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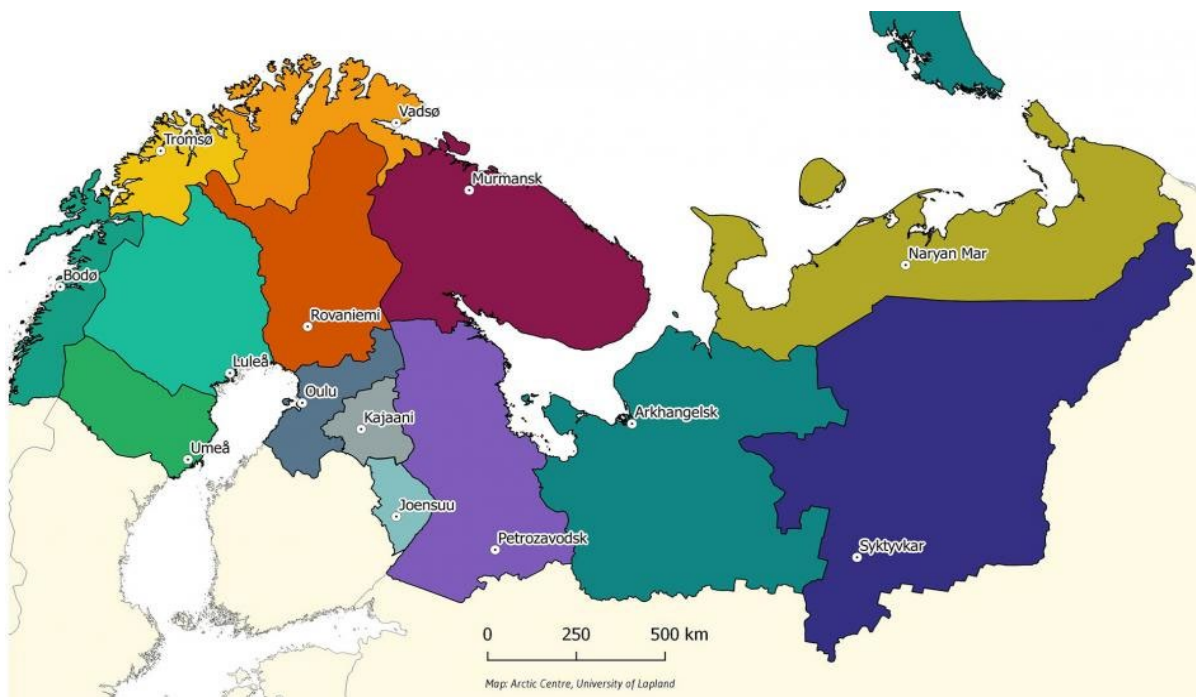
Barents Euro-Arctic Council

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The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) promotes regional cooperation and sustainable development in the Barents Region, an expanse of 1.75 million square kilometers with nearly 5.2 million inhabitants encompassing the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, including its Kola Peninsula. The BEAC was established in 1993 through the Kirkenes Declaration, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War. The goal was to secure political stability and reduce the tensions that had accompanied the threat of military confrontation, and thereby promote the region as a venue for a peaceful co-existence fostering cooperation. Barents Cooperation takes place at two levels – inter-governmental cooperation through the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), and interregional cooperation through the Barents Regional Council (BRC).

The BEAC consists of six countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden – as well as the European Union. However, the chairship rotates among the four countries of the Region – Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The BEAC's administrative functions take place at two levels – a Ministerial Meeting, held at the foreign ministers level after the two-year chair period, and meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials between the Ministerial Meetings, at which the work of the BEAC is organized. In addition to its member countries, the BEAC includes the following as observers: the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Canada, Poland, France, Germany and the United States. At the regional level, the BRC consists of thirteen counties or similar sub-national units from the region. The Chairship of the BRC rotates biennially among its thirteen-member units. The Council convenes twice a year and discusses an agenda prepared by the Regional Committee, which consists of civil servants from the member countries.

The following map shows the Barents region as a whole and its thirteen sub-national units:

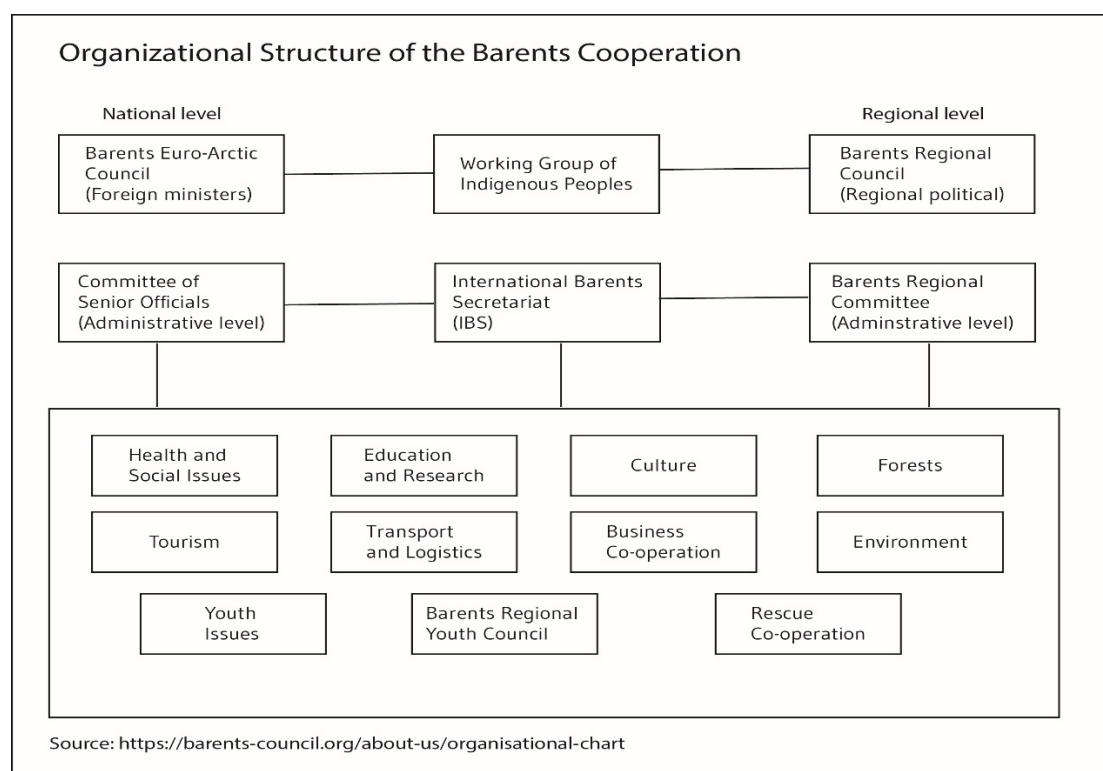


Both the BEAC and the BRC operate through several working groups (WGs). In addition to individual WGs, there are joint WGs, which address areas of cooperation focusing on various topics such as economic cooperation, transport and logistics, Indigenous peoples' issues, environment, education, culture, and health. The Working Groups meet regularly to discuss and develop projects and initiatives within their respective areas. Additionally, there is an independent WG – the WG of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) – consisting of representatives of the Sámi, Nenets and the Vepsians from their respective organizations. The WGIP has a special status and actively contributes to discussions and decision-making processes, particularly in matters related to Indigenous rights, culture, and sustainable development. The WGIP plays an advisory role in both the BEAC and the BRC, and has access to all other WGs. The Chair of the WGIP is a member of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) and the Barents Regional Committee.

Barents cooperation within the framework of the BEAC and BRC is supported by a permanent international secretariat based in Kirkenes, Norway. It was established in 2008 to secure coherent and efficient Barents cooperation. The Secretariat is responsible for coordinating activities, providing administrative

support, facilitating communication, and assisting in the implementation of decisions and projects.

Structure of the BEAC and BRC



As shown in the diagram, the BEAC and the BRC cooperate closely with each other. This collaboration works to strengthen regional integration, improve living conditions, and promote sustainable development in the Barents Euro-Arctic region. Some key areas of Barents cooperation furthered through the Barents Euro-Arctic institutional set-up are discussed in what follows:

Sustainable development: Barents cooperation aims to promote sustainable economic, social, and environmental development in the region. Through the efforts undertaken by its various WGs, the cooperation has included enhancing infrastructure, energy cooperation, tourism, and cultural exchanges. However, the region’s unique environmental conditions are taken into consideration while taking actions in these areas. The collaborative projects address environmental challenges, including pollution, climate change, and conservation of biodiversity. Sharing information through collaborative projects improves the understanding of environmental issues and promotes sustainable practices.

An inclusive regional governance: The BEAC facilitates dialogue and cooperation between regional and local authorities, Indigenous peoples, stakeholders and civil society organizations. Thus, the cooperation aims to offer an inclusive forum for a range of voices in order to strengthen democracy, human rights, and good governance practices in the Barents Region.

People-to-people contacts: Cooperation in the Barents supports initiatives that promote interaction, exchanges, and mutual understanding among the people of the Barents Region. This includes educational and youth programs, cultural events, sports cooperation, and joint research projects.

Cross-border cooperation: The cooperation in the Barents Region encourages collaboration on a wide range of issues across national borders, including economic development, transportation, healthcare, emergency preparedness, and environmental protection. It facilitates practical cooperation through various working groups and joint projects.

All in all, cooperation in the Barents has been instrumental in promoting regional stability, good governance and inclusive decision-making, economic development, environmental protection, and Indigenous rights in the region. By fostering dialogue, collaboration, and joint initiatives through its various WGs, cooperation fostered by the BEAC has made significant strides in addressing common challenges and harnessing the potential of the region.

For more on this, read...

Joenniemi P, 'The Barents Euro-Arctic Council' in A Cottey (eds), *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan 1999) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27194-8_3.

