

Thematic Network Update

Discussing & Promoting (Regional) Arctic Cooperation in Russia: Highlights from Karelia in 2014

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On May 23rd, 2014 the 4th International Conference “Innovative and Safe Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region” took place in Petrozavodsk, Russia. The agenda included topics relevant to the topic of cross-border cooperation in BEAR such as issues of (industrial) development in the High North and across the circumpolar North(s). The conference took place following the 11th International Summer School in Karelia (ISSK), and preceded the “Eco-Efficient Project” workshop which reunited experts, practitioners and observers from Russia, Finland, Norway and Canada.

Innovative and Safe Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region

The 4th [annual meeting](#) “Innovative and Safe Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region” was organized in 2014 by the North Center at the Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Science in Petrozavodsk. The event proved to be both topical and interesting considering the political and the global contexts in which it took place. It was therefore ripe for interesting debates and discussions between participants (NRF members and others) with

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different backgrounds coming from many Arctic countries like Russia, Canada, the United States, Finland, Norway, and other states from the European Union like France.

This year's conference was hosted in the middle of heated public debate within both Russian civil society and media over the issue of international economic and political sanctions applied to the Russian government officials and major businesses in Russia by the EU, the US, Canada and other states. These sanctions, being a result of growing international concern for Moscow's foreign policy in the Ukraine, had become a focus for the public debate in Russia by the time the conference took place. Thus, it was without much surprise that the discussions were tainted by the context of international relations. While some participants argued against Western sanctions from a classic hardheaded *Realpolitik* perspective, others presented a more liberal approach arguing for the need to not ignore the implications of such foreign policy decisions on regional cooperation (and economies), and thus long term stability in BEAR and northern Europe.



It was pretty clear from that perspective – based on the realities of globalization – that economic sanctions upon Russia would not and could not be a good strategy to reverse the situation in the Ukraine, and in contrast would have negative repercussions in BEAR cooperation and, in the longer term, on the work of the Arctic Council. Indeed, many participants underlined their concern that sanctions and absence of dialogue with Russia would have on the human security

agenda in the High North. It was often argued that as a consequence of Western foreign policies regarding Russia – which have been projecting throughout 2014 contested stereotypes and speculations about Russian intentions in world affairs, and on Russians in general – security issues and cooperation in the Arctic are likely to be impacted in some way.

A very revealing aspect of the ongoing situation between Russia and the West became quite vivid at the time of the conference: that there is a *need* to ‘depoliticize’ the areas of pragmatic work being done in the North by numerous individuals whose genuine values and human security objectives cannot be substituted with the ones that have been set forth by multiple state and non state actors during the last few months. History and the known value(s) of cooperation in BEAR for example speaks for its vitality that should not be impaired by any political sanctions or restrictions derived from a very controversial ground.

The 4th annual meeting on “Innovative and Safe Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region” has definitely served as a forum and network to pursue discussions between Arctic states on geopolitics and security issues. Engaging dialogue between academics, stakeholders and students in Russia, with translators, is a known pragmatic and efficient way to foster knowledge sharing and network building for enhanced collaboration throughout the Arctic.

11th International Summer School in Karelia (ISSK)

Another important example of knowledge sharing methods between Russians and Arctic states is the [International Summer School in Karelia](#) (ISSK) that was organized for its eleventh year in 2014. The summer school is held at the Petrozavodsk State University in Karelia for BA and MA students affiliated to different Russian and Finnish universities. It is an international joint initiative organized by PetroSU, the University of Lapland, the University of Tampere, the Aleksanteri Institute of the University of Helsinki and the University of Eastern Finland.



This year's week-long intensive course was themed "Sovereignty in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region" and brought together scholars and students from Karelia and other parts of Russia, France, Finland, the United States and Canada. Students were first introduced to the global Arctic in a post-cold war context, with lectures on the world economy, regionalism, theory of international relations, the relationships between transnational corporations and states, and also the geopolitics of energy security. The Arctic region – and mostly BEAR – is feeling the pressure from those abovementioned contexts and actors that appear to be increasingly challenging state sovereignty and national securities, thus fuelling sentiments of insecurity. Thematic case studies were also presented to the students by professors and scholars from the Arctic on different issues and perspectives on sovereignty, borders, national defence, regional economies, governance, and environmental security. The format of the summer school – lectures and interactive participation by the students as well as afternoon breakout working groups – offers an excellent opportunity for students from different regions of the Arctic or elsewhere to work together and learn from lectures and from each other. After being trained for a week, students are asked to submit an article on different sessions of the summer school.

While one of the organizers of the ISSK, Lassi Heininen from the University of Lapland, is the lead of the Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security (TNGS), many lecturers who participated in the ISSK were affiliated to the TNGS. The network therefore is a tool for knowledge sharing on Arctic issues, and has also the potential to interest more students to pursue

higher learning in geopolitics and security. Most of all, through such formats as ISSK, the TNGS creates bridges and academic relationships between Russian students, professors and scholars from Finland and elsewhere, which in our view corresponds to the interest of all Arctic states.



“Eco-Efficient Tourism” in the Republic of Karelia

One of the main characteristics of BEAR is local, regional and cross-border cooperation which, since the mid 1990s, has been promoting people-to-people collaboration from a bottom-up approach and between multiple governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

Launched in 2012, the “Eco-Efficient Tourism Project” is a great example of ongoing (often unnoticed) collaborative measures that strengthen cross-border relations and stability in BEAR. It is implemented through the framework of the Karelia European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument and Cross Border Cooperation (ENPI CBC). Over the last two years, the project has been promoting Nordic-Russian economic and sustainable development cooperation through “green” tourism initiatives across the Republic of Karelia, and with shared Nordic-Russian expertise. Finnish and Russian partners have joined efforts to make the Karelian borderland a more developed and attractive area for the tourism industry.

Organized at the end of May 2014 by the North Center of the Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Science, the [final seminar and field trip](#) of the project took place at the “Denisov mys” center on the shores of Lake Syamozero and at project pilot sites in Karelia. The North Center invited us to participate as a way to get a hands-on experience of the project, its implementation, the current results, and to meet with various Russian, Finnish and Norwegian stakeholders who have been engaged in the project over the last few years. Bellow is a short summary of what we observed at the seminar and on the field trip in various locations of Karelia.



The “Eco-Efficient Tourism Project” was developed around three objectives that are key to developing an attractive and sustainable tourism industry in the Republic of Karelia:

1. Promoting the introduction of eco-efficient technologies for the management of recreational management, and also to be utilized to improve and offer high quality services in important tourist destinations in the Republic of Karelia (Lake Ladoga and Syamozero area). This is to be done in close collaboration with the Finnish partners.
2. In the pilot areas of the project, initiatives should be made to offer a more comfortable, safe and environmentally friendly experience.
3. Introduce and implement measures to improve cross-border tourism through transboundary practices and regional development cooperation.

While at the seminar at the “Denisov mys” center, we got the opportunity to be briefed on the development of the project and the core pilot projects that we got the chance to visit the next day. Below are the pilot projects we were introduced to and visited.

“Dlinny” beach, Essoila settlement on the Syamozero lakeshore



At this pilot site, the project initiated one of the very rare rest stops and beach area for tourists in Karelia. Here the planners aimed to construct a 1-hectare beach, a passage to the beach and a parking area, an information board, lavatories, shelters (with cooking grills), fire pits, and also trash containers.

Kolatselga village

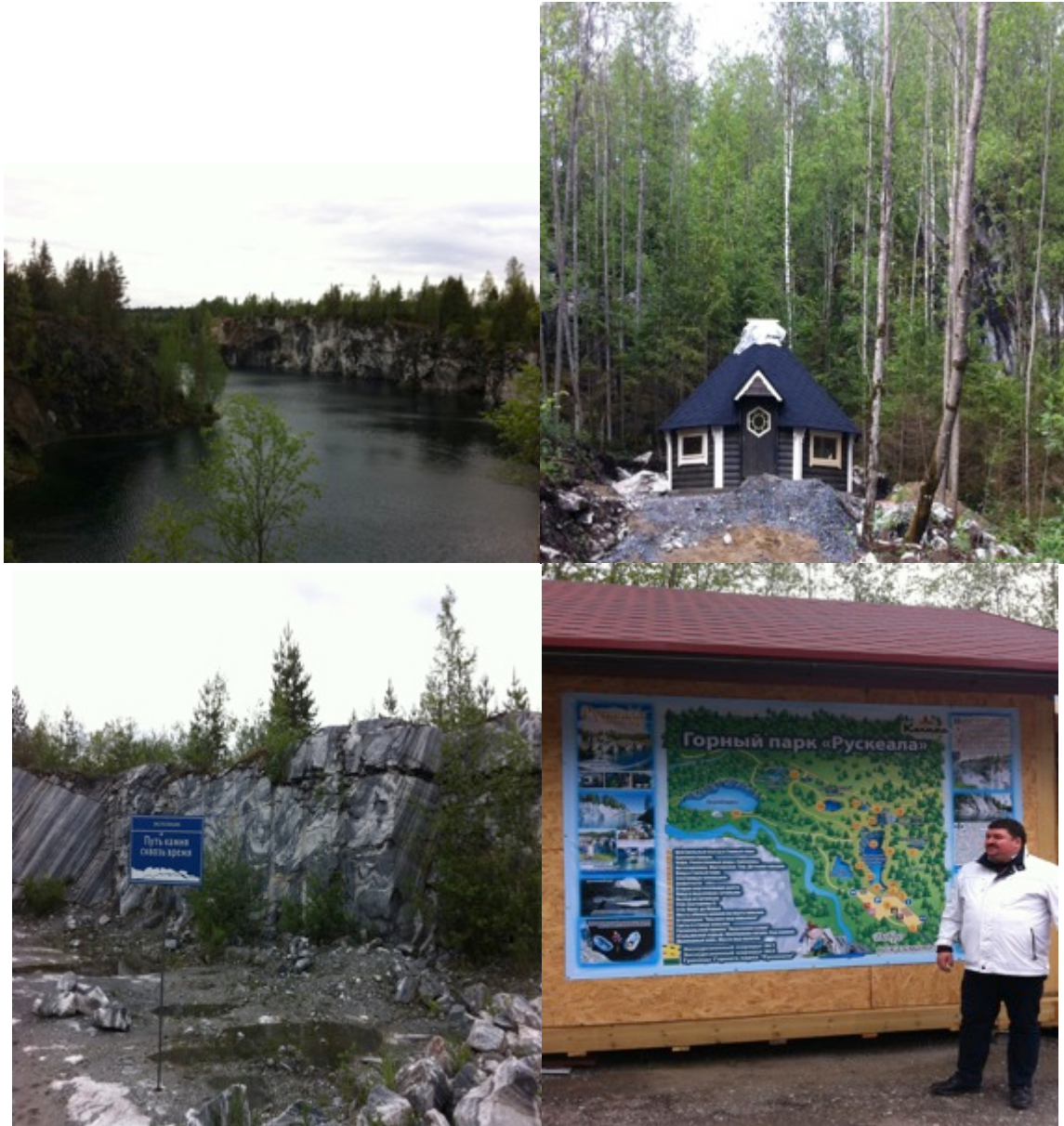
After visiting that first site, the whole group headed to the Kolatselga village which is a popular tourist stop considering its location between the Russia/Finland border and the city of Petrozavodsk and tourist attractions. This was not only an interesting stop to discover the new lavatories for travelers, but also to eat some delicious local Karelian pastries from the café’s bakery (the Kalitki are exceptionally tasty here!). This pilot stop also hosts a convenience store that is again an important added-value for tourists.



Sortavala, Svetloe Lake & Ruskeala Marble Canyon

Leaving the Kolatselga village, we then headed to Sortavala to have lunch at Piypun piha restaurant which is one of the major partners of the “Eco-efficient Tourism Project”. We ended our field trip later that day very close to the Finnish border on the shores of Svetloe lake and the popular tourist destination Ruskeala Marble Canyon where we got the opportunity to visit the canyon grounds and lakeshore to see the new facilities that were introduced through the project.

Upon our arrival at Ruskeala, we immediately saw the new state of the art lavatories, tourist information panels and a tourist information desk. The grounds also host a boutique and restaurant, and tourists can also buy local art by vendors on site (before or after spending some hours touring the marble grounds). Planners also integrated new camping sites on lake Svetloe with new grill cabins close to the canyon. From our experience on site, we take back the impression that the project has had a major impact on Ruskeala by transforming the marble canyon into a very attractive and interactive tourist destination on the Russian-Finnish border. It has also brought together partners to build a sustainable tourist attraction that could eventually serve as a model for other potential sites along the border.



The “Eco-Efficient Tourism Project” is a concrete example of local, people-to-people cooperation that has the potential to reinforce cross-border relations, create closer relationships between regional/international stakeholders, and engage collaboration around a common objective with beneficial impacts on local economies. For some people, having lavatories or road

signs for tourists are pretty common things back home. For others, like in Karelia, building such infrastructures are a complete change of culture that can only be initiated, implemented and sustained through cross-border cooperation for region building and knowledge sharing in such an important borderland between Russia and the European Union. Hopefully more projects similar to this one will be funded and implemented in the years to come.

About “Eco-Efficient Tourism Project”

More information about this project is available at:

- <http://eet-northcentre.ru/en/pilotprojects/>
- <http://eet-northcentre.ru/en/news/5565.html>