 – September 2021

Mapping Synergies in Regional Cooperation in the Northern Dimension Area

Summary

This background paper presents the results of mapping of regional synergies in the North, implemented by the NDI as part of its EC-funded Action Support to the Northern Dimension Institute (2020-2022). The mapping was implemented by looking at the agendas of other regional policies and initiatives in the Arctic, Barents and Baltic Sea regions through the lens of the priorities of the ND thematic partnerships and of ND actors.

Key themes with potential for synergies – and also existing synergetic efforts – were found. Some of them are connected to sustainable development, such as the need for curbing black carbon emissions, promoting decarbonization of transport, and circular economy and green industries. Others address important societal issues such as healthy ageing and wellbeing, and crossovers of culture with other sectors of the society and economy. Finally, the mapping highlighted the people-to-people dimension of regional cooperation with examples of successful engagement of the science community and youth.

The mapping revealed concrete ways in which synergies already are, or could in the future be, implemented. These include sharing of information and knowledge about good and innovative practices, exploiting expertise from other regional initiatives when organizing events, co-organizing events on topics that are on the agenda of several regional initiatives, and avoiding overlapping structures and activities and building complementarities.

The key role in synergetic efforts is played by committed individuals who are engaged in several regional initiatives. Their resources are however limited, and therefore also institutional “linking pins” would be needed to foster coordination and cooperation. On a more strategic level, cross-sectoral cooperation and holistic approach should be encouraged. This is needed to tackle the complex and multidimensional societal challenges of the contemporary world. This can be done, for example, by identifying umbrella themes that cover many sectors. Such cross-sectoral approach is also likely to provide fresh insights by bringing ideas from outside the box.

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Dimension (ND) area covers a region stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Arctic and Barents regions. International cooperation in this geographical area is active, ranging from official inter-governmental cooperation to grassroot level people-to-people contacts. The cooperation addresses themes important for the prosperity and well-being of the North, including economic development, environmental protection, transport connections, as well as social welfare and culture. These themes are central on the ND agenda as well, and could be more efficiently promoted by coordinating efforts and joining forces with other regional actors and initiatives such as the Barents, Arctic and Baltic Sea agendas. On the policy level the ND is promoting collaboration with other regional initiatives by inviting their representatives to the meetings of its Steering Group and the ND Parliamentary Forum, but there is room for more tight cooperation on the practical level.

The Northern Dimension Policy in a nutshell

- The Northern Dimension (ND) was initiated in 1999 as external policy of the EU. Since 2006 it is a **common policy** of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland where **all partners are equal**.
- The Northern Dimension area covers the **European North**, including **the Arctic, Barents and Baltic Sea regions**, and **Northwest Russia**.
- The **strength** of the ND Policy is its **concreteness**, as it provides **proven instruments and platforms** to **jointly address** topics of **shared concern** and **mutual interest**.
- The ND policy is implemented through **thematic partnerships** on **environment, transport and logistics, culture, and health and social wellbeing**, and by other actors and forums such as the university network **ND Institute**, the **ND Parliamentary Forum** and the **ND Business Council**.

The ND is a policy, the strengths of which could be even more widely harnessed for the use of regional cooperation in the North. The core of the ND approach is concrete cooperation in thematic partnerships on environment, transport and logistics, health and social wellbeing, and culture. The thematic cooperation is supported by active and well-structured intergovernmental cooperation.

Another strength of the ND approach is its well-established cooperation between science and society, which supports the culture of knowledge-based decision making in the ND area. Similarly, other regional initiatives have strengths that the NDI could learn from, such as platforms and practices of engaging indigenous people and youth.

This background paper presents the results of mapping of regional synergies in the ND area (hereafter referred to as the North). The mapping is part of the EU-funded action “Support to the NDI” (2020-2022). The Action is implemented by the Northern Dimension Institute (NDI) which is the “science partnership” of the ND family.

The NDI is a university network and think tank co-coordinated by three EU and Russian universities: Aalto University from Finland, and St. Petersburg University of Economics and the Arkhangelsk-based Northern Arctic Federal University from Russia.

Its purpose is to serve the thematic ND Partnerships and policy making with evidence-based knowledge, and raise awareness about the ND in the wider society. For the purpose, the NDI maintains knowledge exchange and dissemination platforms including the annual ND Future Forums, NDI Policy Briefs and NDI Background Papers.

The NDI maintains the website northerndimension.info to raise awareness of the Northern Dimension agenda, its actors and achievements. The NDI publications are also publicly available on the website.



The paper first gives an overview of key regional initiatives in the North, and then elaborates common themes and potential synergies. The final section presents summary of the findings and suggestions for future action.

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE NORTH – AN OVERVIEW OF KEY ACTORS AND POLICIES

The key actors in regional cooperation at the inter-governmental level in the North are the four “sister councils”. These councils have different geographical focus and coverage, ranging from Barents and Arctic to the Baltic Sea and Nordic ones. The regional policy landscape is complemented by the Northern Dimension policy which covers most of this geographic area. Table 1 ¹ gives a summary of these initiatives and their priorities.

¹ List of acronyms and abbreviations can be found on the last page

EXPLORING THE NORTHERN DIMENSION

Name, Est. Members	Cooperation level	Mission	Priorities/Policy areas	Organization of work
BEAC and BRC, 1993 DK, FI, IS, NO, RU, SE, the EC	Forum for inter-governmental and inter-regional cooperation in the Barents Region.	The overall objective is sustainable development	Economic cooperation, environment, transport, health and social issues, education, energy, culture, tourism, youth and indigenous people	Thematic working groups, established independently by BEAC or BRC, or jointly. Secretariat in Kirkenes.
Arctic Council, 1996 CA, DK, FI, IS, NO, RU, SE, the US	High level inter-governmental forum	Promote cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, involving Arctic inhabitants, on common Arctic issues	Sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic	Research, monitoring and the other work of the Council is primarily carried out by Working Groups. Secretariat in Tromsø.
CBSS, 1992 DE, EE, FI, DE, IS, LV, LT, NO, PL, RU, SE, the EC	High-level regional inter-governmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea region	To serve as a forum for guidance and overall coordination among the participating states and the EC.	Regional identity, sustainable and prosperous region, safe and secure region	The Committee of Senior Officials monitors, facilitates and aims to coordinate the work of all CBSS structures, including thematic expert groups. Secretariat in Stockholm.
Norden (NCM and NC), 1971 DE, FI, IS, NO, SE	Forum for official Nordic co-operation at inter-governmental and parliamentary levels	To make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world	Law & justice, working life, digitalization, disability, environment & climate, sustainable development, children & youth, energy, culture, education & research, gender equality, language	Thematic working groups that monitor the implementation of programs set by the NCM and their projects and other activities. Secretariat in Copenhagen.
ND, 1999/2006 DE, FI, IS, NO, SE	Common international policy	To support stability, well-being and sustainable development in the ND region by means of practical cooperation.	Environment, health and social wellbeing, transport and logistics, culture	Thematic partnerships with secretariats that govern expert groups, investment projects, research and networking projects. Supporting structures NDI and NDBC.

Table 1: Actors in regional cooperation in the North

Sources: <https://www.barentscooperation.org/en>, <https://arctic-council.org/>, <https://cbss.org/>, <https://www.norden.org/>, <https://northerndimension.info/>

The **Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)**, established in 1993, is the main forum for intergovernmental cooperation in the Barents Region. Its overall objective is to promote sustainable development in the region, and its priority areas cover a variety of economic, societal and cultural issues.

The Barents cooperation is implemented on two levels. The BEAC works on intergovernmental level, whereas its supporting structure **Barents Regional Council (BRC)** is responsible for interregional cooperation. The members of the BEAC are the five Nordic countries, Russian Federation and the European Commission. The BEAC chair rotates between Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden.

The BRC is formed by thirteen counties or similar sub-national entities from the BEAC member states. The activities of BEAC and BRC are supported by the International Barents Secretariat (IBS), located in Kirkenes, Norway. To implement their agenda, BEAC and BRC have established working groups, both independently and jointly. The working groups consist of appointed experts from the member countries. The Barents cooperation engages also indigenous people in its work, as representatives the Sámi, the Nenets and the Vepsians cooperate in the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples. The working group has an advisory role for both BEAC and BRC.

The **Arctic Council** was established in 1996 as a high-level inter-governmental forum. The purpose was to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues. The focus is on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.

The member states of the Arctic Council are Canada, Russian Federation, the United States of America, and the five Nordic countries (Denmark including Greenland and the Faroe Islands). The Chairmanship of the Arctic Council rotates every two years among the Arctic States. The Chair is supported by the Arctic Council Secretariat (ACS) located in Tromsø, Norway.

Research, monitoring and the other work of the Council is primarily carried out by Working Groups. The Council has also provided a forum for the negotiation of important legally binding agreements among the eight Arctic States to promote cooperation in maritime and environmental safety in the Arctic, and Arctic scientific cooperation.

The **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**, established in 1992, is an overall political forum for regional inter-governmental cooperation. Its role is to serve as a forum for guidance and overall coordination among the participating states. The CBSS has three long-term priorities, including regional identity, sustainable and prosperous region, and safe and secure region. Its current work focuses on themes such as societal security, sustainability, research and innovation, as well as countering human trafficking.

The members of the CBSS are the eleven states of the Baltic Sea Region (the five Nordic countries and the three Baltic states), Germany, Poland, the Russian Federation, and the European Commission. The Council consists of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs from

each Member State and a member of the European Commission. The CBSS Presidency rotates between the Member States on an annual basis.

The Council is assisted by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) and a secretariat located in Stockholm, Sweden. There are also thematic working groups which monitor the implementation of programs set by the NCM, their projects and other activities.

The **Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM)** is the Nordic governments' co-operation forum. Its mission is to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world, and its work covers a wide range of policy areas from legislation and justice to environmental, societal and cultural issues.

The Council consists of ten policy councils of ministers, and the co-operation is coordinated by an eleventh council of ministers made up of the ministers for Nordic co-operation in the member countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers rotates on annual basis between the member countries. Many of the Council of Ministers' activities are carried out in the Nordic institutions, projects and initiatives. The Council of Ministers has a secretariat in Copenhagen, Denmark, and as well as local information offices in the Nordic countries and Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia.

The **Northern Dimension** was introduced as an external policy of the EU in 1999, and renewed into a common policy of the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia in 2006. It aims at providing a common platform for promoting dialogue and concrete cooperation as well as strengthening stability and promoting economic integration, competitiveness and sustainable development in Northern Europe.

The objectives of the ND policy are being implemented by four thematic partnerships: Environment (NDEP), health and social wellbeing (NDPHS), transport and logistics (NDPTL), and culture (NDPC). In addition, the ND structure includes "knowledge partnership" the NDI Institute, the "business partnership" ND Business Council, and the Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum.

The overall ND policy is monitored by the ND steering group that has high-level representatives from the ND partners. The practical work of the environmental partnership is governed by a fund hosted by EBRD. The work of the NDPHS is implemented by a number of expert groups and a secretariat located in Stockholm, Sweden. The NDPTL and NDPC secretariats are located in Helsinki, Finland and Riga, Latvia, respectively. The thematic partnerships are supported by the ND Institute, the ND Business Council and ND Parliamentary Forum.

COMMON THEMES AND POTENTIAL SYNERGIES

Within the themes covered by the ND co-operation, namely environment, transport and logistics, health and social wellbeing, and cultural cooperation, there are shared topics of interest that can be identified also in other regional agendas and initiatives in the Barents, Arctic and Baltic regions.

We next present the current priorities of the ND thematic partnerships, mirror them against other regional agendas, and discuss how they could be promoted by exploiting synergies between different regional initiatives.

Environment: Curbing Black Carbon emissions

The **Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP)** is a result-focused initiative responding to calls from the international community - including Russia and Belarus - for concerted action to tackle some of the most pressing environmental problems in the Northern Dimension Area covering the Baltic and Barents Seas region.

The NDEP successfully works on concrete investment projects in the ND area already for two decades. The projects are implemented by International Financing Institutions with the support of NDEP grants and beneficiary country funds. Most NDEP projects include complementary funding from ND partner countries. The NDEP projects are located in Northwest Russia and Belarus.

The NDEP environmental projects focus on water and wastewater treatment, management of municipal and agricultural waste, energy efficiency and nuclear safety projects for spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste management. The work on these themes is continuing, in addition to which NDEP has taken Black Carbon reduction as its new focus area, and is currently initiating concrete projects in this domain.

Black Carbon is visibly present in the work of BEAC and Arctic Council as well, both independently and as coordinated effort.

Finland chairs the **BEAC Working Group on Environment (WGE)** in 2020-2023 and black carbon is one of the thematic priorities of its Chairmanship. Under the priority “climate change” WGE will focus on black carbon and synergies with the activities under the Arctic Council by promoting awareness raising, sharing of good examples and by following the outcomes of relevant projects in the Barents region.

The **Arctic Council Working Group AMAP** (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program) recently coordinated an EU funded action on black carbon in the Arctic (2018-2020). The action aimed at improving the knowledge base on black carbon emissions, increasing awareness and sharing knowledge, preparing technical advice documents and scenario analyses, and supporting development of a roadmap for international

cooperation on black carbon. Black Carbon and other short-lived pollutants are also among the topics of demonstration projects of the **Arctic Council's Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP)** that works to prevent and reduce pollution and environmental risks in the Arctic. These projects intend to raise awareness among national policy-makers and show possibilities to cut pollution and clean up.

All in all, there is common international understanding for the need to curb black carbon emissions in the North, and the topic is visibly present particularly in the Arctic and Barents cooperation agendas. There are also good examples of different regional actors joining forces to increase the understanding on and awareness of black carbon among policy-makers and the wider society. The NDI organized its annual Future Forum 2020 in collaboration with the AMAP-coordinated EU Action on black carbon in the Arctic to bring together producers and end users of knowledge on sources and implications of black carbon emissions, and ways of cutting them². Currently, the NDI is planning follow-up events for the Forum and their linking to the Finland's current chairmanship of the BEAC WGE.

Transport and logistics: Promoting decarbonization and digitalization

The **Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL)** was set up to improve the major transport connections and logistics in the Northern Dimension region.

The work of the NDPTL addresses another important theme for the North, which is the ensuring of functioning and sustainable transport and logistics infrastructure for the regional economies and people. On the one hand, the NDPTL emphasizes connectivity such as the emergence of new Euro-Asian trade routes in the North, and on the other, it is interested in how transport could be made more environmentally friendly, safe and accessible to users via for example decarbonization of transport and digitalization.

Transport and connectivity are on the agenda of other regional actors as well. The main aim of the **Steering Committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA)** is to strengthen co-operation in order to create an efficient transport system in the Barents Region that integrates the different means of transport. This work includes cooperation on border crossing and customs issues, and infrastructure projects. The current BEATA work program under the Norwegian chairmanship (2020-2021) emphasizes ITS and digitalization, road corridor development, sustainability and traffic safety.

Also, the mitigation of environmental and other risks of marine traffic in the Arctic waters and in the Baltic Sea is important in the work of the Arctic Council and CBSS. **Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group of the Arctic**

² <https://northerndimension.info/future-forum-2020-curbng-black-carbon-emissions/>

Council closely collaborates with International Maritime Organization (IMO) to encourage implementation of the Polar Code³.

CBSS Expert Group on Sustainable Maritime Economy promotes initiatives such as land-based power generation for ships docked in ports which would dramatically reduce CO2 emissions in the Baltic Sea Region. CBSS closely collaborates with HELCOM⁴ on topics such as sustainable shipping technologies and new fuels.

In sum, there seems to be a shared interest among regional actors to develop transport and logistic systems in the North towards a more safe and sustainable direction, utilizing possibilities of modern digital technologies. In the ND context, the NDI serves the information needs on this theme by publishing ND Policy Briefs which have recently discussed topics such as the safety of Arctic navigation, and the Polar Code. In addition, within the NDI framework, the University of Economics in St Petersburg closely cooperates with the ND Partnership on Transports and Logistics in the theme of decarbonization of transport. Also, the 2020 ND Future Forum on black carbon already successfully brought together scholars and experts on decarbonization of transport and new fuels, and on environmental science on black carbon. The follow-up activities of the Forum discussed above will include decarbonization of transport as one of the central themes.

Health and social wellbeing: Healthy ageing and wellbeing

The **Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS)** is a cooperative effort of eleven governments, the European Commission and eight international organizations. The NDPHS provides a forum for concerted action to tackle challenges to health and social well-being in the Northern Dimension area and foremost in North-West Russia.

The NDPHS is working actively in eleven expert groups to exchange information and improve the situation on diseases and other health risks in the ND area, such as tuberculosis, HIV and non-infectious diseases, as well as on acute themes such as the COVID-19. It is also focusing on holistic issues such as healthy ageing, and digitalization as a tool for improving efficiency, accessibility and equality of healthcare and social services, particularly in sparsely populated areas.

These topics are on the agenda of Barents Regional Council as well. Its **Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS)** brings together governments, regions, organizations and experts in health and related social issues with the aim to improve public health and social well-being of the people in the Barents Region. It has

³ The Polar code was introduced by IMO to enforce the maritime safety and protect the marine environment in polar areas.

⁴ The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) – is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) and a regional sea convention in the Baltic Sea area.

sub-groups on topics such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The JWGHS works closely with organizations such as the NDPHS and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The main priority areas of the working program of the JWGHS are the prevention and control of communicable diseases, improved health and increased access to health care in sparsely populated areas, improved environment for growth and development of children and youth, and prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

The central social and health sector themes of **Finland's NCM presidency** include the COVID-19 pandemic, health and social services in sparsely populated areas, utilization of health data and registries, and public health.

The existence of overlapping themes on regional organizations' agendas largely results to the tendency of certain experts being involved in several initiatives. From the viewpoint of synergy creation, these "committed individuals" are an important resource. A recent example of a project serving several regional initiatives is the NORRUS-AGE project⁵ that identifies and shares information on good practices in healthy ageing in the Arctic region. It is funded by the NCM, and contributes to the agenda of NDI Think Tank Action, cooperates with the NCM funded project on Aging, gender, and ethnicity (AGE-Arctic), and is included in the program of Arctic Council's science cooperation initiative University of Arctic network.

The NDI is also acting as a catalyzer of cooperation between regional initiatives by bringing them into dialogue. A recent example of this is bringing the NDPHS viewpoint to the agenda of Finland's NCM presidency, eventually leading to the inclusion of NDPHS expert presentation on the agenda of the NCM forum on wellbeing in December 2021.

The NDI is also playing an active role in teasing out relevant knowledge on the shared themes in various regional initiatives and disseminating it to the wider audience. A good example of successful dissemination is the ND Policy Brief on premature deaths in the ND region⁶ that was based on a study implemented in the NDPHS expert group on primary healthcare.

Another example of NDI's contribution in potentially interesting cross-organizational knowledge accumulation in health issues is related to the COVID-19 pandemic, where the NDI has brought together users and end users of knowledge from science, social sphere and economy to exchange view on the post-pandemic "new normal" ways of life. The theme is relevant in several upcoming future forums, too, and could be enriched for example with knowhow on how to promote digitalization in health services for sparsely populated areas. It links also to the agenda of Finland's Nordic Council of Ministry presidency, which addresses societal impact of the mobility restrictions in the Nordic region due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and digital solutions to ensure mobility also in the post-pandemic era.

⁵ <https://www oulu.fi/medicine/node/209541>

⁶ https://northerndimension.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PYLL_policy_brief_final.pdf

Culture: Creative crossovers

The **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)** initiative focuses on cultural and creative co-operation in the Northern Dimension area. One of its objectives is to bridge the gap between public and private funding. NDPC is an extensive cultural co-operation tool which reaches out to cultural operators, creative entrepreneurs and to the business communities throughout the entire Northern Dimension area. The NDPC provides cooperation platforms and networking opportunities, including the annual Culture Forum in St. Petersburg.

The NDPC is focusing in its recently adopted strategy 2021-2024 on the following priorities: building cultural and creative crossovers with other sectors, helping creative professionals and organizations to reach out to and collaborate with other stakeholders across the ND area, providing state-of-the-art training and development programs to creative professionals, and offering a platform for policymakers to share good practices and to design solutions for common challenges. Recent examples of creative cross-overs include the joint work between NDPC and NDPHS on the role of art in promoting wellbeing.

Cross-border regional cooperation in the field of culture is also an integral part of the Barents cooperation. The aim of its **Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC)** is to strengthen cultural identities, multicultural dialogue and cultural ties between the Barents countries and the regions. The latest Strategy of Cultural Cooperation "Creative Barents" (2019-2023) takes into account wide possibilities to enhance cultural policy dialogue and practical cooperation. Thematic priorities and objectives of the Barents cultural cooperation are culture and sustainable development; cultural exchange, intercultural dialogue and diversity; conditions for and access to creativity; cultural and creative industries, innovation and tourism; and cooperation.

Culture is one of the foci within the **CBSS long-term priority Regional Identity**. The CBSS work in the field of culture includes cooperation in cultural heritage, contemporary culture and support to Culture and Creative Industries. The CBSS supports cooperation of authorities, and networking of cultural operators in this field. The CBSS also contributes to intergovernmental cultural cooperation in the Region through its work with the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) Policy Area Culture and the NDPC. This demonstrates again the importance of "committed individuals" as linking pins between various regional initiatives. These include individuals who participate in boards of diverse programs as, for example, representatives of their national functional ministries.

The NDI has close relationship with the NDPC as its "scientific adviser". This includes contributing to the NDPC strategy formulation by giving recommendations on priority themes based on its academic expertise. As a result, the NDPC decided to put cross-sectoral cooperation in the core of its strategy. Also, the NDI supports various initiatives of the NDPC by providing a bridge to the research community by serving relevant

research knowledge and suggesting experts to be used in events, forums and symposiums.

Business and Economy: Sustainability and green economy

In addition to the four thematic partnerships, the ND cooperation structure involves supporting actors that bring expertise from different societal spheres to the use of the partnerships.

The **Northern Dimension Business Council (NDBC)** connects businesses in the ND area with each other and with governmental decision-makers via annual Business Forums in St. Petersburg and thematic working groups. The NDBC ensures that the view of business community will be taken into account in developing Northern Dimension Policy. The main activity of the NDBC is its annual Northern Dimension Business Forum in St. Petersburg, which has recently focused on issues such as the Northern Dimension Business's response to COVID-19 challenge (2020) and boosting connectivity of people, information, energy, goods and services (2021). The NDBC also hosts Working Groups focusing on themes such as ecology and circular economy, and energy and energy efficiency.

Economic and business cooperation is on the agenda of other regional initiatives as well. The **Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)** seeks to promote economic development of the Barents Region through enhanced cooperation between the BEAC member states. WGEC works closely together with the regional business life, the **Chambers of Commerce** and the **Barents Business Advisory Group (BBAG)**. The biennial Barents Industrial Partnership meetings are the highlights of each WGEC Presidency.

Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation (RWGIEC) aims to build bridges between business life and local administration. RWGIEC assesses business infrastructure from the practical viewpoint of the region's SMEs and makes improvement proposals concerning business climate and operational conditions. RWGIEC also encourages SMEs for cross-border economic cooperation and to build up sub-contractor networks so that SMEs could participate in large-scale projects. RWGIEC is also trying to combat trade barriers and inform about the transportation needs of companies.

Economic sustainability is promoted by several initiatives as well. **The CBSS priority sustainable and prosperous region** focuses on supporting the transition towards competitive green economy. Sustainable development, especially in the field of developing green industry, is also one of the priorities of the current **Lithuanian presidency of CBSS**. It focuses on issues such a sustainable management and use of natural resources, particularly in resource-intensive industries.

Transition towards carbon neutral circular economy is also strongly present in the agenda of **Finland's current (2021) NCM presidency**. In a specific presidency project,

Finland will develop networks of knowledge and skills for a circular economy in the construction industry. The construction sector currently uses approximately half of the world's natural resources and is a major source of carbon dioxide emissions.

All in all, business and economy are included in most regional initiatives as additional and/or supporting viewpoints. It is widely acknowledged that social development programs call for sound economic foundations, and that business and entrepreneurship are critical elements for any social activity in the long run. Enterprises turn cultural ideas into creative businesses, establish digital applications for health services, generate sustainable solutions for environmental challenges and invent ways to decarbonize transports.

The NDI includes the viewpoint of the economy and businesses in all its awareness raising and brainstorming platforms, workshops and forums. This means that the speakers include representatives of the business community, who are brought into interaction with other societal actors such as public sectors decision-makers and the research community.

People-to-people cooperation: Engaging the science community and youth

People-to-people cooperation is an integral part of regional cooperation, and in the ND context it is mainly taking place as cooperation between scientists, and the involvement of various societal stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations (NGO) and youth to activities of the NDI.

Research and education

As discussed throughout the paper, the **NDI** is the “science partnership” of the ND family, and through its mission of serving the knowledge needs of the ND thematic partnerships and decision-makers in the ND area it promotes people-to-people cooperation in research and education. The NDI brings together researchers and other experts, and connects them with end users of knowledge and this way supports knowledge based decision making in the ND region and beyond. The NDI both conducts research as part of its activities, and provides dissemination channels for research conducted elsewhere.

Cooperation in research and education is visibly present in other regional initiatives as well. In Barents cooperation there is a **Joint Working Group on Education and Research**, and the NCM hosts the **Nordforsk** organization under the Nordic Council of Ministers to fund and facilitate Nordic cooperation on research and research infrastructure. Special programs are devoted to Arctic research and research that strengthens Nordic-Russian research and education relations.

There are also research and education networks hosted by the regional councils. The Arctic Council initiated in late 1990s the **University of the Arctic (UArctic)**. UArctic is a cooperative network of universities and other research and educational institutions in

and about the North. UArctic builds and strengthens collective resources and collaborative infrastructure that enables member institutions to better serve their constituents and their regions. UArctic operates through thematic networks and institutes, including those that cover themes of ND partnerships (e.g. health and wellbeing in the Arctic, Arctic transport and logistics).

On the Baltic Sea region, the CBSS hosts the **Baltic Science Network (BSN)** that connects more than 30 organizations, including National ministries, universities and research centers. The BSN activities include the ongoing project BSN_powerhouse that focuses on cooperation in research infrastructure and mobility of young researchers (research internships).

The NDI is closely connected to other regional university networks, both institutionally and thematically. The Russian co-coordinator of the NDI NArFU and a member of the NDI network University of Oulu are active actors in the UArctic, and the Russian co-coordinator UNECON is one of the driving forces in the BSN. The NDI Policy Brief series provide an important dissemination channel on UArctic research on topics such as safety of Arctic navigation, environmental pollution in the Arctic sea, and healthy ageing in the Arctic region.

The collaboration between the NDI and UArctic has also generated interesting insights on how science can further develop people-to-people cooperation as part of regional initiatives. A recent example of this is the idea of citizen science that was successfully implemented in an environmental project in the Arkhangelsk region⁷. In this project inhabitants of remote areas were instructed to collect samples for research on microplastic pollution in the Arctic waters. This project is an example of how researchers in the North can contribute to an emerging research area by collaborating with local people.

Children and youth

Children and youth is recognized as an important stakeholder group in people-to-people cooperation in the ND policy. Representatives of youth are included as participants in the biannual ND parliamentary forum meetings, and students and young scholars are engaged to the activities of the NDI, including its research and Future Forums.

Children and youth are formally included in the structures of some other regional initiatives to underline the importance of activating children and youth in regional development issues.

The Arctic Council has taken active steps to promote the participation of indigenous youth in its work. The first **Arctic Youth Leaders' Summit (AYLS)** was organized in 2019, following to the establishment of the **Permanent Participants' (PP) Youth Network** in 2020. The PP are organizations of indigenous people, which have been

⁷ <https://northerndimension.info/ndi-briefing-note-the-urgent-need-for-standardized-assessment-of-microplastic-pollution-in-the-arctic-ocean/>

granted full consultation rights in connection with the Council's negotiations and decisions.

The joint working group on youth (JWGY) aims at increasing youth cooperation in the Barents region. This aim is partly implemented by the **Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC)** which works to empower the younger generation to participate more actively in the Barents regional development. The BRYC consists of 14 members representing the youth from each county, oblast, republic and okrug in the Barents region as well as the indigenous youth.

The CBSS hosts the **Baltic Sea Youth Platform**, the purpose of which is to systematically involve young adults in the policy-making and decision-making in the Baltic Sea Region and make sure that their voice is heard, and to promote networking between youth organizations in the region and their connections with decision-makers. The platform organizes events where youth representatives are brought together with ministers, members of parliaments and other decision-makers.

The NCM has established a cross-sectoral strategy Children and Young People in the Nordic Region (2016-2022), the vision of which is to make the Nordic Region the best place in the world for children and young people. A central goal of the strategy is for the NCM to integrate the perspective of children's rights and young people into their work to a greater extent, thus highlighting and taking into consideration the voices of children and young people. The NCM's advisory and co-ordinating body for matters relating to children and young people is the **Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK)**. The Committee members represent authorities of the Nordic countries, and youth organizations in the region.

The inclusion of children and youth is critical in order to increase social ownership of regional initiative and to secure social commitment for initiatives in the long run. It is therefore important to include the youth viewpoint in all regional initiatives, including the Northern Dimension, where it is currently not as visible as in some other initiatives. One way to include and activate youth in ND structures could be to organize a virtual ND Youth Forum as part/in connection of - or back to back to - the ND Future Forums. Here, the NDI could act as a bridge between the Northern and Southern parts of the ND area by collaborating with youth initiatives of Arctic, Barents, Baltic Sea and Nordic regional initiatives.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This background paper presented the results of mapping of regional synergies that the NDI implemented as part of its EC-funded Action Support to the Northern Dimension Institute (2020-2022). The mapping exercise revealed that there are many actors and policies involved in regional cooperation in the North, whose priorities are somewhat differently formulated, but yet address shared concerns. The mapping was implemented by looking at the agendas of other regional policies and initiatives through the lens of

the priorities of the ND thematic partnerships and of ND actors. As a result, a number of key themes with potential for synergies – and also existing synergetic efforts – were found (Table 2).

Table 2: Topics for regional synergies and key actors

Thematic area	Topic	Regional policy/actor
Environment	Curbing black carbon emissions	ND: NDEP Barents: WGE Arctic: AMAP
Transport & logistics	Promoting decarbonization and digitalization	ND: NDPTL Barents: BEATA Arctic: PAME Baltic Sea: EGSME
Health and social well-being	Healthy ageing and wellbeing	ND: NDPHS, Barents: JWGHS Nordic: NCM
Culture	Creative crossovers	ND: NDPC Barents: JWGC Baltic Sea: CBSS
Business and economy	Sustainability and green economy	ND: NDBC Barents: WGE, JWGIEC Baltic Sea: CBSS Nordic: NCM
People to people cooperation	Engaging the science community	ND: NDI Arctic: UArctic Baltic Sea: BSR
	Engaging youth	ND: NDI Arctic: PP youth network Barents: BRYC Baltic Sea: BSYP Nordic: NORDBUK

The paper further described how the strengths of the ND policy, including that of concrete cooperation, could contribute to the regional cooperation in the North more widely. On the other hand, the mapping showed that there are areas in which the ND policy could learn from other regional initiatives. This includes for example the ways of engaging children and youth in regional development.

The paper identified existing synergies between regional initiatives and proposes that such synergies are often created by committed individuals who have the role as linking pins. Such individuals are, for example, civil servants who participate in boards of several regional councils, or researchers who run in parallel projects funded by different regional bodies. The degree to which such individuals can promote synergies is, however, dependent on their motivation and resources. Therefore, institutional “linking

pins” would be needed. The NDI is an example of organization that could take such a role.

The results of the mapping revealed several concrete ways in which synergies already are or could in the future be implemented. These include:

- Sharing of information and knowledge about good and innovative practices. Examples of such practices include citizen science as means for engaging local people in scientific research, or experiences on how to best engage youth in regional decision-making.
- Exploiting expertise from other regional initiatives when organizing events. A good example is the inclusion of presentation of the PYLL study implemented under the ND umbrella to the NCM event on welfare.
- Co-organizing events on topics that are on the agenda of several regional initiatives. The ND Future Forum on black carbon that was organized in collaboration between the NDI and the EU-funded action of black carbon in the Arctic serves as an example for this.
- Avoiding overlapping structures and activities, and building complementarities. In the research and education sphere the links between the UArctic and the NDI provide a good example, where the NDI offers the platform for disseminating research results of the UArctic to policy-makers and the wider public.

In addition to these concrete suggestions for building synergies, the mapping results could be applied in a more strategic level. Regional cooperation is often undertaken by working groups or other structures that have a rather narrowly defined thematic focus. In the contemporary world the societal challenges faced in the North are, however, complex and multidimensional. Climate change and the current COVID-19 pandemic are examples of such global challenges that address practically all spheres of the society.

Therefore, cross-sectoral cooperation and a holistic approach should be encouraged when planning activities. This can be done, and has already been done by the NDI, by identifying umbrella themes that cover many sectors. These include black carbon that is highly relevant from perspectives including the environmental, transport and health ones. Such a cross-sectoral approach is also likely to provide fresh insights by bringing ideas from outside the box, as demonstrated in the joint initiative of the NDPHS and NDPC on the role of art in social wellbeing.

To conclude, the North has a plentitude of regional cooperation on different levels and on different topics. This cooperation could be further strengthened by better communication and coordination between various initiatives and structures, which would ultimately make the North even more sustainable, citizen-friendly and prosperous region.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACAP = Arctic Council's Arctic Contaminants Action Program
ACS = Arctic Council Secretariat
AMAP = Arctic Council Working Group AMAP
AYLS = Arctic Youth Leaders' Summit
BBAG = Barents Business Advisory Group
BEAC = Barents Euro-Arctic Council
BEATA = Steering Committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area
BRC = Barents Regional Council
BRYC = Barents Regional Youth Council
BSN = Baltic Science Network
CBSS = Council of the Baltic Sea States
CSO = Committee of Senior Officials
EBRD = European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EUSBSR = the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
IBS = International Barents Secretariat
IMO = International Maritime Organization
JWGC = Joint Working Group on Culture
JWGHS = Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues
JWGY = Barents joint working group on youth
NCM = Nordic Council of Ministers
NC = Nordic Council
NORDEN = NCM and NC
ND = Northern Dimension
NDBC = Northern Dimension Business Council
NDEP = Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership
NDI = Northern Dimension Institute
NDPC = Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture
NDPHS = Northern Dimension Partnership on Public Health and Social Well-Being
NDPTL = Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics
NORDBUK = Nordic Committee for Children and Young People
PAME = Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment Working Group of the Arctic Council
RWGIEC = Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation
UArctic = the University of the Arctic
WGE = Working Group on Environment
WGEC = Working Group on Economic Cooperation



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