

1.2 The Barents Region, a society with shared security concerns in the Arctic

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the 19th century, the Barents Sea area, as a sub-region of the entire Arctic, has been considered one of the most peaceful regions in the world. However, historically, there was high tension between the countries of the northernmost parts of Europe – Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia – and the relationships between these countries have been characterised by their struggle for sovereignty and security.¹

Despite historical tensions and conflicts, in 1993, Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden established the so-called Barents Euro-Arctic Region – covering the northernmost counties of Finland, Norway and Sweden, and the North-western regions of the Russian Federation – based on common interests, and the desire to strengthen shared identities across national borders (e.g., Heininen 2009). With the Barents cooperation in place, interregional cooperation between the northern parts of the Nordic countries and Russia drastically improved over the years and allowed for the creation of a governance framework to improve the human security of its inhabitants. As mentioned by Former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bjorn Thore Godal,

throughout most of history ... a regional identity emerged, a sense of common destiny among peoples sharing the experience of trying to make a living in harsh surroundings.

(Godal 1996)

In practice, this has contributed to foster peace and stability in the region and laid the ground for the creation of a political region. Today, despite growing tension between Russia and the West, specifically the USA and European Union, and the consequent decrease in activities of Arctic cooperation since 2014 as a consequence of the crisis in Ukraine, cooperation in the Barents Region still stands strong in promoting the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the region.

Against this background, it is the aim of this chapter to describe and analyse inter-regional cooperation in the European Arctic. More specifically, the

objective of this chapter is to provide a contextual background describing the major characteristics that led to the establishment of the Barents cooperation. While the assessment of this development for improving human security in the region is mostly left to the following chapters, the last section concludes with some remarks about the specific identity of the Barents Region as a special ‘community’ within the Arctic Region, as well as the importance of the interregional cooperation to strengthen human security in the region.

1 Geography and demography of the Barents Region

The Barents Region covers an area of 1.75 million square kilometres (about three times the size of France), which extends from Lofoten in Norway in the west to the Russian coal-mining town of Vorkuta in the east, and from Lake Ladoga in the Russian Karelia in the south to Nordkapp in the North.² The Barents Region includes lands and territories situated in the northernmost parts of the continental Europe on the southern coast of the Barents Sea, and consists of the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland, and the northwestern regions of the Russian Federation. The Barents Sea, named after a Dutch explorer, Willem Barentsz who undertook three Arctic expeditions searching for the North West Passage in the sixteenth century, does not, however, include the official Barents Region. As a political region, the Barents



Figure 1.2.1 Maps of the Barents Region by the Barents Norwegian Secretariat

area comprises the land along the coast of the Barents Sea but does not include cooperation over the sea. This is mostly due to unsettled sovereignty issues between Norway and Russia in the Barents Sea (Carrillo 1998, 21).

From a geographic perspective, the Barents Region constitutes parts of the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions which share a number of physical features. The Kirkenes Declaration (1993) which created the Barents Euro-Arctic Council notes that these include a 'harsh climate, sparse population and vast territory'.³ To this could be added physical features such as large swathes of Arctic tundra, polar night and midnight sun and areas of permafrost. There are however, a number of differences, particularly between the Nordic countries and Russia, such as living standards, language, culture, religion, history and political traditions (Zimmerbauer 2012, 94). The Barents Region is located at the intersection between eastern and western culture, between Catholic and Orthodox Christianity (nowadays Lutheran and Orthodox), and consequently, the population also shares different languages, cultural and religious traditions. Furthermore, it is a region that is culturally diverse with different livelihood systems.

The Barents Region is a home to 5.23 million people, the Finns, Norwegians, Russians, Swedes and a number of indigenous people groups. Among the inhabitants of the region, the Sami, the Nenets and the Veps account for the indigenous peoples living in the region.⁴ These peoples have much maintained their traditional way of life with different usage of local resources, which were established before nation-states were formed. The most populous of them, the Sami people, are comprised of approximately 70 000–90 000 people living across Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Kola Peninsula, Russia. The Sami communities remain closely attached to their traditional livelihoods including fishing, hunting, reindeer herding and berry picking. It is estimated that 10 per cent of the Sami population is still involved in herding-grazing activities on a fulltime basis. Indeed, their cultural, economic and political development remains a core issue in the region, and for this reason, the protection of the lands and resources of the traditional Sami territory – Sapmi – across the northern borders of the four states of Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia are of utmost importance. In all three Nordic countries, the Sami people have their own assemblies to represent their interest at the state level and in Russia they are recognised as indigenous peoples. Despite state borders, the Sami people have maintained a common history, culture, language and traditions, and their relations have increased since the end of the Cold War through the development of political and cultural cooperation.

In addition, the Veps, who live in the southern part of the Republic of Karelia and in remote parts of the Leningrad and Vologda Oblasts, form another indigenous minority of approximately 8200 people according to the 2002 census (barentsinfo.org, 2017). While agriculture was always at the heart of their livelihoods, most of the traditional occupations of the Veps have today vanished (Kolga 2001). Finally, the Nenets are the most numerous indigenous people in the Russian Federation. In the Barents Region they form a minority of about

41 000 people living in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Arkhangelsk Oblast, Komi Republic and Murmansk Oblast. Today, the majority of the Nenets live in rural communities and are engaged in agricultural sector, in education and health care. In addition, 14 per cent of the Nenets work in reindeer herding, which are still migrating while other have settled in villages. On the whole, the rural population of the Nenets has to count on local renewable resources to fulfill their needs, though it is said that 'the local economic situation has improved thanks to high revenues from oil and gas development' (Tuisku 2004).

In this context, national integration accompanied by modernisation and industrialisation processes have raised tensions and conflicts of interests between peoples and their livelihoods at regional and local levels. While parts of indigenous peoples groups often follow a traditional lifestyle, engaging in activities such as reindeer husbandry and subsistence fishing, there is also a highly skilled workforce in the region, which exploits the rich forestry, mineral, oil, gas, fishing and even diamond resources.⁵ It is significant that not many other parts of Europe have access to the amount of forests, fish, oil and gas and other minerals present in the region. This has raised both growing concerns regarding the environment, and has sparked important economic and business interests in the region. Large mining sites have been exploited for decades in the Barents Region. Recently, the region has also received interest due to the discovery of several important natural gas and oil deposits in the Barents Sea and Petsoran Sea.

All in all, the Barents Region is extremely rich in minerals and while extractive industries cause controversy through their impact on the environment and livelihoods of local communities, they are important for the development of the region. Finally, renewable resources are also important, as Nordic counties of the Barents Region have large hydropower resources and are currently investing in massive wind power energy projects to meet the demand for sustainable energy production and consumption.⁶

All these elements constitute the foundations for economic, social and cultural development in the Barents Region and the markers for its specific identity.

2 The history of the Barents Region⁷

The history of the European Arctic, today the Barents Region, is that of colonisation, state expansion and cooperation. Until the 13th century the states' influence was small, and the region 'was uncharted territory totally without borders, taxation, conscription and other traits of nation states' (Gyllenhaal 2017). Between the 13th and 20th centuries, the region was subject to many geopolitical changes, mostly caused by hegemonic power struggles between different sovereigns. Only indigenous peoples, mostly nomadic, and small groups of hunters and fishermen from the Nordic countries and Novgorod lived within the region. Most of these groups adapted to the environmental conditions, possessed different cultures and interacted to some extent with each other. The absence of any homogenous population, still today, raises

some difficulty for addressing the history of the Barents Region. Yet, the impact of the colonisation process, the conflicts between nation-states and the establishment of cooperation across state borders have forged a unique historical relationship for the inhabitants of the region, which have helped to shape the contours of a distinct society.

The colonisation of the Arctic region approximately began when non-indigenous populations moved in the region and accentuated trade and cultural relations with local communities. During the 14th century, the local population also became the target of royal taxation and the influence of the church increased. The colonisation process led to the establishment of competing areas of authorities between local settlements and the kingdoms of Sweden, Norway and Novgorod.⁸ For indigenous communities, the colonisation of the Arctic also meant their connection to national political structures, including rules of taxation, laws and control over local resources. The colonisation process triggered important changes in the governance of the region, accompanied by major societal transformations fuelled by trade, industrial and cultural developments. Historically, this process accelerated in the more accessible Barents Region during the 16th century while, by comparison, the Canadian Arctic remained relatively isolated until the mid-1900s.

With a focus on territorial control as a key element to strengthen sovereignty, the expansion of nation-states also spurred conflict in the region. Between the 13th and 20th centuries, the countries that today consist of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia were involved in various struggles for supremacy in the governance of the population, land and resources of the region. From 1397 until 1523 all the Nordic countries and nations were governed under one kingdom, the Kalmar Union. During part of this period, Sweden was a European great power. From 1523–1814 Nordic governance consisted of two main states. Denmark ruled Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and Sweden ruled Finland from the 12th century until Russia finally won control in 1809. In 1814, Norway became part of a union with Sweden, lasting until 1905 when Norway gained independence. In 1917, the October Revolution created Soviet Russia. In the same year, Finland was able to use the chaos caused by the First World War and the Bolshevik revolution to declare its full independence. The Second World War, with human catastrophes and losses of inhabitants, meant extensive geopolitical changes in the Barents Region. Despite two wars, Finland remained independent but was partly destroyed and lost large territories to Russia, such as the Petsamo region, which was only regained in 1920. Norway managed to keep its independence as well, even though Nazi Germany occupied the whole country and used it, as well as Petsamo, as a convenient launching point for the failed attack on the Russian city of Murmansk. The Soviet Union was the main target of Nazi Germany in the European Arctic. Supported by the Allies and their material assistance, such as maritime escorts to Murmansk, the Soviet Union survived the siege, though with important casualties.

During the Second World War, the northernmost areas of Europe became a place of great geopolitical significance, especially as the German troops occupied Norway and Svalbard, and were in charge of the Northern Front of Finland (comprising half of the Finnish territory). With the Finnish-Russian peace treaty ceding the Petsamo border region to Russia, Norway found itself beside a closed border with the Soviet Union and with a large military presence next door. After the Second World War, the Kola Peninsula was industrialised and militarised, transformed into a platform for industrial and military activities with a stockpile of both conventional and nuclear weapons as an important part of the military competition between the USSR and the USA. As a consequence, traditional interaction in the northern areas became even more difficult, especially considering that there was almost no access across the border from Finland or Norway into or out of the Soviet Union from the late 1940s until the fall of the Soviet Union. This situation consequently underlined an East–West divide that was practically impossible to overcome until the end of the Cold War.

At the same time, Nordic states began to increase trans-border cooperation to strengthen the integration and development of their northern areas. In 1952, the Nordic Council was established. This inter-parliamentary institution has been instrumental in facilitating contact between peoples and developing a sense of affinity between them.⁹ The Nordic Council's first real contribution was the establishment of a common labour market and a free visa zone for citizens. In order to further cooperation between Nordic states, the inter-governmental forum of the Nordic Council of Ministers was also established in 1971 to complement the activities of the Nordic Council. In 1967, the northernmost counties of Finland, Norway and Sweden also established the North Calotte Committee as a forum for Nordic cooperation in the North Calotte, to further cross boundary exchanges and cooperation in the field of regional policies, local economic development, culture and art.

Following stronger cooperation between Norway, Finland and Sweden, their collective relations with the Soviet Union also evolved. Although tensions between the two blocs remained, possible modes to integrate the Soviet border regions within the inter-regional cooperation of the North Calotte region were discussed. Starting in 1964, cultural meetings such as the North Calotte Peace Days were organised under the auspices of peace and friendship, and to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region. Various forms of cultural co-operation and the increase of individual contacts also accompanied such meetings across the Iron Curtain (Elenius et al. 2015, 341–343; also Heninen 1999a, 1999b, 107–198).

3 The forerunners of the Barents cooperation: peace and environmental collaboration

In 1985, perestroika opened a new window of opportunity to facilitate cooperation across the East–West border. In October 1987, the Soviet leader

Mikhail Gorbachev gave a speech in Murmansk and proclaimed the Arctic a zone of peace. This event was fundamental to the transformation of the region, constituting the beginning of a new phase in the history of its population. As a result of these new opportunities, the organisation of international peace and environmental events, many of which were Nordic-Russian, took place in the summer of 1988 in Murmansk. Thus, in spite of the Cold War cleavage, and due to the rich tradition of regional cooperation such as the Pomor Trade, 'it was during this period that the seeds of the future Barents were sown' (Elenius et al. 2015, 365) and that cooperation in this sub-arctic region begun its journey.

In his speech, Mikhail Gorbachev (Pravda 1987) made concrete initiatives outlining a goal to establish a nuclear-free zone and 'zone of peace' in the (European) Arctic. Among the initiatives were measures that included a restriction of naval and air force activities in the Baltic, Northern, Norwegian and Greenland Seas and the promotion of confidence-building measures in those areas, cooperation on resource development, the organisation of an international conference on Arctic scientific research coordination, and cooperation in environmental protection.

The Murmansk speech was followed by immediate negative and positive reactions as well as a series of diplomatic discussions and negotiations to ensure peace and stability in the region and to increase functional cooperation. Due to long-range and regional pollution, in particular radioactivity, concern for the environment resurged in the 1980s as the subject of a number of different threats in the Barents Region, as well as the entire Arctic (e.g., Heininen and Lomagin 2017). Mostly emanating from the Russian side of the Barents Sea, nuclear safety and air pollution became a significant concern and threat, particularly to Norway.¹⁰ As a result, the environment became a new security issue in the region and the main target of a new international cooperative framework, negotiation for the adoption of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), began in 1989. It culminated in 1991 with the adoption in Rovaniemi of a common document signed by the governments of the eight Arctic states and Arctic indigenous peoples' organisations. This non-binding agreement was the first major political achievement after the Cold War and marked the introduction of an Arctic dimension into Northern European politics.

Building on the AEPS and need to enhance collaboration at the regional level, new governance structures were also created to support this cooperation including the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) established in 1993 and the Arctic Council established in 1996. The first step towards the creation of the Arctic Council occurred in the late 1980s and was accelerated in 1991 after the AEPS was signed. After several years of meeting, the 1996 Ottawa Declaration formally established the Arctic Council as an inter-governmental forum for promoting cooperation among the Arctic States – Canada, the United States, Russia, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Finland – with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities, but excluding

representations of other Arctic inhabitants and sub-national governments. The mandate of the Arctic Council focuses essentially on increasing cooperation in the domain of environmental protection and sustainable development, leaving military issues aside as too sensitive issues.

The creation of these new regional structures set the stage for defining the Arctic region and the Barents Region as distinctive, international political regions (Young 1996; Käkönen 1996; Arctic Council 2004; Griffiths 1988; Heninen 2009). This was also meant to stabilise the post-Cold War Arctic and institutionalise interstate relations in the Arctic region, as well as develop a new governance framework for reinforcing functional cooperation among Arctic countries, regions and sub-regions.

4 The institutionalisation of the Barents Region's cooperation

In December 1991, the Soviet Union finally collapsed, and the international geopolitical landscape changed. With it came the opportunity for the Nordic countries to reassess their foreign policies to work with, rather than against, Russia with the ultimate aim of decreasing military tension from the Cold War period and increasing political stability in the European North, as well as the entire Arctic Region (e.g. Heninen 2009). The Norwegian Foreign Minister, Thorvald Stoltenberg, first proposed the concept of regional cooperation to his Russian counterpart, Andrei Kozyrev as early as March 1992, a mere three months after the Soviet Union was formally dissolved (Stokke and Tunander 1994, 1). His proposal was based on the experience of the Baltic Sea cooperation and the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS). In April 1992, the governors of the Murmansk and Arkhangelsk provinces in Russia were invited to a meeting in Tromsø to discuss possible cooperation. In January 1993, a joint conference of the Foreign Ministers of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia took place in Kirkenes just beside the Norwegian-Russian border. It was at this ministerial meeting that the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, as well as intergovernmental and interregional cooperation on the region, was formally established.¹¹

The Kirkenes Declaration was signed in January 1993 in Kirkenes, and set out the objectives and purposes of the cooperation. It listed 'environmental protection' in line with the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy and 'sustainable development' in line with the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, as the main objectives of the collaboration. Further, while participants of the cooperation indicated 'that the environmental dimension must be fully integrated into all activities in the Region', other areas of cooperation are also listed in the document, such as economic cooperation, science and technology, regional infrastructure, tourism, education and cultural exchange.

In relation to economic cooperation, the Kirkenes Declaration also makes clear that the environment should be preserved and that 'the principles of environmental soundness and sustainability in all fields of economic co-operation'

should be observed. Finally, the cooperation specifically targets the situation of indigenous peoples, notably in support of the restoration and preservation of Nenets and Sami cultures, and stresses that ‘wider human contacts and increased cultural co-operation in the Region should be encouraged to promote constructive co-operation and good neighbourly relations’. Overall, cross-border relations, with an aim to increase mutual confidence, are at the centre of the cooperation.

From a functional perspective, the Barents cooperation operates at different levels, on a dual level structure, which involves both national and regional governments.

Firstly, at the national level, there is the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), an intergovernmental forum with the purpose ‘to serve as a forum for cooperation among the participants’.¹² The BEAC is made up of the Foreign Ministers of member countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the European Union’s Commission. There are also nine countries with observer status: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.¹³ The chairmanship of the Council rotates between Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden with each country holding the chair for two years at a time.¹⁴ For example, for the period 2015–2017 the chairmanship was being held by Russia, and for 2017–2019 it is being held by Sweden.¹⁵ Initially the BEAC met annually, but in recent years, it meets biennially. Between meetings, the Committee of Senior Officials deals with administrative matters. This committee is made up of civil servants from the member states and from the European Commission, and meets regularly to consider progress and to establish working groups on various topics relevant to the cooperation.¹⁶

Second, at the regional level, there is the Barents Regional Council (BRC) as a parallel body for interregional cooperation. While the BRC initially included seven member regions, today it comprises 14 member counties and a representative of the indigenous peoples in the northernmost parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden and northwest Russia.¹⁷ The most recent member to join was the Finnish county of North Karelia, which was approved as a member in November 2016, having held observer status for many years. There are also two organisations with observer status: The Council of Christian Churches in the Barents Region and The Parliamentary Association of North West Russia.¹⁸ With the same purposes as the BEAC, the BRC has a mandate to support and promote cooperation and development in the Barents Region. The purpose of the BRC is also to recognise and share local knowledge and to provide the opportunity to identify and work on cooperative projects. The chairmanship of the Regional Council rotates between the countries in Norway, Sweden, Russia and Finland every two years with the provision that the same country cannot chair both the interregional council and the international council at the same time.¹⁹ The executive body of the BRC is the Barents Regional Committee, which is composed of civil servants from the member counties.

Furthermore, 15 working groups have been established to enhance cooperation on issues relevant to the Barents Region. Each working group is able to enhance cooperation in its area of expertise and coordinates projects across the Barents Region. Some of the working groups, such as the Working Group on Environment and the Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation, are working groups established by the BEAC. Correspondingly, the BRC has established others, such as the Regional Committee on Environment and the Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics. There are also a number of joint working groups, including the Joint Working Group on Energy and the Joint Working Group on Youth.

As part of these, the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) established in 1995 on a permanent basis. It is composed of representatives of the Sami, the Nenets and the Veps of the Barents Region. On a daily basis, the main goal of the WGIP is ‘to secure indigenous peoples’ rights, foundation for trade, society, culture and language through implementation of the Action Plan of Indigenous Peoples’ (WGIP 2017, 7), which constitutes WGIP’s policy development framework.²⁰ The 2017 Action Plan lists different issues and a set of measures to implement in order to secure indigenous peoples’ rights.²¹ With this action plan, the WGIP sets the priorities of indigenous peoples in the region and can advise the BEAC or the BRC when they initiate projects concerning them. Unlike other regional working groups, in addition to its operational role, the WGIP has also an advisory role to both the BEAC and the BRC, which consequently gives it a political dimension. The chair of the WGIP sits also as a member of the Committee of Senior Officials in the BEAC and the Barents Regional Committee, which gives the WGIP a permanent right to attend all meetings organised by the councils. Thus, WGIP constitutes an important platform for indigenous organisations to strengthen their political stance at the regional level, as well as to enhance their cooperation with the national, regional and local authorities of the Barents Region’s countries and counties (WGIP 2017, 7).

5 The development of the Barents cooperation, its achievements and challenges

Those who established the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and signed the 1993 Kirkenes Declaration hoped that cooperation would lead to stability, progress, peace and security throughout the region and eventually promote the wellbeing of the entire population. To celebrate its twentieth anniversary, the Barents countries adopted a new declaration at the Barents Summit in 2013. In the document (Kirkenes Declaration 2013) all states reaffirmed their commitments to the cooperation, which is justified by ‘the important role the Barents cooperation has played in strengthening mutual trust, stability and security in Europe, by joint efforts in northern Europe based on the shared commitment to indivisible and comprehensive security’. Twenty years after its establishment, these renewed statements certainly demonstrate that the

cooperation is still playing an important role in the enhancement of security and cooperation in the region. In fact, as an outcome of this development, the Barents Region is also no longer a periphery of Europe, as it was before 1993, and ‘the demand for cooperation is greater today than ever’ (Kirkenes Declaration 2013).

During these 20 years the geopolitical situation of the Barents Region, as well as the entire Arctic, has significantly changed from confrontation during the Cold War period, when the Barents Sea area was mostly a military ‘theater’, to an international, much more functional, cooperation (see Heininen and Lomagin 2017, 269–274). In the 2010s there are two main developments or tendencies. On the one hand, the Arctic region, with high geopolitical stability, is globalised and impacted by grand environmental challenges, in particular (rapid) climate change, and interests and plans for mass-scale exploitation of natural resources located in the region. On the other hand, there is geopolitical tension between Russia and the West (in particular the USA and the EU) much due to the Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the Ukrainian crisis/war.

However, despite this tension and colder political climate between the Arctic states, the Barents Region’s official and unofficial cooperation remains largely unaffected. Behind this lies Arctic ‘exceptionalism’, as high geopolitical stability in the Arctic remains and is resilient (see Heininen 2016). In fact, it has been suggested that ‘the Arctic to this point remained largely insulated from wider geopolitical issues following 2014 – and in some cases cooperation has deepened’ (Clifford 2017) and contacts between regional and local representatives still goes on (Nilsen 2016a). Compared to the Baltic Sea Region, it was also stressed that in the Barents Region, ‘it is not as high tension’ and that there is ‘good cooperation with Russia on a lot of common areas and issues of importance’ (Nilsen 2016b). As a result, the Barents regional cooperation stands strong (at the moment), and even in this difficult geopolitical context, it continues to promote the development of the region across national borders.

Regarding its achievement, over the last twenty years, the cooperation in the Barents Region has led to the sharing of expertise, technology, finances and other resources which has resulted in a number of improvements to the environment for the benefit of the whole of the region and, as a result, to the security of the people in the region. Although the environmental threats have not yet been completely eradicated (see Chapter 2.1), thanks to the cooperation the threat of major environmental disasters, with all the implications for the environment and for human security, has been dramatically reduced. There have also been a number of cultural, educational and other projects with an aim to bring the people(s) of the Barents Region together, some organised by the formal institutions of the Barents Region, others merely as a result of increased community cooperation. These include exhibitions and festivals, such as the Barents Spektakel 2016, an impressive display of art, film, workshops, seminars, music and sport in the nearby towns of Kirkenes (Norway) and Nikel (Russia); and the Calotte Academy, an annual academic gathering

and travelling symposium for scientific work and open discussion to implement the interplay between science and politics (e.g. Final Report of the 2016 Calotte Academy, Huotari et al. 2016). Other projects include student exchanges, a multi-stage ski race dubbed the 'Tour de Barents' and a health programme specialising in tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS (e.g. Wilson Rowe 2009, 35–52). In 2016, the Ministers of Culture of the member states announced funding for a number of scholarships across the region to foster cultural cooperation.

However, there are, also weaknesses, uncertainties and criticism regarding the Barents cooperation. These notably relate to the fact that cooperation is neither deep enough nor is there a common historical-cultural identity. As Zimmerbaur (2012) argues 'the idea of [the] region as an imagined community is stronger elsewhere than *in situ*'. It can also be questioned how much activities and tasks are currently performed under the auspices of each working groups. The development of new projects to further cooperation is highly dependent on resources and national support, which are manifestly insufficient to support cooperation. Currently, 'the majority of Barents Region consider the current level of financing insufficient for their joint activities' and to finance every day work (BEAC 2015, 7). The main issue in financing the Barents cooperation relates to a 'lack of financial mechanisms that would encompass the whole Barents Region'. This situation 'prevents regional actors from developing geographically-wide projects and leads to unequal access to financial opportunities of different regions' (BEAC 2015, 43). In addition, non-governmental organisations and other civil society actors have also indicated that financial support remains insufficient in supporting small-scale activities (BEAC 2015, 51). Thus, it seems that cooperation could be improved if more funding was made available.

Furthermore, while the working groups and programme developed under the auspices of the Barents cooperation have obtained tangible results in reinforcing cross borders ties and relations, there are still issues that continue to challenge the wellbeing of the Barents population that have not been addressed institutionally. As already mentioned, this includes the grand scale of environmental challenges, in particular the impact of global warming and the development of natural resources located in the region. In addition, whereas the Ukrainian crisis has not affected the Barents cooperation directly, it has strained the economic development of the region and increased political tensions between states, a topic that is largely outside the purview of the Barents cooperation. Thus, any real assessment of the Barents situation cannot be fully examined through the lens of the existing cooperation framework. To this degree, there is an entire human experience that exists beyond the cooperation institutions.

Therefore, while the wellbeing of peoples of the region constitutes the overriding goal of the Barents cooperation, and collaboration has enabled better cross-border relations over the years, there is a continuous need to consolidate cooperation in addressing present and emerging societal challenges. Against this background, the following chapters intend to assess the

challenges faced by the Barents population in relation to several human security issues in order to assess how regional cooperation can address the populations' interests and wellbeing.

Conclusion

Since its establishment, the vision of the Barents Region's cooperation has been 'to improve peoples' living conditions, to encourage sustainable social and economic development, and to have a peaceful and sustainable development in the northernmost part of Europe' (BRC 2014, 6). The Kirkenes Declaration has been the basis for the establishment of a comprehensive framework to ensure functional cooperation in many fields, excluding military-security, such as the environment, economy, human health, tourism and cultural interaction.

Despite occasional tensions between the governments of Russia and the Nordic countries, the contacts between sub-national governments of, and regional capitals in, the Barents Region have remained, and contacts between peoples and civil societies continue to be supported through the institutional mechanisms that have been created for enhancing cooperation in the region (e.g., Nilsen 2016a). This precisely accords to the ultimate aim of region-building with states as major actors – one of the main trends of the post-Cold War Arctic IR and geopolitics (Arctic Council 2004) – i.e. the establishment of the BEAR as an international, cooperative region located in the former military theatre of the Cold War. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that from the point of view of the states, the main objective has been completed, even though other objectives, such as sustainable development require more efforts (Heininen 2009).

In effect, the Barents cooperation continues to operate as an institutional forum to promote dialogue and concrete cooperation with the purpose of strengthening regional stability, sustainable development and the wellbeing of the Barents population. The Barents cooperation is truly an achievement, especially considering the historic context of the Cold War. The borders of the socialist Soviet Union were closed through much of the 20th century, and there was very little contact or cooperation across the national borders of the countries surrounding the Barents Sea, and with the open, democratic Nordic countries in the West. Such an achievement highlights the deep value of, and commitment to, mutually beneficial cooperation across borders. Indeed, for centuries the populations of the Barents Sea area have been closely intertwined through trade and cultural exchanges, as the Pomor Trade era well shows. Behind this, the peoples of the region share several features that were similar, especially for indigenous peoples and settlers, whose families have lived there for centuries. A problem of the past was that there were few, if any, opportunities for those living on either side of the border to meet or to share culture or expertise during most of the 20th century. Despite this, it is evident that the population has established strong relations under the auspices of the Barents cooperation.

As argued, one of the key motives for cooperation between the countries in the Barents Region was the desire to ensure the wellbeing of the population across the borders that separate them by consolidating cooperation in key areas of issues relevant to the region. Despite criticism that the interregional cooperation is not deep enough, or that the region lacks cultural identity or financial resources, the work of the two Barents Councils shows there is an ever-growing amount of cooperation among the countries of, and counties in, the Barents Region. This ranges across diverse sectors such as youth, culture and human health to tourism and transport, and has strengthened the societal bonds of the Barents Region's populations. The sharing of ideas, expertise and resources has led to improvements in standards of living across the region. Alongside the exchange of culture and ideas, higher living standards and increased economic opportunities for all ensures greater levels of economic and political stability which promotes human security.

Every time a project results in the collaboration between previously opponent countries, it leads to greater levels of understanding and cooperation. This form of cooperation is cumulative, and contributes to increased levels of peace and security within the region. While the Barents cooperation certainly faces a number of challenges, it remains an important framework to enhance human security among its civil societies and to strengthen the societal bonds of its peoples. Indeed, the Barents Region is a society with shared human security concerns.

Notes

- 1 For more information about the Barents Region see Olsson et al. (2016), *The Encyclopedia of The Barents Region*.
- 2 www.barentsinfo.org/Barents-region/Facts (visited on 6 October 2016).
- 3 Declaration of Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, Conference of Foreign Ministers in Kirkenes, 11 January 1993.
- 4 www.barentsinfo.org/Barents-region/Facts visited on (6 October 2016).
- 5 Webpage of the Barents Council: www.barentsinfo.org/Barents-region/Facts (visited on 7 March 2017).
- 6 In Norway, nearly 100% of the electricity demand is produced locally with hydro-power in the counties of Nordland, Troms and Finnmark. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Sweden is also investing in major wind power development projects, especially in the counties of Norrbotten and Vasterbotten. While Finland is also following a similar trend, Russia lags behind in term of investment concerning renewable energy.
- 7 For more detailed information about the history of the Barents see Elenius et al. (2015) and Olsson et al. (2016).
- 8 At that time, King Magnus Karl Eriksson jointly ruled the territory of Norway and Sweden but the kingdom remains politically distinct.
- 9 Webpage of the Nordic Co-operation: www.norden.org/en/fakta-om-norden-1/history-of-the-nordic-region/five-welfare-states-in-a-global-world-1920 (visited on 7 March 2017).
- 10 By the time the Soviet Union ended, northwest Russia was the most highly nuclearized region in the entire world. The city of Murmansk was home to the Russian Northern Fleet, which controlled large numbers of nuclear submarines, and there

were estimated to be at least 270 nuclear installations, both military and civil situated in the region. There had been very little investment in the region and little attention paid to quality or to safety during the final years of the USSR, which meant that the nuclear installations posed a huge environmental threat to the entire region.

- 11 Declaration Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region Conference of Foreign Ministers in Kirkenes, 1993.
- 12 Annex to the Kirkenes Declaration Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region Conference of Foreign Ministers Kirkenes, Norway, 11 January 1993 Terms of Reference for the Council of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, art 1.
- 13 Administrative Manual for the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 17 June 2008.
- 14 Administrative Manual for the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 17 June 2008.
- 15 Webpage of the Barents Council: www.barentscooperation.org/en/Barents-Euro-Arctic-Council/Chairmanship (visited on 4 March 2017).
- 16 Administrative Manual for the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, June 17 2008
- 17 The Barents Region includes the following counties or their equivalents:
 - in Finland: Kainuu, Lapland, Oulu Region and North Karelia.
 - in Norway: Finnmark, Nordland and Troms
 - in Russia: Arkhangelsk, Karelia, Komi, Murmansk and Nenets.
 - in Sweden: Norrbotten and Västerbotten.
- 18 Barents Regional Council, Barents Regional Committee Terms of Reference Adopted by the Barents Regional Council on November 14 2012 in Oslo, Norway.
- 19 Barents Regional Council, Barents Regional Committee Terms of Reference Adopted by the Barents Regional Council on November 14th 2012 in Oslo, Norway.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.

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