

FROM THE HISTORY OF CULTURAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE MURMANSK REGION AND THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES AND FINLAND (1985 – 2008)

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Introduction

Culture has always been one of the most neglected aspects of the critical analysis of cross-border cooperation. It is the least studied and least understood aspect of international cooperation. That's why it is clear that the study of culture and cross-border cooperation is needed now. The subject of this article is cultural cooperation between the Murmansk region, the Scandinavian countries and Finland. This article will examine cooperation in the field of libraries and literature studies, and cooperation in the exhibition and management of the museums within this Region.

Cultural cooperation between the Murmansk region, the Scandinavian countries and Finland has a long tradition. There were also extensive contacts among the inhabitants of the region throughout recent history; however, these contacts were greatly reduced after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Additionally the Murmansk region was one of the areas where the "Cold war" was extremely cold. During that period contacts across the Soviet border were almost non-existent. Nevertheless, the Scandinavian countries, Finland and USSR have had, since the beginning of the 1960s, contacts within the framework of Calotte cooperation, the so-called "Calotte Peace Days" where people from the northern provinces of the Nordic countries and from the Murmansk region discussed matters of mutual interest. Cultural contacts were traditionally promoted by cooperation in twin-cities projects and so-called "societies of friendship," such as the Society "USSR - Norway".

A new impulse toward international contacts between the Murmansk area and its neighbours was shaped by the reorganization and democratization of all spheres of life in the USSR in 1980s. Inter-

national contacts became more democratic and free from ideological contradictions. In 1987, the leader of the Soviet state Mikhail Gorbachev visited Murmansk and made an important speech outlining large areas of cooperation in the North. After that statement northern regions of the Soviet State started to create more intensive contacts with northern provinces of the Nordic countries.

One of the significant events of this period was the International Conference of the Northern Calotte countries on the theme: "Role of libraries in strengthening the peace and good-neighbour relations of the Northern Calotte countries" which was held in Murmansk in 1989. Delegates included 62 foreign representatives and more than 300 Russians.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and evolving reforms in Russia, there have been significant changes in international attitudes in northern Europe. The Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Torvald Stoltenberg presented the idea of Barents Cooperation in 1992. The main goal was to create stability in an area where earlier there had been 'a cold war zone'. In 1993, the Foreign Ministers of the Nordic countries and Russia signed the Kirkenes Declaration formalizing international cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). The Kirkenes Declaration emphasized the importance of cooperation on a broad range of issues including cultural contacts.

The establishment of the Barents region was a practical attempt to make use of a new opportunity to forge lasting cooperation across borders that were previously closed. It was the beginning of the most successful period of cooperation within the region. Participation of the Murmansk region in the projects of BEAR has become a powerful stimulus to the development of cultural contacts with northern countries. Traditionally, international cooperation was governed from the capital of each country, which has been the pattern even when the activity was carried out on regional level. However what was unique about Barents cooperation was the strong role of the regions themselves in decision-making.

Most of the cultural interaction between the Murmansk region, the Scandinavian countries and Finland has been in projects involving sports (18%), libraries and literature (18%), small local projects (14%), and arts and needlework (9%). Despite being given a high regional

priority, the level of museum activity (2%) and theatre production (2%) was relatively low.¹

Cooperation in the field of libraries and literature

Undoubtedly one of the main areas of cooperation in the field of international cultural cooperation could have been through libraries. However, in the initial stage, the connections were not made. The problem was as follows - library business management in Scandinavia was the responsibility of the Department of Education, while library business management in Russia was the responsibility of the Department of Culture. It was therefore practically impossible to include any exchange between libraries into a plan of cooperation².

A new stage in library contacts development started at the beginning of the 1990s with the acceptance of a set of agreements and documents allowing libraries to conduct many different kind of activities at the international level.³ At this stage, libraries played a greater role in the distribution and preservation of information about cooperation in "BEAR"; and there were Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish literature festivals, as well as book-exchanges between the provincial libraries of Sweden, Finland and Norway. This has been carried out on a contractual basis.

The most significant projects within the Murmansk region are the following: the training of managers on culture, "Arctic diploma"; a project of the Central Library System (CLS) of Pechenga region, "Northern Neighbour"; projects with the participation of the Murmansk regional scientific library, "Barents library school"; the "Lappin bibliography"; the Norwegian and Russian library information service in frontier territories (NORU); and the project of the Murmansk regional children's library, "Cloudberry glade". There are also a number of other projects.

When summarizing cultural cooperation in the Barents region, it is necessary to pay attention to the most effective form: youth literary

¹ Training by business. Northern cooperation in the field of culture of the countries of Barents region. The collection of materials. National library of Komi republic; Davidova L.V., Latkina L.I., Otvetstven. Responsible for issue Miftakhova O.R., Syktyvkar, 2004. – p.22.

² State archive of Murmansk region. – F.935 - □.1 - D.1454 - p. 139.

³ The federal law "About library activities". 1993. Art.13, p.9.

camps in BEAR. Since 1994 the youth of the Barents region have been mastering the elements of literary craft under the direction of writers, teachers and librarians. The Literary camp is a part of a project entitled “The Literature in BEAR” which takes place annually in one of the participating countries. The main idea is to interest the youth of BEAR countries in communicating with each other, to promote creative expression in the arts, to develop literary abilities, and to help them realize that they belong to a universal cultural heritage.⁴.

The project NORU was created in 2003. The project included: Finnmark provincial library, the library of Sør-Varanger commune (Kirkenes), Troms library (Tromsø), Deutschman library (Oslo) from the Norwegian side; Murmansk State Regional Universal Scientific library (MSRUSL) and the central library of Nickel from the Russian side. In October 2004, according to that project, two Murmansk librarians had the opportunity of a visit Sør-Varanger and Finnmark provincial libraries, and in October, 2005 two librarians from Norway paid a return visit to Murmansk. Within the framework of the project, both Norwegians and the Russians had the opportunity to become acquainted with classical and modern Russian literature and various literary traditions within Russia.

Since 2005, a large-scale point of contact has developed connected with the project “Electronic library and Culture without borders”. It has just recently been completed. It was connected with the special sector on culture for the Barents “Information Portal” entitled “Pass into the Barents region culture”. Many cultural organizations showed an interest in participation and assisted in the realization of the project.

Pechenga and Severomorsk CLS also cooperate with the National Academy of Northern Norway in the project “Northern Neighbour”. Within this project there was a four-day international seminar for leaders and a meeting with Norwegian writer Torvald Sundom. In 2000, actors and puppeteers from the central children's library of Nickel visited the festival of puppet theaters of the Barents region in Rovaniemi Finland. The Lappin Council of the Finnish city of Juka-Joki, under the arrangement and with the support of the director of Pechenga CLS organized a mobile Lappin literature exhibition which

⁴ Yakovleva N. Even everyone has named a word mum. / Library 2000 □11 p.37-38.

traveled across Norway and visited a number of cities in the Murmansk region⁵.

Readers at the Nickel library have had the opportunity to use funds raised by the Kirkenes library for meetings with Norwegian journalists, ecologists, representatives of female delegation, musicians, and clerics. Readers have become acquainted with T. Henriksen and K. Bri's photo-exhibitions and with an exhibition of the knitted products of N. Myst.

In 2002 the library project "Youth of Severomorsk, on the way to the world culture" received funding from the Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes with a grant of 20,000 Norwegian Kroner⁶.

Cooperation between museums of Murmansk region, the Scandinavian countries and Finland

When focusing on the cooperation of museums in the region of the Barents Sea, it is necessary to note, that from a beginning in the 1990s there have been active exchanges of exhibitions. In September, 1990 there was an exhibition of comic strips "from Kem" held in Murmansk Regional museum of local history. In November of the same year Murmansk Regional museum of local history had an exhibition "Church's utensils and painting of Russian Pomorie" in a museum in Lulea. This was the first time there had been such an exhibition in Sweden and it received a great deal of attention from the media.⁷ In 1992 the exhibition "Applied art of Kola Sámi" was on display in the National Museum in Oslo.

Among past exhibitions in the visual arts there has been an exhibition of works of the young Norwegian photographer M. Torgersrud (November, 2004); an exhibition of the Norwegian artists "The Place under the Sun" (2005); an exhibition of works of the Finnish photographer L. Rautiainen "My forest" (September, 2005); an exhibition of works of the Finnish photographers "Be your Enemy"⁸ (2006);

⁵ Mednikova S.A. Libraries of Murmansk region and Barents Euro-Arctic region: sides of cooperation. / Culture of the North-West – space of new opportunities. – Pskov, 2001. – p.128.

⁶ The grant from northern neighbours. // Severomorsk news. – 2002 - □43. – p.14.

⁷ State archive of Murmansk region. – F. □-935. – O.1. – D.1356. – p.108 – 109.

⁸ Feofanova O. Bifurcation of a soul. /about. Feofanova // Murmansk bulletin. - 2006 - April 29.

an exposition of Sámi decorative -applied art prepared by a Sámi museum of Varangerbotten (September, 2006). In 2006, within the framework of the “Days of Culture of Finland”, the Murmansk Regional museum of Local History opened an exhibition devoted to 100-year anniversary of the opening of the Parliament of Finland.

Museum workers also exchanged information and became personally acquainted. In the autumn of 1991 museum workers from Rovaniemi familiarized themselves with the work of museums in Murmansk.⁹ Members of the Council of organization “Norwegian Museums of Art and Social History” have visited Murmansk Regional museum of local history in September, 1992. They failed to achieve concrete results, but the director of Murmansk Regional museum of local history, V. A. Pogidaev, stated, at the time, that cooperation in the museum sphere might come to something in the future.

And it did. Employees of Murmansk Regional museum of local history made a trip to see the work of their colleagues in northern Norway. In April, 2002 representatives of these museums visited Murmansk Regional museum of local history. Then a decision on cooperation was made under the project “The Restoration after the War, A Time of Great Hopes, 1950-1960” and an exhibition with funds from the museums of Finland and Norway was opened within the framework of this project.

Since 1999 museum workers from northern Norway have taken part in conferences in Murmansk Regional museum of local history. For example, Norwegians participated in the 28th scientific-practical conference “Indigenous people of the North and Archeological and ethnographical researches” in 2001. Film-festivals of Swedish and Norwegian films are held in Murmansk Regional museum of local history.

The territorial department of Murmansk Regional museum of local history in Lovozero, the museum of a history in Polarniy, the museum of Red Banner Northern fleet in Murmansk also participate in the international cooperation and exchange of exhibitions with museums in Sweden, Norway and Finland.

The Murmansk Regional Art Museum also cooperates with museums in the Scandinavian countries and Finland: exchanging ex-

⁹ State archive of Murmansk region – F. □-935. – □.1. – D.1390. – p.2.

hibitions, concerts, and literary evenings with the participation of Norwegian artists and writers. In September, 2007 in Murmansk, within the framework of Days of the Swedish Culture, a number of exhibitions of works of artists from Lulea and a lecture about these art-projects was carried out.

Difficulties and possibilities of cooperation

A great number of difficulties still interfere with the development of cultural cooperation in the region of the Barents Sea. First of all, there is not any major economic interest in developing cultural cooperation on a large scale. That's why it is easy to make small agreements, but then no one seeks to do anything to move them forward. The lack of financing of culture within the Russian Federation also has a dramatic effect on what is possible and seriously complicates the realization of joint arrangements. Besides, Russian managers on a municipal level do not see their role as able to act independently in the sphere of international cooperation and quite often try to solve all problems at a higher level. This handicaps the development of regional cultural cooperation. In spite of the fact that foreign partners have become used to difficulties of a bureaucratic character, typical for Russia, this factor continues to reduce the efficiency of international cooperation.

High customs duties also cause problems when moving equipment across the border, complicating the realization of projects and increasing their cost. It is also necessary to note that in small towns and cities there are not enough people speaking foreign languages, especially the Scandinavian ones. In Scandinavia there are also only a few people who know Russian well enough to develop a continuing dialogue with their Russian counterparts. But despite these continuing difficulties there will still be the need and the desire for cross-border exchanges throughout the Barents region.

The objectives, which could guide Barents cultural cooperation in the future, will be realized through the following priority activities: networking and training programmes for cultural actors in the Barents Region; cooperation and exchange in the fields of arts and culture; promotion of the traditional cultures of the indigenous peoples in the region; developing information exchange both internally and externally using new technologies; creating different kinds of new cultural

meeting places where people can interact, particularly the youth of the region.

The development of cultural life may very well serve the social and economic development in the Region. That is why one essential aspect of the cooperation is to increase contacts and develop creative partnerships between the cultural sector and other sectors such as business and industry and research and education. For instance, the film industry and tourism represent a great potential in the cultural sector.

It is necessary to strengthen cultural identities in the BEAR and ties between regional entities, to further develop cultural cooperation in the Region as a part of the implementation of the Northern Dimension Policy and in interaction with other international structures, particularly the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the Council of Europe.

Cultural cooperation and “Northern Dimension”

Speaking about cooperation in the Barents region, we should mention the initiative of EU called “Northern Dimension”, which was considered as an effective way to enhance cooperation in different sectors including arts and culture. The member of the international organization Barents Press International journalist Sari Pelttari-Heikka said: “Northern dimension wasn't defined very well. The Northern Dimension does not have any secretariat or anything that can promote its ideas. There was not enough funding to make things happen¹⁰.

But nevertheless the EU's Northern Dimension is of utmost importance for the further development of the Russian areas within the Barents Region. The possibilities for cooperation are quite good. The author of the book “Northern Dimension” Markku Heikkilä said: “Russia and Scandinavian countries and Finland are now more and more interested about the North. It is mainly economical interest but with it other connections come. The cultural cooperation will be strengthened”¹¹.

¹⁰ Interview (16 April 2008).

¹¹ Interview (07 April 2008).

Some results of cultural cooperation in the Region

A great deal has happened in the years of cooperation. The different nationalities have learned to work together. Cooperation exists between professionals and between amateurs. Cultural contacts have become more frequent and fruitful. Projects include multilateral and bilateral, unilateral, twin city, and "people to people" contacts such as small organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO's). The experience of cooperation shows that most of the projects are bilateral and are small, low budget people-to-people projects. This is not in line, however, with the idea of one Barents Region.

The projects include activities like sporting events, dance, cooperation in the areas of literature and ecclesiastical affairs, production of films, library and museum cooperation. Ties between cultural sectors of these countries gradually have become stronger: there are now cultural days in these cross-border countries, and joint musical projects, the exchange of art exhibitions, joint theatrical productions, presentations of books, the exchange of delegations and common festivals have already become common. A great many of the projects involve activities for children and young people.

The Committee on Culture and Art of the Murmansk Region and the Administrations of Culture of Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian regions hold regular meetings and discuss plans for cooperation. One of the important results of cultural cooperation has been the developing understanding of Russian political parties of the practices and outcomes of various international cultural projects, as well as a better Nordic understanding of changing political and cultural policies in Russia. Cultural contacts in the region of the Barents Sea have not only been extended, but have developed dramatically over a short period of time. Artists' associations and other institutions have started to organize exhibitions and events independently, after years of only being able to network. Gradually, with networking, individuals have become more active so that, with time, the role of the administrations will be to coordinate and finance rather than just to implement projects and networks.

It is still too early to estimate results of the international cultural cooperation in this area, but it is possible to state clearly that cultural cooperation is capable of influencing positively a political climate in the cooperating countries. Xenophobia and intolerance is being over-

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come by close cooperation and open dialogue. I state the belief that the Barents cultural cooperation can work as a model for areas where a cross-border co-operation is built on trust and good will. I will end by quoting the Russian proverb: “A close neighbour is better than a remote relative”.