

Education defines the future of cross-border cooperation in Europe Arctic

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“The future is closer than you think”

International Business DP student

Lapland UAS strategy as one of the core elements emphasises the Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) expertise that derives from long-term successful involvement in the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation activities. It is important to incorporate education on CBC issues in study programmes for university students, who potentially will ensure building future CBC community that deals with shared challenges in northernmost regions of Europe Arctic.

The cooperation within EU and with EU's external borders *aim at managing issues* that go beyond of border regions within their nation-states. These issues may include economic and social development, cross-border employment, trade across borders, the environment. It provides Cross Border Cooperation with possibilities to utilize borders for regional development as well as for exchange in economic and cultural fields. Cultural and economic similarities as well as social motivation is a substantial reason to overcome existing borders. The driven motivation for cross-border cooperation has gone through several transformation steps of being at first to harmonize national differences to foster regional development.

Furthermore, the globalization process changes the border perception and opens discussion for understanding borders as institutions, processes and symbols. Rather than focus strictly on

physical borders, the border perspective is about the everyday cooperation among people of border regions.

One of the vivid example of CBC is the Barents Euro-Arctic region. It is a unique place in terms of geographical location, climate zone, nature and the existence of border regions. Furthermore, social, economic development and cultural exchange has historical feature in the Barents Euro-Arctic region where people-to-people cooperation is at place. The cooperation within the region among countries is driven by common interest and common challenges. Whether, the borders between the member state of the Euro-Arctic region is 'blurred', the EU's external border e.g with Russia is a visual case of the 'valuable use' of borders to cooperate. Thus, the CBC offers new opportunities for cooperation across borders in order to solve problems and exchange knowledge.

Understanding the essence of CBC, its importance as well as positive outcomes is a crucial feature to promote cross-border cooperation among a society on both sides of the border in order to sustain results and develop it further. One of the main responsibility of regional development authorities and educational institutions is to ensure the transfer of knowledge and rise awareness on CBC to young population in the Barents Euro-Arctic region, who are in a matter of fact students now and decisions makers in the future. Therefore, educating young population with common challenges, opportunities of the region along with financial instruments available would motivate them to participate in the regional development.

In order to bring necessary education and the knowledge on cross-border cooperation issues, it is important that regional actors and authorities collaborate together with one common aim. Such cooperation for many years exists between Lapland UAS and Kolarctic CBC programme leaders under Regional Council of Lapland. It is already a tradition to carry out a joint workshop called "Cross-border cooperation in the Barents region: defining a problem- to find a solution" for the first year students who study International Business IB at Lapland UAS. Usually IB students come from different places from all over the world. Coming from different countries and different cultures, it is important that they gain good insight of the region where they study and possibly will work or run a business in the future. During the workshop students learn about the Barents region and Kolarctic CBC funding programme. Key questions addressed are why is CBC needed, how does CBC operate in the Barents Region as a diverse space with common problems. Furthermore, the group discusses Kolarctic CBC programme

and existing problems of the region versus needs. Ones introduced to common region problems such as economic, environment, infrastructure and education and research, student group gets a task to identify more specific problems, to analyse a cause and effect and propose seven steps to solution of the problem. Students are advised that solutions must always change current situation for the better. Facilitators of the workshop have observed that in a creative workshop discussion process students come up with the solutions that if realised would really bring improvements for the better in entire region.

But what are the most common problems identified by the students and solutions to those problems? Obviously, the most common concern for young people is the employment after graduation and opportunity to stay and integrate in the region. Even coming from different countries, they demonstrate a real interest in the Barents region and the future of the Arctic region. With the gained understanding on cross-border cooperation students realise that there are common problems across the borders that need solution. Young people are strongly concerned with the future development as they understand that “the future is closer than you think”, as stated by one of IB students during the workshop. It is very important to take into account the opinion and vision of young people, which rather often is ignored in the decision making processes at the regional level. Many problems were identified and many interesting solutions were proposed during the workshop. One student group identified the following. “From a huge list of problems, our team concentrated on economic problem: migration of young and educated work force to south. We went through seven steps approach to define a problem and find solution. As the solution of the problem, we found out that it is necessary to provide advantageous conditions for starting a business. It will lead to new workplaces and development of the business in the North in total. The result can be achieved better by joined forces of all Barents countries. It is also a good opportunity for young people from Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia to get a job. Mostly, these activities are directed to young people who have already graduated from the university. The goal we would like to reach by solving this problem is decreasing migration of young and educated people to south. Objective fits to the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 Programme, because it will contribute to economic and social development, support cooperation projects, where partners are looking for joint solution to common problems” (International Business student team, 2019). Sometimes it is difficult to reflect actual atmosphere of an event. However, workshop activities were fulfilled with such a positive energy of participants and their excitement about this unusual learning of the region seemed to increase their interest in further discovery of the Barents CBC regional activities.

The group suggested that the best would be to learn about the region by travelling and visiting all four cross-border regions: from Finland to Sweden and Norway, and further to Russia Arctic. Virtual travel was made during the workshop, probably next thing would be to carry out an actual study tour in Barents region. It would be the best way to understand the region and discover variety of opportunities for the business ideas.

These kind of findings and overall workshop results demonstrate that young people can contribute to the regional development in many ways with ideas, future vision and different actions. By gaining relevant education on CBC issues, they become more aware of the opportunities in the region and they are forming Arctic human capital as the most relevant actors of the future developments. It cannot be stressed enough that there is a need to increase CBC competence among young graduates and education is the key factor that defines the success of CBC cooperation in the future in Barents and circumpolar Arctic region. In years to come we will witness the role of young people and university graduates in overall regional development activities, that derive from the efforts of education of the future generation implemented by the education institutions in the close cooperation with the working life. Collaboration in this particular case between Lapland UAS and Kolarctic CBC programme representatives is mutually beneficial. University gets a real life into the classroom process, while Kolarctic CBC authorities can understand the views and potential of young people. Authorities also can see that with increased CBC competence students can become future decision makers and contributors to so important task as CBC cooperation development. Programme people understand that the better this young generation is educated on CBC matters the better joint project ideas across the borders will be implemented. With this view, both Lapland UAS and regional CBC authorities express an interest for even more close collaboration in the future. European experience of cross border cooperation (CBC) has proven itself as an effective tool for supporting stability and prosperity of border territories (Shlapeko, 2017), therefore in conclusion, our vision is that in the future there is more education on CBC matters in the Lapland UAS programmes that will ensure building a responsible and sustainable cross-border community in the Arctic region.

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