

# Barents Culture Report

*An analysis of the situation for cultural life in northern  
Finland, Norway, and Sweden and proposals for measures  
that can be taken for increased international cooperation*



A report by *Eric Sjöström* commissioned by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council



Opening of the festival Barents Spektakel 2023 in city square in Kirkenes. Photo: Bernt Nilsen. "Adriana Mater" by Kaija Saariaho from Norrlandsoperan in Umeå with Jonah Spungin, Emma Sventelius and Norrlandsoperans Symfoniorkester, conductor Ville Matvejeff. Photo: Mats Bäcker.

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An analysis of the situation for cultural life in northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden and proposals for measures that can be taken for increased international cooperation

The report can be downloaded from:  
[barents-council.org/working-groups/culture](https://barents-council.org/working-groups/culture)



The author of the report, *Eric Sjöström*, has been working for many years as an analyst and consultant in the cultural sector via his company Erda konsult AB. Clients are both municipalities and regions as well as publicly funded, non-profit, and private cultural organisations mainly in Sweden, but also in the Nordics. Eric Sjöström is also an active board member and interim manager in the cultural sector.

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# Background

## *Barents Culture Report – an analysis of the situation for cultural life in northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden and proposals for measures that can be taken for increased international cooperation.*

The chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Barents Regional Council rotates every second year between Barents countries on the national level and regions on the regional level. The interim Trio Presidency of BEAC of Finland, Norway, and Sweden follows the Finnish Presidency 2021 – 2023 for a one-year period, unless otherwise decided. North Karelia holds the chairmanship of the Barents Regional Council 2023 – 2025. The focus of these organisations is on strengthening the cultural life and societies in the Barents region.

A vibrant cultural life is important for people to settle in the region. Culture is also a central arena for meetings between people across borders in the Barents region, and thus contributes to good relations. Several strong cultural networks in the north contribute to contact and strengthened relations between the countries.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit the Barents region hard, through closed communities and closed borders. This has not only affected the individual cultural practitioner but also led to a halt in many activities. Not only have the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic affected cultural life, but also the fact that since February 2022 there has been a war in a neighbouring country, and that there is an economic recession in the rest of the world.

## The assignment

There is currently no systematic overview of the pandemic's impact on cultural life in the Barents region, nor the repercussions that war and the economic situation have had. A good comprehensive knowledge base is one of several key prerequisites for further development and strengthening of cultural cooperation in the Barents region.

The purpose is also that the various actors in the Barents region – its policymakers, the public, and the professionals working within the field of culture – should have a basis for discussions in their efforts to strengthen cultural life in the Barents region and to strengthen increased international cooperation.

The aim of the report is to provide an overview of the impact that Covid-19, the war, and the economic situation

has had on the cultural institutions and the professional creators active in the Barents region. It is desirable that the analyses show nuances and geographical differences, and that the indigenous peoples' perspectives are included.

The report will contribute to strengthening and establishing a good knowledge base about the situation for the cultural life. While the purpose is to examine the repercussions of the pandemic, Russian war and economic downturn, it also focuses on measures to “build back better” when it comes to cultural life and cross-border cooperation.

The analysis is based on official national reports and research on the effects of Covid-19 on the cultural sector, combined with interviews and surveys aimed at stakeholders, such as cultural institutions and professionals.

The report contains on an overall level:

- Description of the Barents region, the Barents Cooperation, and facts about the regional cultural life in the various counties in Finland, Norway, and Sweden
- Summary of official reports on a national and regional level regarding the effects of the pandemic on the cultural sector in the Nordic countries
- Interviews with and survey responses from various stakeholders and actors within the cultural sector in the northern parts of Finland, Norway, and Sweden
- Analysis and proposals for efforts and recommendations to increase international cooperation in the Barents region

## Questions

Two major issues are the underlying themes of the report:

- What does the current situation look like for cultural life and how is it affected by the pandemic, the proximity of a warring country, and economic downturn?
- What does international contacts and cooperation look like, and what efforts would be needed to strengthen international cooperation?

The purpose of the report is to describe the situation today for businesses/organisations, what challenges and opportunities exist for the cultural sector right now,

what international cooperation looks like, what obstacles exist to increased international collaborations, and what efforts need to be made for increased international cultural cooperation.

The questions are divided into three parts:

- The current situation
- International operations
- Needs and strategies going forward

## Method

For the qualitative part of the report, the investigator has conducted several interviews with professionals in the cultural field and sent out questionnaires to many cultural activities, and conducted workshops and study visits at a number of locations. The different methods are part of a knowledge base that maps the situation of cultural life in the Barents region after a pandemic, in an economic recession, and during the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine. In total, in total 228 people have participated through conversations, discussions, and survey responses.

The interviews are made with people who in many ways represent different areas of the cultural life in the Barents region of Finland, Norway, and Sweden. There are representatives from cultural institutions and independent businesses, but also individual artists and cultural workers. They were selected because they represent different areas of the cultural sector and can therefore provide different insights and perspectives on the survey's who questions.

The survey has been sent out to representatives of cultural life in the northern parts of Finland, Norway, and Sweden. In addition to forming the basis for an analysis of the current situation, the survey also includes proposals for efforts to strengthen and increase international cooperation. The survey was made in three languages: Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish.

The investigator has also conducted several workshops and group discussions with a number of invited representatives for the various areas of cultural life.

Workshops/study visits have been carried out in the following locations:

- Finland: Council of Oulu Region and Culture House Korundi in Rovaniemi
- Norway: at the festival Barents Spektakel (Barents Spectacle) in Kirkenes, and the Festspillene i Nord-Norge (Arctic Arts Festival) in Harstad
- Sweden: Havremagasinet (Oats Warehouse County Hall of Arts) in Boden, Kulturväven (Väven Cultural Centre) in Umeå, and the Sara Kulturhus (Sara Cultural Centre) in Skellefteå

In the survey, people have been asked to give their views on the situation today regarding the businesses/organisations, what challenges and opportunities exist for the cultural sector right now, what international cooperation looks like, what obstacles exist to increased international collaborations, and what efforts need to be made for increased international cultural cooperation. Through this survey, the cultural activities of the Barents region have contributed by analysing the current situation and contributed with their thoughts about development.

To carry out the assignment, the investigator has had a steering committee and a project group, representing the client, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

- Steering committee: Sverre Miøen, Ministry of Culture, Norway; Joakim Sandberg, Region Västerbotten.
- Project group: Jasmina Bosnjak, Troms and Finnmark County; Pia Brinkfeldt, Region Västerbotten; Auli Suorsa, Council of Oulu Region.

*With Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, Barents cooperation with Russia was suspended in March 2022. On 18 September 2023, Russia announced their withdrawal from the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.*



Some of the participants at the workshop in Oulu for the Barents Culture Report.

# The Barents region

The name Barents region was launched in 1993 as a political ambition to establish international cooperation after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Barents region consists of the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Northwest Russia. Sometimes the area is also referred to as the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

The geographical area covers 1.75 million km<sup>2</sup> of which about 75% is in Russia, which also has the same proportion of the population. The Barents region has six million inhabitants, including several indigenous peoples: Sámi in all the four Barents countries, and Nenets and Veps on the Russian side.

The assignment was originally also to report on the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on international cooperation across borders in the Barents region. The development, both with economic decline and the war in Ukraine, made it natural and more relevant to change the layout of the survey to also include those aspects.

## Countries and regions that are part of the Barents region\*:

### Norway:

Nordland County, Troms and Finnmark County

### Sweden:

Västerbottens County, Norrbottens County

### Finland:

Lapland, Northern Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, North Karelia

### Russia:

Murmansk Oblast, Arkhangelsk Oblast, Komi Republic, Republic of Karelia, Nenets Autonomous Okrug

*\* With Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, Barents cooperation with Russia was suspended in March 2022. On 18 September 2023, Russia announced their withdrawal from the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.*

## Geography

The region stretches from Nordland in Norway in the west, to Novaya Zemlya and the Ural Mountains in the east, and south to the Gulf of Bothnia and the great lakes Ladoga and Onega. The Barents Sea borders the Norwegian and Greenland Seas in the west, the Arctic Sea in the north, and the Kara Sea in the east. The Barents Sea is divided between Russia and Norway as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Barents region is known for its rich natural resources, including forests, fish, minerals, oil, and gas. These resources play a significant role in the economic and business development of the region. The region's remote location and harsh climate pose challenges, but also provide opportunities for industries such as mining, fishing, and energy production.

The region experiences the midnight sun phenomenon, where the sun remains visible for 24 hours a day from May to July. This provides a unique experience for residents and attracts tourists who come to witness this natural phenomenon. In contrast, the winter months bring darkness and the opportunity to witness the northern lights, a stunning display of colourful lights in the night sky.

The Barents Sea, which borders the region, is an important body of water for both Russia and Norway. It is rich in fish stocks and is also a significant route for shipping and transportation. The division of the Barents Sea between the two countries is defined by international law.

Overall, the Barents region is a unique and diverse area with its remote location, harsh climate, and abundant natural resources. These factors contribute to its economic and business development, as well as its appeal for tourism and outdoor activities.

## Population and cities

The Barents region is sparsely populated with approximately 6 million inhabitants living within its geographical territory, but it is nonetheless the most populated area in the Arctic. Due to the extreme climate and limited infrastructure, the population is largely concentrated to certain cities.

The two largest cities are Arkhangelsk and Murmansk in Russia, with 349,000 and 285,000 inhabitants respectively. The largest Nordic city in the region is Oulu, Finland, with over 200,000 inhabitants, followed by Umeå, Sweden, with a population of over 130,000.

Other notable cities in the Barents region include Tromsø and Bodø in Norway, with populations of around 76,000 and 52,000 respectively. Kirkenes, also in Norway, has a smaller population of around 3,500. Other smaller towns and settlements are scattered throughout the region, mainly along the coastlines.

The concentration of population in these cities is due to economic activities such as mining, fishing, and oil and gas extraction, which provide employment opportunities and attract people to these areas. But also, the service sector, public sector, and technology industry are strong economic drivers creating work places and gathering people to the bigger cities in the region. Additionally, these cities often have better infrastructure, including transportation networks and healthcare facilities, compared to the more remote and sparsely populated areas of the Barents region.

Despite the challenges posed by the extreme climate and limited infrastructure, the Barents region has seen some growth in population in recent years. This is partly due to increased economic development and investment in the region, as well as improved living conditions and opportunities for education and employment.

Efforts are also being made to promote sustainable development and improve living conditions in the more remote areas of the Barents region. This includes initiatives to develop renewable energy sources, improve transportation links, and provide better access to healthcare and educational services.

## Sápmi and indigenous peoples

The Barents region is home to several indigenous peoples. There are around 85,000 Sámi inhabitants living in Sápmi, the traditional area of the Sámi people, that comprises parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Around 7,000 Nenets live in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Russia, and approximately 6,000 Vepsians in the Republic of Karelia.



The indigenous peoples have ancient traditions for habitation, and traditions for usage of the areas' resources in a trade context from the times before the national states were established. The indigenous peoples are characterised by having their own languages, cultures and traditions for trade and society.

The Komi people living the Republic of Komi are not recognised as indigenous people according to federal legislation. Karelians and Pomors are other minorities living in the region.

The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples was established by the Barents Regional Council in 1995. The overall goal for the indigenous peoples' cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is to secure indigenous peoples' rights, foundation for trade, society, culture, and language.

## General definition of indigenous people

According to Wikipedia the term indigenous people can be used to describe any ethnic group of people who inhabit a geographic region with which they have the earliest known historical connection, alongside immigrants who have populated the region, and who are greater in number.

A definition of indigenous people is stated in Article 1 (1b) of the International Labour Organisation's Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO No. 169). This Convention applies to people in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present State boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions.

Furthermore, Article 1 (2) leaves significant discretionary power to the people themselves to evaluate whether they regard themselves as indigenous: Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply.

It is noteworthy that the term used is "indigenous" even though it is not a common term for all Arctic countries. In Alaska, the most common reference is "Alaska Native" while the Constitution of Canada uses the term "aboriginal". "First nations" is also a widely used term in Canada as it is preferred by Indian people themselves.

The Russian legislation defines indigenous people based on their population size. Groups with less than 5,000 people are defined as "indigenous numerically small people" whereas non-Russian peoples with a population size of over 50,000 are denied indigenous status.

**Read more:**

[www.barentsinfo.org/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barents\\_Region](http://www.barentsinfo.org/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barents_Region)



**Mary Simon**, Governor General of Canada, delivers a keynote speech to open the 2022 Arctic Arts Summit in Whitehorse, Yukon. Photo: Andrew Strain

# Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region

Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region was launched in 1993 on intergovernmental and interregional levels. The objective was to resume contact with Russia after the softening of relations after the Cold War and to ensure sustainable development.

*With Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, Barents cooperation with Russia was suspended in March 2022. On 18 September 2023, Russia announced their withdrawal from the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.*

*The Barents Cooperation will now continue between Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and the European Union.*

The text below describes the conditions and relationships that prevailed before the Russian invasion. In the continuation of the report, only the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish areas that are part of the Barents region are included.

## The Barents Cooperation

The Barents Cooperation is a regional cooperation initiative between four countries: Norway, Russia, Finland, and Sweden. It was established in 1993, at the initiative of Norway under Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg, with the goal of promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development in the Barents Euro-Arctic region. During the Cold War the Barents region was an area of military confrontation. The underlying premise was that close cooperation secures political long-term stability and reduces possible tensions.

The Barents Cooperation focuses on various areas of collaboration, including economic development, environmental protection, social issues, people to people contacts, and cross-border cooperation. The cooperation aims to enhance economic growth and prosperity in the region, while also addressing common challenges such as climate change, pollution, and social inequality.

The Barents Cooperation has led to numerous joint projects and initiatives, such as infrastructure development, research and innovation collaborations, cultural exchanges, and environmental protection efforts. These projects aim to foster closer ties between the member

countries, promote sustainable development, and improve the quality of life for the people living in the Barents region.

The Barents Cooperation plays a crucial role in promoting regional cooperation and stability in the northern parts of Europe. It serves as a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and joint decision-making, helping to address common challenges and create opportunities for economic growth and development in the Barents Euro-Arctic region.

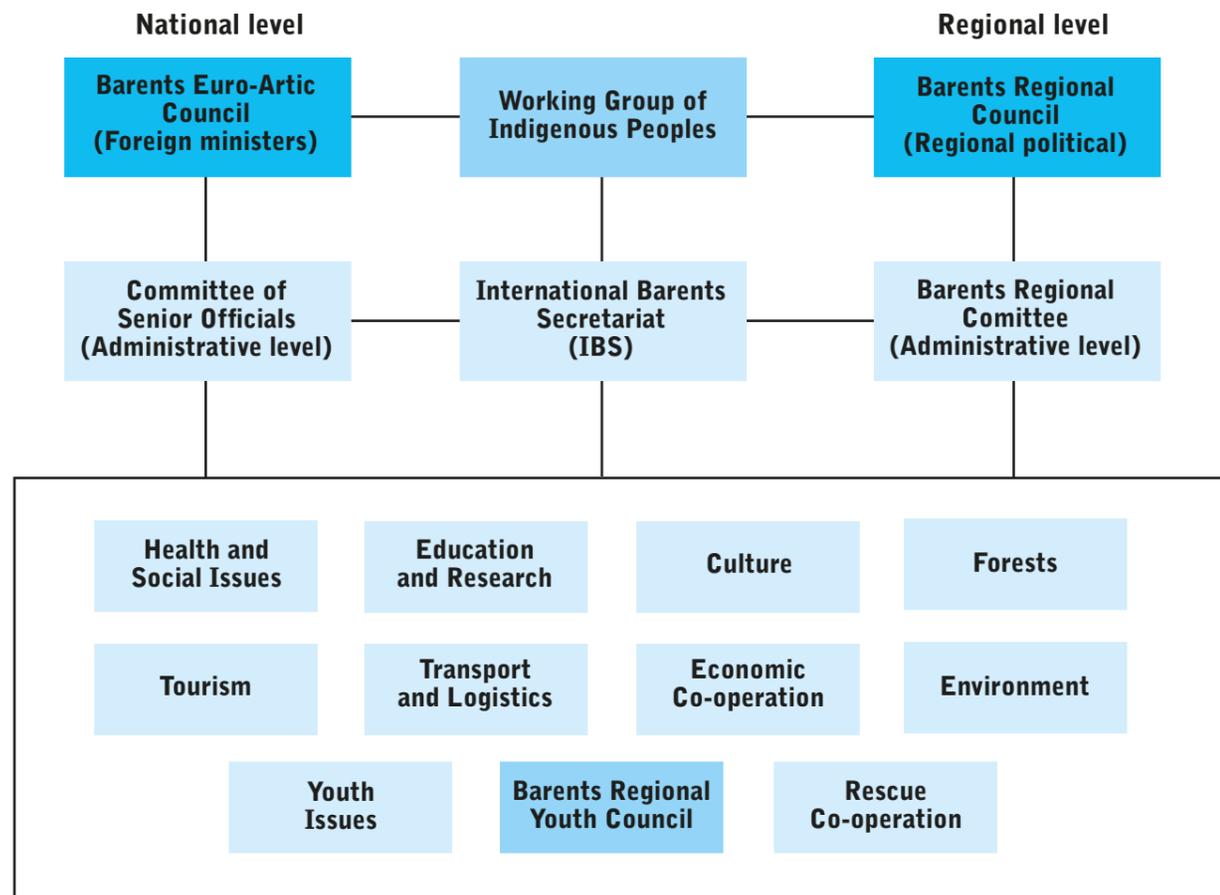
## The Barents Euro-Arctic Council

One of the key institutions of the Barents Cooperation is the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, BEAC, which is composed of representatives from members of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and European Commission, as well as Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP). The BEAC is an arena where national and regional levels regularly meet to discuss and coordinate policies and initiatives in the region. The BEAC meets at the level of Foreign Ministers in the chairmanship country at the end of each BEAC chairmanship term. Between the ministerial meetings, the Committee of Senior Officials organises the work of BEAC.

Now Finland, Norway and Sweden take turns leading the cooperation. The BEAC chairmanship follows a two-year rotation. The collaboration takes place both at the national level with the ministries of culture and with representatives from the regions. Finland held the chairmanship for the period 2021 – 2023. The rotation of chairmanship from 2023 has not been finally determined, following Russia's withdrawal from The Barents Cooperation. From Norway, the regions of Nordland and Troms and Finnmark counties participate, in addition to representatives from the Ministry of Culture and Equality on the national level. Sweden's and Finland's participation is administered from the county administrations in Västerbotten and Norrbotten counties, and the regional associations in Lapland, Northern Ostrobothnia and Kainuu, North Karelia, respectively.

Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region was launched in 1993 on two levels: intergovernmental

## Organisational structure



Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and interregional Barents Regional Council (BRC). The two councils have established thematic Working Groups (see organisational chart). The Working Groups constitute a cross-border platform for exchange for the civil servants and professionals of the respective fields, both on the national and regional level. Over the past years, the Working Groups have also implemented several projects.

Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) has an advisory role in both the BEAC and the BRC, which means that their participation is welcome in all Barents Working Groups, that the WGIP Chair is a member of the Committee of Senior Officials, CSO, and the Barents Regional Committee, and that they are always represented at the BEAC Ministerial Sessions and the Barents Regional Council meetings.

Where appropriate, there is also coordination with the relevant activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Arctic Council, and the Northern Dimension.

## International Barents Secretariat

In 2008, International Barents Secretariat was established in Kirkenes. The secretariat supports the multilateral activities within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Barents Regional Council, and secures the coherence and efficiency of the cooperation.

To this end, the IBS assists the biennially rotating governmental and regional Chairs in their tasks and thus guarantees the seamless continuity of the cooperation. Also, the IBS supports the Barents Working Groups. The IBS maintains the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council archives and serves as an information database, as well as maintaining contacts with other organisations and stakeholders operating in the Barents and Arctic regions, the national and regional authorities of the Member States, and the media.

## The Working Group on Culture

Cross-border regional cooperation in the field of culture is an integral part of the Barents Cooperation. The development of cultural life serves the social and economic development in the Barents Euro-Arctic region.

The aim of the Working Group on Culture, WGC, is to strengthen cultural identities, multicultural dialogue, and cultural ties between the Barents countries and the regions. In addition to the regional cultural administrations, the WGC has representation from the Finnish, Norwegian, Russian, and Swedish ministries responsible for culture and from the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples.

The latest Strategy of Cultural Cooperation “Creative Barents” (2019 – 2023) takes into account wide possibilities to enhance cultural policy dialogue and practical cooperation. The overall mission is to promote the role of culture in meeting the overall objective of the Barents programme on social and economic growth through a knowledge-driven economy and the sustainable development of the region’s natural and human resources. Thematic priorities and objectives of the Barents cultural cooperation are culture and sustainable development; cultural exchange, intercultural dialogue, and diversity; conditions for and access to creativity; cultural and creative industries, innovation, and tourism; and cooperation.

## The Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation

Barents Scholarships for Cultural Cooperation is an initiative, established in 2016 by the Working Group on Culture, on awarding scholarships to Barents cultural actors, both institutions and individuals. Through the Barents Scholarships for Cultural Cooperation initiatives, the Working Group on Culture aims to promote dialogue and cooperation in the Barents region.

The first Scholarship Award Ceremony was held in Arkhangelsk, Russia, in 2017. The second one was held in 2019 in Umeå, Sweden, and the third one in Tromsø, Norway, in 2021. In October 2023 the fourth one was held in Joensuu, Finland.

The goal of the Scholarship is to serve as a recognition of outstanding arts and culture, encouraging cross-border

cooperation in the Barents region. The purpose of the Scholarship is to highlight the cultural activities, artists, and cultural cooperation in the Barents region, and to encourage the cultural actors to work in Barents.

In 2023 candidates were nominated from Finland, Norway and Sweden. The Working Group on Culture assesses the nominated candidates, and each of these selected candidates is awarded a Barents Scholarship.

The Scholarship will draw attention to and encourage artistic quality and cross-border collaboration in the Barents region. It can be distributed to individuals or to groups, associations, or other formations of active cultural practitioners.

The recipient of the Scholarship must be active within the Barents region and show:

- experience of previous cultural cooperation with one or more regions in the Barents region
- ambition and desire for further cultural cooperation with one or more regions in the Barents region
- high artistic quality in previous work

Read more:  
barents-council.org/

### Recipients of the Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation:

**2017:**  
**Finland:** Jaakko Heikkilä, photography  
**Norway:** Samovar Theater, performing arts  
**Russia:** Ethno-Cultural initiatives Support and Development Fund  
**Sweden:** Mona Mörtlund, literature

**2019:**  
**Finland:** Kaltio, cultural journal  
**Norway:** Ola Asdahl Rokkones, musician  
**Russia:** Ilia Kuzubov, cultural producer  
**Sweden:** Embroidery group FIMBRIA, arts and crafts

**2021:**  
**Finland:** The Artists’ Association of Lapland, visual arts  
**Norway:** Stellaris DansTheater, performing arts  
**Russia:** State Opera and Ballet Theater of the Republic of Komi, performing arts  
**Sweden:** Kenneth Mikko, photography

**2023:**  
**Finland:** Koli Art Residence  
**Norway:** Ekaterina Bespalova, performing arts  
**Sweden:** Marit Shirin Carolasdotter, dancer and choreographer



# Cultural life in the north

## *Finland*

*In Finland four regions are part of the Barents Cooperation: Lapland, Northern Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, and North Karelia.*

### Regional conditions

In Finland, municipalities are legally obliged to organise cultural services and maintain public libraries. Municipalities can also maintain theatres, orchestras and museums, and organise basic education in the arts. Cultural and library services are important basic services for municipal residents. Municipalities are important coordinators of cultural activities in their area, builders of networks and platforms. Municipalities can organise services themselves, in cooperation with other municipalities, or in some other way.

### Education in culture

All four regions from Finland involved in Barents Cooperation have their own universities of applied sciences and three regions have a university.

At the University of Lapland, teaching and research in culture and art is extensive and diverse. The Faculty of Art and Design has nine degree programmes: art education, audio-visual media culture, clothing design, graphic design, industrial design, interior and textile design, fashion, textile art and material research, experience design, and applied visual arts. There are four different master's degree programmes: Arctic Art and Design (AAD), Service Design Strategies and Innovation (SDSI), Service Design, and Art Expertise.

The Arctic Centre carries out multidisciplinary research that focuses on the interaction between man and nature. International research is carried out in the Arctic. The Arctic Studies Programme (ASP) introduces the complexity of the Arctic as a lived-in and experienced space and place. It provides comprehensive knowledge of the physical, environmental, social, and cultural aspects of the Arctic.

The applied science unit at the University of Oulu offers courses related to communication, music, and dance. Oulu has the northernmost architectural school in the world. Giellagas Institute has a nation-wide responsibility to organise, introduce and provide Sámi language and cultural studies and research at the academic level.

The Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK) offers education for instance in tourism, information, communication technology, and the video game industry.

The University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu offers a degree programme in Cultural Studies. The main subjects offered are literature, traditional studies, and cultural studies. One special feature of the university is the opportunity to study the Karelian language. At the Karelian applied science unit, it is possible to study media communication.

### International work

International cooperation in culture is active in all four Finnish regions mentioned above. The city of Oulu will be the European Capital of Culture in 2026 together with 38 other municipalities from Northern Finland. Northern Ostrobothnia and Kainuu belong to the Oulu2026 region.

The main message of the culture programme is culture-climate change that is present through three main programme themes: Brave Hinterland, Wild City, and Cool Contrasts. The aim is that culture-climate change creates an inspiring future for northern Europe in a sustainable way. It highlights the importance of art and culture for the future of cities, villages and regions. One of the main goals is to strengthen the international cooperation in culture. The Oulu2026 organisation and partners invite people from all over Europe and the world to join the events during the year.

A first for Finland, Kuhmo was chosen as the Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture 2023. In the past, the nomination has gone to the territories of Russia, Estonia and Hungary.

### Lapland

Lapland is the northernmost region of Finland and the northernmost point of the EU. It has more than 1,000 kilometres of open river and land border with Sweden and Norway and almost 400 kilometres of border with Russia. The area, 100,366 square kilometres, is almost one-third of the total area of Finland. At the same time, it is among the most sparsely populated areas. 58% of inhabitants (total amount 175,795) live in urban centres. The region has 21 municipalities. The biggest cities are Rovaniemi, Kemi and Tornio. Lapland can be grouped into six sub-regions: Eastern Lapland, Kemi-Tornio, Northern Lapland, Rovaniemi region, Torne Valley, and Fell Lapland.

Since 1996, the Sámi have had constitutional self-government in the Sámi Homeland in the spheres of language and culture. This self-government is managed by the Sámi Parliament, which is elected by the Sámi. The Skolt Sámi also maintain their tradition of village administration, under the Skolt Act, within the area reserved for the Skolt Sámi in the Sámi Homeland. The Sámi Homeland is legally defined and covers the municipalities of Enontekiö, Inari and Utsjoki as well as the Lappi reindeer-herding district in the municipality of Sodankylä. In Finland there are three Sámi languages: North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi. In Lapland Sámi is spoken by approximately 1,600 people.

**Read more:**

<https://www.samediggi.fi/sami-info/?lang=en>

### Some cultural institutions and events in Lapland

**Performing arts:**

Theatres in Kemi and Rovaniemi  
Tanssiteatteri Rimpapparemmi – dance theatre

**Music:**

Kemi City Orchestra  
Lapland Chamber Orchestra  
Ylläs JazzBlues, Ylläs Soikoon ry  
Hetta Music Days

**Cross-genre:**

Silence Festival in Lapland/Hiljaisuus-festivaali  
Korundi cultural house  
Cross-art Collective Piste

**Visual arts/arts and crafts:**

Art Museum Rovaniemi  
Art Museum Kemi  
The Aine art museum, Tornio  
Kulttuurikeskus Pentik-mäki/PENTIK, Arctic-ceramic centre, Posio  
Lapland artist association/Lapin taiteilijaseura  
Museo-Galleria Andreas Alariesto  
Cultural heritage/museum/archive:  
The Sámi Museum Siida, Inari  
Särestöniemi Museum  
Lapland Regional Museum  
Tornedalens Museum, Tornio,  
Taito Lapland Crafts Association

**Literature:**

Lapin kirjallisuusseura ry/Lapland literature association

**Film:**

Finnish Lapland Film Commission/Film Lapland  
Midnight Sun Film Festival – Sodankylä

## Northern Ostrobothnia

Northern Ostrobothnia is the second largest area in Finland by surface area (44,000 km<sup>2</sup>) after Lapland. The region has 416,747 inhabitants and the age distribution of the population is young. Average age is 40.2 years and one in five people is under 15 years old. The region has 30 municipalities. Eleven of them have city status. Oulu is the largest city with about 210,000 inhabitants. It is the most populous city in northern Finland and the fifth most populous in the whole country. Over half of the area's population lives in Oulu. Seven other municipalities have more than 10,000 inhabitants, and nine fewer than 3,000. Oulu, capital of area, is also the centre of cultural and art life of the region.

### Some cultural institutions and events in Northern Ostrobotnia

**Performing arts:**

Oulu Theatre – the largest professional theatre in northern Finland  
JoJo – Oulu Dance Centre – the professional dance production centre  
Flow Productions  
The Northern Opera Company  
T A I K A B O X - dance  
Akseli Klouk - puppet theatre  
Full Moon Dance Festival

**Music:**

Oulu Symphony Orchestra – the northernmost symphony orchestra in Finland  
The Irish Festival of Oulu  
Air Guitar World Championships in Oulu  
Oulu Music Video Festival  
OASBB/Oulu All Star Big Band  
Soiva Siili – children's music group  
Jazz-20 ry – Elohjazz 2022  
Haapavesi Folk Music Festival  
Mieskuoro Huutajat – Screaming Men's Choir

**Cross-genre:**

Kulttuuriosuuskunta ILME – Multidisciplinary cultural cooperative that aims to increase society's well-being through equally accessible art  
Oulu August Festival  
Kattilakosken kulttuuriosuuskunta

**Visual arts/arts and crafts:**

Oulu Museum of art  
Northern Photography Centre  
Oulu Artists Association  
PROTO – Designers' association of Northern Finland  
KulttuuriKauppila Art Centre  
Taito Northern Ostrobothnia Crafts Association

**Cultural heritage/museum/archive:**

Museum and Science Centre Luuppi consists of nine institutions, for example the Northern Ostrobothnia Museum, the Oulu Museum of Art, the Tietomaa Science Centre, the Turkansaari Open Air Museum, and the Kierikki Stone Age Centre  
Raahe Museum – The oldest local museum in Finland

**Literature:**

Oulu Comics Center  
Oulu Writers Association  
Kaltio – Northern culture magazine

**Film:**

Oulu Film Centre  
Oulu International Children's and Youth Film Festival

## Kainuu

Kainuu region (22,687 km<sup>2</sup>) is about half of the area of Northern Ostrobotnia. There are 73,284 inhabitants in the region's 8 municipalities. Kajaani is the biggest city and capital of Kainuu. Also Kuhmo has city status.

### Some cultural institutions and events in Kainuu

**Performing arts:**

Kajaani city theatre  
Routa Company – professional dance production company  
Vaara-kollektiivi – professional theatre, performing art  
Kulttuuriosuuskunta g-voima – performing arts  
Kajaani Dance Festival

**Music:**

Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival  
Sommelo – Ethno Music Festival

**Cross-genre:**

Kainuun lasten – ja nuortenkulttuurikeskus Kulttura – children's art centre  
Mustarinda association

**Visual arts/arts and crafts:**

Kajaani art museum

**Cultural heritage/museum/archive:**

Kainuu Museum

**Literature:**

Juminkeko – the cultural centre dedicated to the Kalevala and the Karelian culture  
Kajaanin runoviikko – poetry

## North Karelia

North Karelia is the easternmost region in Finland. It is almost the same size as Kainuu (21,585 km<sup>2</sup>) by surface but the population is bigger (157,370 inhabitants). The region has 13 municipalities, of which five have city status. The city of Joensuu is the capital and the largest settlement of the region.

### Some cultural institutions and events in Northern Karelia

**Performing arts:**

Kaupunginteatteri Joensuun – theatre

**Music:**

Kaupunginorkesteri, Joensuu – orchestra  
Lieksa Brass Week  
Karelia Folk ry

**Cross-genre:**

Karjalaisen Kulttuurin Edistämissäätiö/Karelian culture

**Visual arts/arts and crafts:**

Art Museum and North Karelian Museum, Joensuu  
Joensuun Taiteilijaseura – art association  
Taito North Karelia Crafts Association

**Cultural heritage/museum/archive:**

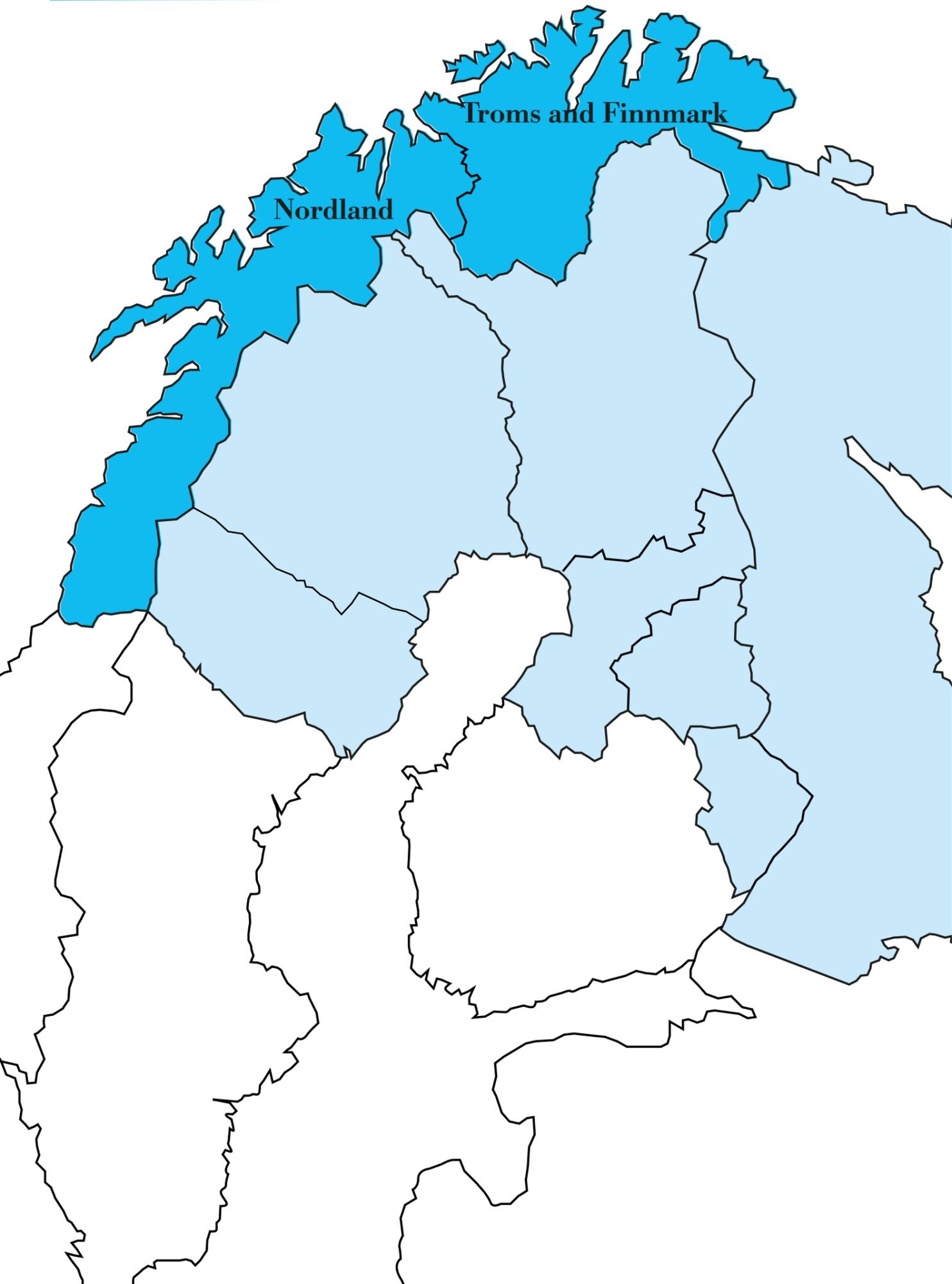
Mine Museum, Outokumpu  
Parppeinvaara, Rune Singer's Village

**Literature:**

Karjalazet nuoret Suomes  
Ukri ry/Northern Karelia writers association

**Film:**

East Finland Film Commission



# Norway

*In Norway two regions are part of the Barents Cooperation: Nordland, and Troms and Finnmark. From 1 January 2024, Troms and Finnmark county will be divided into Troms county and Finnmark county.*

## Nordland

### Regional conditions

The population in Nordland of approximately 243,000 people is spread throughout 38,155 km<sup>2</sup>, with 41 municipalities. The county administration is in Bodø, Nordland's largest city with a population of 53,522. Bodø is an official European Capital of Culture in 2024. Nordland county is divided into five different regions: Vesterålen, Lofoten, Helgeland, Salten and Ofoten. Nordland is part of Sápmi, the Sámi cultural area that extends across northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Five Sámi languages are spoken within Nordland's borders. The long coastline of Nordland makes up approximately 25% of the total Norwegian coastline, and consists of numerous fjords and islands.

### International work

International cultural cooperation is secured through bilateral agreements, projects, and grants such as the Barents Scholarships for Cultural Cooperation and the BarentsKult cultural grant programme, and also participation in Working Group on Culture (WGC) and Artist-in-Residence programmes. They are also one of the owners of the North Norway European Office in Brussels, which works to promote the interests of northern Norway in the European Union. The county council's international office is responsible for coordinating the international affairs of the county.

Via Querinissima is a modern cultural route, which aims at following the itinerary made by Pietro Querini – by sea and by land – and at enhancing the values of solidarity and a welcoming spirit as well as promoting cultural, slow, aware and sustainable tourism. The association was established in Venice on 6 June 2022 with five founding members. It is already building and weaving relations with European organisations and institutions, and aims to achieve recognition as a European Cultural Route promoted by the Council of Europe.

### Some cultural institutions and events in Nordland

#### Performing arts:

Nordland Visual Theatre  
Nordland Teater  
Davvi – Senter for scenekunst

Aarjelhsameien teatere  
Vinterlysfestivalen  
Baredans  
Lost & Found Productions  
Stamsund Teaterfestival  
Eilertsen & Granados  
Klemetspelet  
Aarjelhsaemien Teatere – Southsámi teater

#### Music:

Musikk i Nordland  
Arctic Philharmonic  
Landsdelsmusikerne i Nord-Norge  
Nordnorsk Jazzsenter  
Musikkontoret Nord  
Kirkemusikksenter Nord  
Stormen konserthus  
Lofoten International Chamber Music Festival  
Nordland musikkfestuke  
Parkenfestivalen  
The Querini Opera  
Bodø International Organ Festival  
Trænefestivalen  
VocalArt  
Bodø Jazz Open  
Rootsfestivalen  
Verket musikkfestival  
Festspillene Helgeland  
Hemnesjazz  
Sortland Jazzfestival  
Vinterfestuka

#### Cross-genre:

Bodø 2024 - ECoC  
Bodø Biennale  
Trevarefabrikken  
Trevarefest  
Festspillene Helgeland  
Maaretta Jaukkuri Foundation  
Nordland Academy of Art and Science

#### Visual arts/arts and crafts:

The North Norwegian Art Centre  
The Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts – North Norway  
Northern Norway Art Museum  
Lofoten International Art Festival  
Kjerringøy Land Art Biennale  
Bodø kunstforening  
Galleri Adde Zetterquist

KaviarFactory – Art Hall  
Engelskmannsbrygga  
NOUA

**Cultural heritage/museum/archive:**

Arkiv i Nordland  
Museum Nord  
Nordlandsmuseet  
Helgeland Museum  
Northern Norway Art Museum  
Norwegian Aviation Museum  
Via Querinissima International Cultural Association  
Vega World Heritage Centre  
Árran lulesámi centre (museum, language and culture centre)  
Sijti Jarngge – South Sámi language and culture centre  
Stormen Sámi language centre  
Duoddara Ráfe – Pitesámi centre  
Villmarkscampen Tollådal – pitesámi buidling protection and cultural heritage preservation  
Várdobáiki samisk senter /Várdobáiki sámi guovddaš

**Literature:**

The Hamsun Centre  
The Hamsun Festival  
The Peter Dass Museum  
The Peter Dass Days  
Det Vilde Ord  
Ord i Spor  
Stormen bibliotek  
Nordland fylkesbibliotek  
Orkana forlag

**Film:**

Filmfond Nord  
The Kabelvåg School of Arts and Film  
Lofoten Film Collective  
Linken Pictures  
Mattima Films  
Rabalder produksjon  
Bodø filmfestival

## Troms and Finnmark

### Regional conditions

Troms and Finnmark County is the largest region in Norway by surface area. The population in the county's 39 municipalities pr 01.01.2023 is 242,452, of which 78,162 live in Tromsø municipality and 24,903 in Harstad, the second largest municipality by population. The University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway is the 3rd largest University in Norway. Tromsø is an important centre for Arctic research with institutions such as Norwegian Polar Institute, the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research and the Polar Environmental Centre. The Art Academy in Tromsø is Norway's fourth art academy, hosting the world's northernmost Contemporary

Art Academy and programmes in Creative Writing and Landscape Architecture. The Kabelvåg School of Arts and Film is also a part of the university and offers a BA in moving images. Troms and Finnmark is the geographical centre of gravity for Norway's Sámi population – 65% of those entitled to vote in the Sámi parliamentary elections are residents of the county. The Kven population has a status of a national minority. The most important Sámi and Kven institutions such as the international Indigenous festival Riddu Riððu, The Sámi National Theater Beaivváš and Kvääniteatteri/Kventeateret are located in Troms and Finnmark region.

### International work

Troms and Finnmark is in the heart of the Norwegian northern regions, where the regional and international contexts are closely linked. Together with Nordland County, Troms and Finnmark County owns The Norwegian Barents Secretariate, The North Norway European Office (NNEO). The international cultural cooperation is secured through bilateral agreements, projects, and grants such as the Barents Scholarship and the BarentsKult grant scheme, participation in Working group on culture (WGC) and Artist-in-Residence programmes.

### Some cultural institutions and events in Troms and Finnmark

**Performing arts:**

Hålogaland teater  
The Sámi National Theater Beaivváš  
Kvääniteatteri/Kventeateret  
Davvi – Senter for scenekunst  
Vårscenefest  
Hålogaland Amatørteaterselskap (HATS)

**Music:**

Arctic Philharmonic  
Buktafestivalen – Tromsø Open Air  
BAKgården  
ILIOS  
Insomnia Festival  
Nordlysfestivalen  
Tromsø Internasjonale Kirkefestival  
Tromsø Jazz festival  
Varangerfestivalen  
Landsdelsmusikerne i Nord-Norge  
Riddu Riððu  
Sámi Music Week  
Tromsø World Festival

**Cross-genre:**

Open Out Festival  
Pikene på Broen/Barents Spektakel  
Sámi Beassásfestivála/Samisk páskefestival  
Dáiddadállu- Sami Artist Collective

Festspillene I Nord-Norge  
Markomeannu  
Riddu Riððu  
Tromsø Internasjonale Kirkefestival

**Visual arts/arts and crafts:**

The Art Museum of North-Norway  
Trastad Samlinger  
North-Norwegian Artist Association  
The Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts – North-Norway  
Salangen biennale  
Tromsø kunstforening  
Galleri NordNorge  
Harstad kunstforening

**Cultural heritage/museum/archive:**

RidduDuottarMuseat  
Senter for Nordlige folk / Center for Northern Peoples  
Lásságámmi Foundation  
Vuonnamárganat  
Nord-Troms Museum  
Sør-Troms Museum

Midt-Troms Museum  
Perspektivet Museum  
Norges Arktiske universitetsmuseum  
Alta museum – Verdensarvsenter for bergkunst  
Varanger museum (Vardø – Vadsø-Kirkenes)  
Vadsø museum – Ruija kvenmuseum  
Museene for kystkultur og gjenreisning i Finnmark  
RidduDuottarMuseat  
Tana og Varanger museum

**Literature:**

Ordkalotten Literature Festival  
Finnmark International Litterature Festival  
Nordnorsk Litteraturfestival

**Film:**

Tromsø International Film Festival – TIFF  
Arctic Moving Image and Film Festival  
Nordisk Ung Film Festival  
Filmfond Nord  
Nordnorsk Filmsenter  
Nordnorsk Filmkommisjon  
Nordkapp Filmfestival



View of **Hammerfest** where Davvi – Senter for scenekunst has its headquarters and residence. Photo: Zbigniew Ziggi Wantuch



## Sweden

*Two regions in Sweden are part of the Barents Cooperation: Norrbotten and Västerbotten.*

### Norrbotten

#### Regional conditions

Norrbotten's 14 municipalities together provide the local cultural life in the county through activities and projects. In the municipalities of Norrbotten, with a total of 250,000 inhabitants, there are professional cultural creators, organisations, and associations as well as a varied range and infrastructure of museums, cinemas, art galleries and art in public areas, stages and meeting places for cultural exchange, in addition to a variety of cultural environments. Schools dedicated to culture are found in all the county's municipalities, an important factor in providing children and young people with the opportunity to express themselves through art. Norrbotten's public library and book buses promote reading and access to literature throughout the county.

The culture of national minorities and the indigenous Sámi people is an important, active, and innovative part of the culture in Norrbotten. Sápmi is home to some of the region's most successful artists and professional cultural creators, and the culture of Tornedalen forms a large part of the society in the region. Region Norrbotten investigates the need for a cultural gathering activity for Tornedalings, Kväner and Lantalaiset in dialogue with the minorities in question. The county also has a significant Swedish-Finnish and Romani culture.

Luleå University of Technology offers acting and music programmes in Luleå and Piteå respectively. Sunderby Folkhögskola and the Swedish-Finnish Folkhögskola in Haparanda offer education in the visual arts.

#### International work

Cooperation with other regions and actors within the Nordic region, the Barents region and the Arctic is carried out continuously through projects, exchanges, and residencies. Participation in the Working Group on Culture within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council enables the Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation. The exchange of experiences for young people takes place within the Working Group on Youth and the Barents Regional Youth Council. The new EU programme Interreg Aurora 2021–2027 will develop cooperation across borders in the northernmost parts of Sweden, Norway and Finland. Eight areas are prioritised within the programme, several of which connect to the cultural area. Together with Region Västerbotten, the region is involved in the Arctic Design Center project and supports

work for an application to Creative Europe. The region is working together with ChangeMakers to establish a 2-year vocational training programme in Sävast for International Cultural Producers in the Barents region.

In Norrbotten, the municipalities of Piteå and Luleå are members of the International Cities of Refuge Network, ICORN, and since 2018 they have received refugee artists. Through ICORN, the right of free speech is protected by giving persecuted artists a sanctuary for two years. The sanctuary artist can continue to work with his or her profession in security, and the host municipality provides sustenance and housing during the two years. Region Norrbotten also supports the Emergency Residencies that the SWAN network runs for Ukrainian cultural practitioners as well as projects within sanctuary work, and wants to work to increase knowledge of the area.

#### Some cultural institutions and events in Norrbotten

##### Performing arts:

Norrbottensteatern  
Riksteatern Norrbotten  
National Confederation of Amateur Theatres  
Giron Sámi Teáhter  
Lule Stassteater  
Teater Mila  
Tornedalsteatern  
Dance in Nord  
Regional dance consultants  
Danscentrum Norr  
The Dance Initiative  
NMD – Norrland's network for Music, Theater and Dance

##### Music:

Norrbotten music including Norrbotten Big Band, Norrbotten NEO, Norrbotten Chamber Orchestra, Piteå Chamber Opera  
The Jazz Festival in Haparanda/Tornio  
Spelmansstämman/"The fiddlers' meeting" in Gammelstad  
Haparator sound festival

##### Cross-genre:

Northern Sustainable Futures, Moskosel  
Korpilombolo cultural association with the Night Festival

**Visual arts/arts and crafts:**

Havremagasinet Länskonsthall Boden  
 Regional art consultants  
 The Art Museum in the North  
 Resource Centre for Art  
 Craft and design consultants  
 Sámi Duodji, Sami Handicrafts Foundation  
 Art gallery Tornedalen  
 The Lule Biennale  
 Art promotion Norrbotten  
 Sweden's Art Associations Norrbottens district

**Cultural heritage/museum/archive:**

Norrbotten Museum  
 Norrbotten Archives Centre  
 Norrbotten Association Archives  
 Ájtte – Swedish mountain and Sámi museum

**Literature:**

Resource Centre for Literature  
 Norrbotten Regional Library  
 Book and Image in Luleå

**Film:**

Filmpool North  
 Kiruna Film Festival

## Västerbotten

### Regional conditions

Västerbotten county is Sweden's second largest region by surface area. Region Västerbotten is an administrative area for Sámi and Finnish people. Twelve of the region's fifteen municipalities have less than 10,000 inhabitants, and 73 percent of the region's roughly 260,000 inhabitants live in the two largest municipalities, Umeå and Skellefteå. Umeå distinguishes itself as a city of culture by being the municipality in the country that invests the most in culture based on invested Swedish krona per inhabitant. The cultural infrastructure in the region is characterised by close cooperation and room for flexibility between and within the respective fields of art. The cultural infrastructure in the Västerbotten region comprises regional cultural activities carried out by professional cultural creators, municipal cultural activities, free cultural activities and regional popular movements, along with the activities carried out by associations and public education.

Umeå University has several education programmes related to the cultural sector, for example Library and Information Science, the Cultural Analysis Programme and the Screenplay Education for Film, Television and New Media. HUMlab is a cross-border meeting place on campus that unites humanistic and technical research and artistic creation and research. At the Swedish

Agricultural University in Umeå, education in forestry, forest history, and research is carried out, among other things. At the artistic campus in Umeå, the contemporary art museum Bildmuseet, the School of Design, the School of Art, the School of Architecture and HUMlab-X gather around the creative meeting place Sliperiet. In Skellefteå there are programmes for computer game development, scenography and prop making.

### International work

International work takes place within the framework of the regional cultural activities, which contributes to a dynamic cultural life, artistic renewal, new forms of cooperation, cultural exchange as well as creating awareness of Västerbotten and its professional cultural creators. International collaborations take place throughout the region and in most municipalities.

Region Västerbotten participates in various networks, organisations, and collaborations, including the Assembly of European Regions (AER), with the aim of agreeing and presenting common positions on important issues together with other regions in Europe and creating conditions for collaborative projects. Region Västerbotten is a member of the European cultural network LIKE, which works to strengthen the role of culture in Europe. The region's geographical location offers good opportunities for cultural exchange and cooperation with Finnish and Norwegian partners in the Kvarken area, in Sápmi, the sister county of the Republic of Karelia and the Barents area. The Working Group on Culture (WGC) is a working group for cultural cooperation in which regional and national representatives from all the Barents regions in northern Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia participate. An increased cultural exchange and cooperation in Europe between professional cultural creators as well as the regional cultural institutions is important. Both as a means for increased contacts and understanding between people but also as a step in promoting artistic renewal and development.

### Some cultural institutions and events in Västerbotten

**Performing arts:**

Västerbottensteatern including the Nordic Storytelling Centre  
 Månstjärnan, Puppet theatre  
 Profiltatern  
 Skuggteatern  
 Ögonblicksteatern  
 Teatercentrum Norra  
 The Norrland Opera including the Norrland Opera Symphony Orchestra and Dance in Västerbotten  
 Danscentrum Norr

Norrland's Network for music theatre and dance, NMD  
 Riksteatern Västerbotten/The National Theatre Västerbotten  
 Music and Theatre Associations in Lapland Inland, MOTILI  
 The Storytelling Festival

**Music:**

Norrland Opera's Symphony Orchestra  
 Music in the North  
 Trästocksfestivalen  
 Yran

**Visual arts/arts and crafts:**

Regional art consultants  
 Museum Anna Nordlander  
 Art promotion Västerbotten  
 The Västerbotten Museum  
 Emma Ricklund's foundation  
 Västerbotten County Homework Association

Aejlies, Sámi centre  
 Gallery Verkligheten

**Cultural heritage/museum/archive:**

The Västerbotten Museum  
 Skellefteå Museum  
 The Forest and Sámi Museum in Lycksele  
 The People's Movement Archive in Västerbotten  
 The company archive in Westerbotten  
 Västerbotten county's home village association

**Literature:**

Västerbotten Regional Library  
 Writers Centre North  
 Littfest, Umeå internationella litteraturfestival

**Film:**

Film in Västerbotten  
 Umeå European Film Festival  
 Delliie Maa, Sápmi Indigenous Film & Art Festival



The Norrbotten Theater in Luleå.

# Cultural accessibility in the Nordic countries

## – Summary of the report “Culture within reach?”

In 2022, Kulturanalys Norden, in collaboration with Nordregio Research Institute, worked to enhance the understanding of cultural accessibility in the Nordic countries. This effort expands upon earlier research that mapped cultural access at the municipal level within the region. In this latest phase, cultural activities were geographically charted and joined with demographic data.

The study’s primary aim was to assess how travel distances affect cultural access for Nordic citizens. Additionally, it probed into cross-border exchanges at municipal and national levels and explored the influence of socio-economic factors on accessibility, specifically education. The research was centred on public amenities, including libraries, cinemas, museums, and state-funded performing arts institutions.

The report indicates that cultural accessibility varies across the Nordic region. Cultural activities mainly mirror population densities: urban areas and capital cities are cultural hotspots. Notably, some expansive, less densely populated regions in the Nordics face cultural accessibility challenges. The urban-rural divide plays a significant role in determining travel distances to cultural venues. Of the Nordic countries, Denmark excels in its even distribution of cultural facilities, minimising disparities based on residence.

The study also found that the more prevalent a cultural activity, the more evenly it tends to be distributed. Conversely, niche cultural endeavours are usually concentrated in urban centres, which often have a highly educated populace. This educated segment generally enjoys better accessibility to cultural venues, most prominently in the field of government-supported performing arts.

On the topic of cultural exchanges, the research highlighted that while they are viable, they predominantly occur within established commuting regions. The report also shows that certain residents, such as those in parts of Finland and Sweden, find neighbouring countries more accessible for cultural activities. The study underscores the advantage of looking beyond administrative boundaries when considering cultural access, providing a clearer picture of the role of infrastructure in cultural participation, regardless of municipal boundaries.

### Distance to culture

Accessibility to cultural venues in the Nordics is generally good. Especially Finland, Sweden and Norway exhibit similar patterns in many respects but with certain unique challenges and solutions for each country.

### Commuting and exchange across borders

Highlighted in Nordic cooperation are the opportunities for movement and exchange across national borders. The Nordics aim to be one of the most integrated regions. Culture fluctuates between being cross-national with goals of internationalisation, and being specific to a nation. The location of cultural activities is influenced by a combination of factors, including local initiatives, strategic placement about population concentration, local economic interest, and others. Government involvement in cultural activities also varies in motivation and background.

Accessibility to culture varies based on geographical distances. But distance is also perceived differently depending on the place and purpose of the journey. There’s a limit to how far one is willing to travel to participate in a cultural activity. The studied culture is geographically concentrated in the southern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland which follow general population patterns and densities. The population-weighted distance measure used in the study considers population size.

For Finland and Sweden, a significant portion of the population is closer to cultural activity in their neighbouring country. Language accessibility becomes crucial for determining whether it’s reasonable to travel across borders to experience culture. Some cultural activities, such as performing arts and concerts, might be easier to access across language barriers. Participants in the cultural scene might potentially move across larger geographical areas than their municipality.

### Potential cultural clusters?

The report concludes that a crucial part of regional strategies today is to create conditions for multiple

central formations that can be geographical nodes. The aim is to develop a robust structure not just based on the most densely populated urban areas. This concept is referred to as “multi-core” and means focusing on more than one geographical area or place. Accessibility can increase when cultural activities become possible in multiple locations. These perspectives are imbued with the idea that the city and countryside contain multiple layers, and they do not conflict with each other. Both hold essential values.

Simultaneously, many development efforts are driven by increased digitisation. It also says that the Covid-19 pandemic has broadened the digital range of cultural offerings.

### Concluding words about the report

The report examines cultural participation within the Nordic countries, specifically Finland, Sweden and Norway, and how various factors such as geographical location, education, and demographics influence participation. The report finds the following similarities and differences between the Nordic countries on this topic:

#### Similarities:

- People’s participation in culture varies generally based on factors like urbanisation, educational level, age, gender, and income. This is consistent across both national and Nordic levels.
- Participation in cultural life remains stable over time, with exceptions for disruptions like the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Inhabitants of urban areas tend to be more culturally active than those in rural or less densely populated areas.
- Education is the most significant factor concerning cultural participation. Those with higher education tend to have higher incomes and participate more in cultural activities.
- Urban areas have a higher concentration of highly educated individuals, and this is a consistent pattern in all three countries.

#### Differences:

- While all countries show that highly educated individuals have better access to cultural activities, the degree of this accessibility varies. Specifically, state-funded performing arts show the most significant differences in accessibility based on education level.
- Libraries and cinemas are the most geographically widespread cultural activities, while museums and state-funded performing arts are not as accessible.
- Denmark and Finland showed fewer differences between groups based on education level compared to other countries.
- While there is a general trend that urban areas have a higher concentration of cultural activities, the specific distribution and concentration of these activities vary between countries.

#### Link to the report:

Kultur inom räckhåll?/Culture within reach? Kulturanalys Norden, 2023



Botnia literature prize winner 2022 author Veli-Pekka Lehtola. Photo: Ville Honkonen

# Financial support for international collaborations

## – A brief description of some of the searchable support for cultural collaborations/exchange

In examining the cultural support systems of Finland, Norway and Sweden, one can observe some shared objectives and distinctive approaches. Across the board, financial support is extended to both individual artists and organisations, with a particular focus on fostering international collaboration within the cultural sector. Funding is allocated across various categories, such as guest performances, co-productions, residencies, and scholarships, among others. The evaluation of applications for financial support is based on criteria including the project's quality, the relevance of the cultural cooperation, feasibility, and budget.

However, each country has unique stipulations and conditions for the types of financial support offered. This includes variations in project prioritisation, budgetary requirements, and regional rules. For instance, in Sweden, eligibility for support may be contingent upon regional cooperation, resulting in differing regulations based on the applicant's location. In contrast, Norway and Finland prioritise the promotion of collaborations with specific countries or regions, such as other Nordic countries, EU members, or countries outside of Europe.



Arctic Center and Regional Museum of Lapland. Photo: Kaisa Sirén

## Finland

Renowned for its vibrant culture and artistic landscape, Finland boasts numerous organisations dedicated to fostering international partnerships and endeavours in the cultural sphere. These entities extend support to a diverse array of individuals and groups, including artists, cultural experts, and cultural organisations, as they embark on international projects, residencies, co-productions, tours, and various other cultural pursuits.

An example of an organisation that provides support is **Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike)**, which offers grants and funding to artists and cultural workers who want to carry out international projects or participate in international residencies. Taike also provides support for international collaboration projects between Finnish and foreign cultural organisations.

Another organisation that provides support is the **Suomen Kulttuurirahasto/Finnish Cultural Foundation**, which provides grants to artists and cultural professionals who want to carry out international projects or study abroad. The grants can cover some of the costs for travel and accommodation.

**Svenska kulturfonden/The Swedish Cultural Foundation** provides support to Swedish-speaking cultural professionals and organisations who want to carry out international projects.

In summary, many different organisations provide financial support for international cultural projects in Finland. For artists, cultural professionals and cultural organisations, there is support available to carry out international projects and collaborations. Generally, there are guidelines for the application process: which activities can receive support, which costs can be covered by the support, and what requirements are placed on applicants. The amount of support varies depending on the organisation and type of support. The amounts can also vary depending on which country or region the project is carried out in, as well as the scope and goals of the project.

### Links to some of the searchable support in Finland for cultural collaborations/exchange

#### National

- **Taike/Arts Promotion Centre Finland:**  
www.taike.fi/fi/taike-tukee/apurahan-hakijalle  
www.taike.fi/en/taike-supports/grant-applicants
- **Helsinki International Artist Programme:**  
www.hiap.fi/open-calls/

- **Frame:**  
frame-finland.fi/apurahat/apurahan-hakijalle/  
frame-finland.fi/en/grants/how-to-apply/

- **Musiikin edistämissäätiö/MES:**  
mes.fi  
www.musiikinedistamissaatio.fi/en/

- **Suomen en Elokuvasäätiö/Finnish Film Foundation:**  
www.ses.fi/tuenhakijalle/nain-haet-tukia/  
www.ses.fi/en/funding/how-to-apply/

- **Suomen Kulttuurirahasto/Finnish Cultural Foundation:**  
skr.fi/apurahat  
skr.fi/en/grants

- **Svenska kulturfonden/Svenska kulturfondenin/The Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland:**  
www.kulturfonden.fi/stipendierobidrag/

#### Regional

- **Lapin rahasto/Lapland regional fund:**  
skr.fi/rahastot/lapin-rahasto  
skr.fi/en/regional-funds/lapland-regional-fund

- **Pohjois-Pohjanmaan rahasto/North Ostrobothnia regional fund:**  
skr.fi/rahastot/pohjois-pohjanmaan-rahasto  
skr.fi/en/regional-funds/north-ostrobothnia-regional-fund

- **KulttuuriKauppila Art Centre and Northern AiR network:**  
www.kulttuurikauppila.fi/residenssi/haku/  
www.kulttuurikauppila.fi/en/residency/applications/

- **Kainuun rahasto/Kainuu regional fund:**  
skr.fi/rahastot/kainuun-rahasto  
skr.fi/en/regional-funds/kainuu-regional-fund

- **Pohjois-Karjalan rahasto/North Karelia regional fund:**  
skr.fi/rahastot/pohjois-karjalan-rahasto  
skr.fi/en/regional-funds/north-karelia-regional-fund

## Norway

Norway is a nation with a strong commitment to cultural exchange and collaboration across borders. Over many years, the High North has been considered a key strategic area within Norwegian foreign policy. The government has contributed to the financing of contact and cooperation across borders in the north. The efforts have also been followed up in the area of culture, through earmarked funding for Norwegian-Russian cultural cooperation and participation in various cooperations with neighbouring countries in the north. The Ministry of Culture cooperates with the northern Norwegian counties when it comes to international cooperation in the north.

As a result of Russia's warfare in Ukraine, Norwegian-Russian cultural cooperation has largely ceased, and resources have been reallocated to other international cooperation in the north.

The northern Norwegian counties are key operators in the development of cultural cooperation across borders in the north. Several programmes provide support to artists and organisations seeking funding for international projects, including guest performances, co-productions, collaborations, residencies, and scholarships.

Large parts of the cultural sector in northern Norway have international contact and cooperation as a natural part of their ordinary activities with networks. The regional support for cultural actors in the north is therefore also of great importance for the financing of cultural cooperation in the Barents region.

**The Norwegian Barents Secretariat** has been, and is, an important contributor to Nordland, Troms and Finnmark counties' achievements, when it comes to international cultural cooperation across the Barents region. The secretariat administers funds for cross-border projects in the Barents region. For the cultural institutions, organisations and artists in northern Norway, the financing possibilities offered by the secretariat have played a significant role – especially the BarentsKult funding programme, which targets artists as well as professional cultural institutions in the Barents region. The programme enjoys strong support from Nordland, Troms and Finnmark counties. It receives funding also from the Ministry of Culture and Equality and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Kulturdirektoratet/Arts Council Norway** is an organisation that among other tasks provides support for international cultural collaboration, including funding for international projects and residencies for artists. **Norwegian Crafts** is another organisation that has an international programme that provides support for exhibitions and other cultural projects.

There are also opportunities for artists to receive funding for international collaborations through several state funded organisations, see below.

Additionally, **the Office for Contemporary Art Norway** contributes to the international art scene by providing grants and residencies to artists and cultural professionals. These programmes cater to artists and organisations involved in various international projects, from smaller trips to extensive co-productions and residencies.

In summary, Norway is a nation that invests in cultural exchange and collaboration across borders. Many different programmes provide support for artists and organisations seeking to undertake international projects,

and it is possible to find funding for everything from smaller trips to larger co-productions and residencies.

To apply for support, applicants must adhere to each organisation's specific guidelines and requirements. Generally, the application process involves submitting project proposals, budgets, CVs, and other relevant documentation through the respective online application portals. By exploring these diverse funding programmes, artists and organisations can secure support for their creative projects and contribute to the vibrant cultural exchange in Norway and beyond.

## Links to some of the searchable support in Norway for cultural collaborations/exchange

### National

- **Kulturdirektoratet/Arts and Culture Norway:**  
www.kulturradet.no/internasjonalt  
www.kulturradet.no/english
- **Norwegian crafts:**  
www.norwegiancrafts.no/opportunities
- **Norsk filminstitut/Norwegian Film Institute:**  
www.nfi.no/sok-tilskudd  
www.nfi.no/eng/grantsfunding
- **International Sámi Film Institute:**  
www.isfi.no
- **Music Norway:**  
musicnorway.no/tilskudd/  
musicnorway.no/english/
- **Office for Contemporary Art Norway:**  
oca.no/grants-residencies
- **Danse og teatersentrum/Performing Arts Hub Norway:**  
english.pahn.no/
- **Norwegian Literature Abroad:**  
www.norla.no/en/pages
- **Office for Contemporary Art Norway:**  
oca.no/grants-residencies

### Regional

- **Troms og Finnmark fylkeskommune/Troms and Finnmark county municipality:**  
www.tffk.no/tjenester/stotte-stipend-og-priser/  
okonomisk-stotte-og-stipend/kultur/
- **Nordland fylkeskommune/Nordland county municipality:**  
www.nfk.no/tjenester/kultur/kunst-og-kulturutvikling/  
sok-tilskudd/

## Sweden

Sweden is known for its rich culture and arts scene and for many Swedish artists and organisations it is of great importance to be able to collaborate and work internationally. To support this, some organisations in Sweden offer various types of support for international guest performances, co-productions, collaborations, residencies, and scholarships.

Some of the organisations that offer this support are **Konstnärsnämnden/The Swedish Arts Grants Committee**, **Statens Kulturråd/Swedish Arts Council**, **Svenska Institutet/The Swedish Institute and Svenska Filminstitutet/The Swedish Film Institute**. The financial support offered varies between the organisations but they have common protocols regarding who they are given to, guidelines, and the amount of money that can be applied for.

Financial support is given to Swedish artists, cultural practitioners, organisations, and projects that want to work internationally, collaborate with colleagues in other countries, participate in international events, and/or conduct international guest performances, co-productions, or residencies. To be eligible to apply for support, it is usually required to work in an art form supported by the organisation (e.g., visual arts, dance, literature, music, theatre, or film). There are usually also requirements for relevant credentials and a clear plan for what one wants to achieve with the support.

Depending on the financial support being sought, there may be specific guidelines to follow regarding applications deadlines, application forms, and other requirements. The amounts that can be applied vary depending on the financial support being sought and the organisation being applied to. Most organisations offer different levels of support, from smaller work scholarships to larger production grants and collaborations. Usually, it is up to the application to specify the amount being applied for, and the organisation can then decide how much support to provide.

By offering support for international work and collaboration, these organisations allow Swedish artists and cultural practitioners to participate in the global cultural scene and develop their art and networks internationally.

## Links to some of the searchable support in Sweden for cultural collaborations/exchange

### National

- **Statens kulturråd/Swedish Arts Council:**  
www.kulturradet.se/sok-bidrag/?f=Internationellt  
www.kulturradet.se/en/our-grants/
- **Statens kulturråd/Swedish Arts Council (EU):**  
www.kulturradet.se/sok-bidrag/?f=Kreativa%20Europa
- **Konstnärsnämnden/The Swedish Arts Grants Committee & IASPIS:**  
www.konstnarsnamnden.se/internationella-program-och-residens/  
www.konstnarsnamnden.se/en/international-programmes-and-residencies/
- **Riksteatern/The Swedish National Touring Theatre:**  
www.riksteatern.se/teater/teaterresidens/
- **Svenska filminstitutet/Swedish Film Institute:**  
https://www.filminstitutet.se/sv/sok-stod/stod-till-internationell-lansering/
- **Film i Väst:**  
filmivast.se/ansokningsportalen-2/
- **Svenska institutet/The Swedish Institute:**  
si.se/utlysningar/bidrag-finansiering/

### Regional

- **Region Norrbotten/The Norrbotten region:**  
utvecklanorrbotten.se/kulturstod/kulturstod/  
mobilitetsstod/
- **Region Västerbotten/The Västerbotten region:**  
www.regionvasterbotten.se/kultur/regional-kultur/  
kulturstipendier

## The Barents region

In the Barents region, there are several opportunities for individual artists and organisations to seek support for international guest performances, co-productions, collaborations, residencies, and scholarships within the cultural sector. Here follows some organisations that offer financial support and contribute to promoting cultural exchange and cooperation between the countries in the region:

**The Interreg Aurora** programme works to strengthen cross-border cooperation in several areas, including culture. It is a programme in the European Union Interreg community for cross-border cooperation in 2021–2027. By financing projects that promote cooperation and joint development between the countries in the Barents region, the programme contributes to creating stronger cultural ties and increased understanding between neighbouring countries.

**The Working Group on Culture (WGC)** is an official group consisting of representatives from ministries and regions that aims to strengthen cultural identity, dialogue, and ties in the Barents region. Together with **the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)**, they offer a 10,000 euro Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation, awarded biennially to recipients from each Barents country. The scholarship promotes artistic quality and cross-border collaboration and can be granted to individuals or groups. Recipients must be active in the Barents region and demonstrate previous cultural cooperation and ambition for further collaboration.

By exploring these resources and taking advantage of the various funding opportunities offered, artists and cultural organisations in the Barents area can develop their projects, strengthen their international presence, and contribute to promoting cultural understanding and cooperation across borders.

**The North Calotte Council/Pohjoiskalotin neuvosto/Nordkalotträdet** is an important player supporting projects between the northern regions of Finland, Norway and Sweden. Through their financial contributions, they aim to promote joint projects and network building in culture, education, research, and business. Criteria set for the applicant include that it must create Nordic added value and that all actors in the project must belong to the three countries.

**The Norwegian Barents Secretariat** also support artists and organisations that work with international exchange in the culture sector. For more information, see page 30.

**The Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)** was established in 2010 as a fourth partnership in EU's Northern Dimension Policy. The members of the

NDPC are the European Commission and the Ministries responsible for culture in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation (suspended), and Sweden. The NDPC is a cooperation platform in the Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) ecosystem, bringing together both the EU and the non-EU countries and providing access to a wide pool of expertise and experience related to CCS development across the ND region.

While the NDPC is officially a governmental partnership, it has the flexibility to operate closely with other public and private organisations in setting up new initiatives and forming broader alliances. It brings together both the national authorities as well as other non-governmental stakeholders and experts within the CCS and in other related sectors.

Additionally, there is **Nordisk Kulturkontakt/Nordic Culture Point**, which provides travel funds to artists and cultural professionals who wish to travel between the Nordic countries to participate in cultural projects. Nordisk Kulturkontakt/Nordic Culture Point is an organisation that operates in all the Nordic countries

### Links to some of the searchable support for cultural collaborations/exchange

#### Barents

- **The Norwegian Barents Secretariat:** [barents.no/nb/barentskult-en-stotteordning-profesjonell-kunst-og-kultur](http://barents.no/nb/barentskult-en-stotteordning-profesjonell-kunst-og-kultur) (Norway-Russia)
- **Barents Euro-Arctic Council & Working Group on Culture:** [barents-council.org/barents-regional-council/barents-success-stories/barents-scholarships-for-cultural-cooperation](http://barents-council.org/barents-regional-council/barents-success-stories/barents-scholarships-for-cultural-cooperation)
- **Nordkalotträdet/Pohjoiskalotin neuvosto:** [nordkalottradet.org/hae-tukea-sv/](http://nordkalottradet.org/hae-tukea-sv/)  
[pohjoiskalotinneuvosto.fi/hae-tukea/](http://pohjoiskalotinneuvosto.fi/hae-tukea/)
- **Interreg Aurora:** [www.interregaurora.eu/projects/calls-for-applications/](http://www.interregaurora.eu/projects/calls-for-applications/)

#### Nordic

- **Baltic Art Center** [www.balticartcenter.com/om-bac/uppdrag/](http://www.balticartcenter.com/om-bac/uppdrag/)  
[www.balticartcenter.com/home/](http://www.balticartcenter.com/home/)
- **Nordisk kulturkontakt / Pohjoismainen kulttuuripiste/ Nordic Culture Point:** <https://www.nordiskkulturkontakt.org/ansok-om-stod/>  
[www.nordiskkulturkontakt.org/fi/hae-tukea/](http://www.nordiskkulturkontakt.org/fi/hae-tukea/)  
[www.nordiskkulturkontakt.org/en/apply-for-funding/](http://www.nordiskkulturkontakt.org/en/apply-for-funding/)

## The Saami Council's cultural support

The Saami Council's cultural support is financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The purpose is to support, revitalise and promote traditional and modern Sámi cultural life across national borders. The grant will strengthen Sámi cultural life and cooperation, and provide an opportunity for Sámi groups, organisations, and individuals to apply for cultural support.

When allocating grants, particular emphasis is placed on activities that reach the whole of Sápmi. Cultural support is not given to states, municipalities, churches, or to media that receive state funds.

Cultural support is granted as project support, employment, or study travel grants. Project support is intended for support for cultural cooperation across national borders and is granted primarily for measures that affect at least two countries where the Sámi live. The purpose of the employment grant is to support active cultural workers. The study travel grant is intended to help active cultural workers, so that they can travel to places for artistic development.

The Saami Council's Cultural Committee has just awarded cultural support for 2023. Grants totalling NOK 2,000,000 were distributed to various cultural activities throughout Sápmi.

**Read more:**  
<https://wolverine-opossum-zznd.squarespace.com/en/cultural-fund>

- **Kulturfonden för Sverige och Finland/Suomalais-ruotsalainen kulttuurirahasto/Swedish-Finnish Cultural Foundation:** [kulturfonden.net/bidrag/](http://kulturfonden.net/bidrag/)  
[kulturfonden.net/fi/bidrag/](http://kulturfonden.net/fi/bidrag/)

- **Nordic Culture Fund:** [www.nordiskkulturfond.org/en/funding-programmes/project-funding-for-collaborations-across-the-nordic-region](http://www.nordiskkulturfond.org/en/funding-programmes/project-funding-for-collaborations-across-the-nordic-region)

- **Norsk-Finsk kulturfond/Norjalais-suomalainen kulttuurirahasto/Norwegian-Finnish Cultural Foundation:** [nofikulturfond.no/hvem-kan-soke/](http://nofikulturfond.no/hvem-kan-soke/)  
[nofikulturfond.no/fi/hvem-kan-soke/](http://nofikulturfond.no/fi/hvem-kan-soke/)  
[nofikulturfond.no/en/hvem-kan-soke/](http://nofikulturfond.no/en/hvem-kan-soke/)

- **Suomalais-norjalainen kulttuurirahasto/The Finnish-Norwegian Cultural Foundation :** [www.hanaholmen.fi/kulttuurikeskus/hanasaari/rahastot/suomalais-norjalainen-kulttuurirahasto/](http://www.hanaholmen.fi/kulttuurikeskus/hanasaari/rahastot/suomalais-norjalainen-kulttuurirahasto/)  
[www.hanaholmen.fi/en/culturalcentre/hanaholmen/foundations/the-finnish-norwegian-cultural-foundation/](http://www.hanaholmen.fi/en/culturalcentre/hanaholmen/foundations/the-finnish-norwegian-cultural-foundation/)

#### European

- **Creative Europe:** [culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe](http://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe)
- **European Cultural Foundation:** [culturalfoundation.eu/open-calls/](http://culturalfoundation.eu/open-calls/)
- **EUNIC:** [www.eunicglobal.eu/about](http://www.eunicglobal.eu/about)



**Dans Theatre Rimpparemmi**, from Rovaniemi. Photo: Antti Kurola  
**Northern Paradise**. From the artistic expedition to view objects of historical and cultural heritage in the basin of Lake Onega, within the framework of the Northern Paradise international project. In the picture from the left: Dina Chetvertnaya, Heidi Vasara, Jarkko Suvela, Hanneriina Moisseinen, Päivi Hynninen and Tuomas Ollikainen. Photo: Sergey Terentyev

# The effects of the pandemic on culture

– Summary of some national and regional reports and studies in the Barents region

This chapter focuses on some of the reports and studies conducted on how the pandemic has affected the cultural sector in the various countries belonging to the Barents region. The chapter summarises the different reports from each country. However, we can see the following prominent conclusions that are found in the reports from the countries Finland, Norway and Sweden:

- The pandemic has highlighted the economic and social vulnerability of artists and cultural creators.
- Some art forms fare better than others in a pandemic situation.
- New digital habits and opportunities have emerged for both artists and audiences.
- The importance of culture in society during a crisis has become more evident.
- There is a significant need for physical meetings among artists and cultural creators.
- Among the three countries, Norway addresses the importance of culture in the Barents region the most.

## Finland

The pandemic has left an indelible mark on Finland’s cultural sector, resulting in considerable economic losses and job insecurity for both artists and cultural organisations. In response to the crisis, the Finnish government introduced various support measures, such as grants and subsidies, aimed at mitigating the impact on the cultural sector. These measures have been vital for the survival of many cultural organisations, as reported by Cupore, a research institute for the cultural sector. However, the distribution of support has been unequal, with certain regions, particularly northern Finland, receiving less aid.

Recognising the need for a comprehensive approach, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture established a working group tasked with developing proposals to reinforce the Finnish art and culture sector. The group’s report, *Kulturens tid är nu och alltid /The time of culture is now and always*, offers an insightful and forward-looking perspective on the cultural sector’s future, incorporating surveys on the industry’s prospects. The report proposes a multi-faceted approach to strengthen the Finnish cultural sector, considering lessons learned from the pandemic, elevating culture’s societal value,

making strategic investments in the cultural economy, improving conditions for artists, and ensuring equitable access to culture throughout Finland.

In the report *Koronapandemian vaikutuksia kulttuurialalla 2020 – 2021 /Effects of the corona pandemic in the cultural sector 2020 – 2021*, the analysis delves deeper into the pandemic’s effects on the cultural sector’s capacity to produce and present creative work. The report highlights the unique challenges encountered by cultural organisations in remote northern regions, such as Lapland and Kainuu, due to a decline in tourism. It advocates for the adaptation of future support measures to accommodate these regional differences, ensuring a fair distribution of resources across the country.

Furthermore, Kultra’s report, *Kulttuurin puolesta: 24 keinoa kulttuuri- ja taidealan tukemiseksi Covid-19 pandemian jälkeen/For culture: 24 ways to support the culture and arts sector after the Covid-19 pandemic*, offers an empathetic view of the pandemic’s impact on Finland’s cultural sector through the lens of cultural workers. The report underscores the financial and emotional hardships faced by these workers and calls for greater support of their mental health. It also identifies the pandemic’s role in revealing the necessity for cross-border collaboration in the Barents region and the untapped potential of digital platforms for fostering international cultural exchange.

With the pandemic’s far-reaching consequences, it is essential to highlight its impact on different sectors within the cultural sphere. For instance, theatres and live-performance venues have experienced extended closures and capacity limitations, severely affecting revenues and job opportunities for artists and technical staff. The restrictions on international travel have also hindered cultural exchanges, limiting opportunities for international collaborations, guest performances, and residencies.

Moreover, museums and galleries have faced closures or reduced visitor numbers, which has led to substantial losses in ticket sales and revenue. This situation has had a knock-on effect on the artists whose work is exhibited and on the curators and support staff responsible for maintaining these institutions.

The film industry in Finland has also felt the impact, with delays in production schedules, disruptions to film festivals, and the temporary closure of cinemas. This has resulted in a loss of income for filmmakers, actors, and other industry professionals, while also limiting the reach of their creative work.

To address these challenges, it is essential for the Finnish government and relevant stakeholders to develop targeted support measures that cater to the specific needs of each subsector within the cultural sphere. This may include emergency grants, low-interest loans, and subsidies for rent or utilities to help organisations stay afloat. Additionally, the government should consider investing in digital infrastructure and training for cultural workers, enabling them to adapt to new technologies and reach wider audiences through online platforms.

The post-pandemic recovery offers an opportunity to reimagine the cultural sector's future, building on the lessons learned during this time.

- *Kulturens tid är nu och alltid/The time of culture is now and always/*, **Opetus- ja Kulttuuriministeriö/** Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet/ Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022
- *Luovien alojen koronatuettu vuosina 2020 ja 2021/ Interest subsidies for creative sectors in 2020 and 2021*, **Kulta**, 2021
- *Koronapandemian vaikutuksia kulttuurialalla 2020 – 2021/Effects of the corona pandemic in the cultural sector 2020 – 2021*, **Opetus- ja Kulttuuriministeriö/** Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet/Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021

## Norway

A report from Arts and Culture Norway and Norwegian Film Institute, *Koronakrisen og kultursektoren/ The corona crisis and the cultural sector*, shows that the pandemic has caused significant disruptions in the cultural sector in Norway, particularly in the performing arts and music. Many festivals and events have been cancelled, resulting in significant losses for both artists and organisers. Another report from Arts and Culture Norway and Norwegian Film Institute, *Kunstneren og coronapandemien/The artists and the corona pandemic*, focuses on how the pandemic has affected the situation of artists and creators. The report shows that many artists have lost their income and that economic uncertainty has increased. Artists in the Barents region have also been affected by the pandemic, but the report does not provide any specific details on how.

Another report from Arts and Culture Norway, *Kvalitativ studie av musikk- og scen kunstneres arbeidssituasjon etter coronapandemien/Qualitative study of the working*

*situation of music and stage artists after the corona pandemic*, focuses on how the pandemic has affected art and cultural education in Norway. The report shows that both students and teachers have been affected by the pandemic and that education has been significantly impacted. In the Barents region, many art and cultural education programmes have been affected by the pandemic.

Another report from Arts and Culture Norway and Norwegian Film Institute, *Sterkere tilbake/Stronger back*, provides an overview of the measures taken to support the cultural sector during the pandemic. The report describes support measures for artists and cultural organisations, including increased support for digital projects and live-streamed events. Arts and Culture Norway also produced a report *Kartlegging av kommunale og fylkeskommunale tiltak rettet mot kultursektoren for å avbøte konsekvensene av coronapandemien/Mapping of municipal and county measures aimed at the cultural sector to mitigate the consequences of the corona pandemic*, which shows that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the cultural sector throughout the country, including in the Barents region. Many actors have lost significant portions of their revenue, and there is concern that cultural events and institutions will suffer permanent damage. Therefore, the government has introduced various measures to support the cultural sector and contribute to recovery, such as economic stimulus packages and the development of new digital platforms.

In the Ministry of Culture's interim report from July 2021, *Gjenoppbygging av kultursektoren/ Reconstruction of the cultural sector*, a plan is presented to rebuild the cultural sector in Norway after the pandemic. The report emphasises the importance of collaborating with local cultural actors and involving a diversity of cultural expressions and perspectives. It also notes that the Barents region is an important part of Norway's cultural landscape and that there is a desire to strengthen cooperation with other countries in the region to promote cultural exchange.

The report *Kunnskapsoppsummering/Knowledge summary* from October 2021, also published by the Ministry of Culture, details how the pandemic has affected different parts of the cultural sector in Norway, including theatre, music, film, literature, and art. It is noted that many artists and cultural actors have been severely affected by the pandemic and that there is a risk of important voices and creative expressions being lost if measures are not taken to support the sector.

In a *Tenketank rapport 2021 – 2022/ Think tank report 2021 – 2022* from The Sámi Council, the impact of the pandemic on Sámi culture in Norway is described. The report points out that the Sámi people have been hard hit by the pandemic, partly because many of the events and gatherings that are important to Sámi culture

have been cancelled. It has also been difficult for Sámi artists to receive financial support during the pandemic, as support systems often do not consider the unique situation of Sámi artists.

In Nordland County Council, a cultural strategy for 2023 – 2027 has been developed. The strategy includes a chapter on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the cultural sector. It describes how the pandemic has affected the cultural life in the county, and that those who were primarily affected were those who practiced art forms that required physical meetings, such as performing arts and museums. It is reported that the number of cultural events and visits was greatly reduced, and the number of applicants for project funding decreased.

At the national level, recruitment is highlighted as by far the biggest challenge for the cultural sector in the future. The decline in the professional art and cultural sector is likely to significantly weaken the overall activity, innovation, and diversity of the cultural offerings in the coming years.

- *Koronakrisen og kultursektoren/The corona crisis and the cultural sector*, **Kulturdirektoratet** Arts and Culture Norway, 2020
- *Gjenoppbygging av kultursektoren/Reconstruction of the cultural sector*, **Kulturdirektoratet/** Arts and Culture Norway & **Norsk filminstitutt/** Norwegian Film Institute, 2021
- *Kunnskapsoppsummering – konsekvenser av pandemien i kultursektoren og tiltak for gjenoppbygging/ Knowledge summary – consequences of the pandemic in the cultural sector and measures for reconstruction*, **Kulturdirektoratet/** Arts and Culture Norway, 2021
- *Kunstneren og coronapandemien/The artist and the corona pandemic*, **Kulturdirektoratet/** Arts and Culture Norway & **Norsk filminstitutt/** Norwegian Film Institute, 2021
- *Kartlegging av kommunale og fylkeskommunale tiltak rettet mot kultursektoren for å avbøte konsekvensene av coronapandemien/Mapping of municipal and county measures aimed at the cultural sector to mitigate the consequences of the corona pandemic*, **Kulturdirektoratet/** Arts and Culture Norway, 2021
- *Tenketank rapport 2021 – 2022/Think tank report 2021 – 2022*, **Sámiráddi/**The Sámi Council, 2022
- *Sterkere tilbake – Pandemiens konsekvenser for kultursektoren og mulige virkemidler for gjenoppbygging/Back stronger – The consequences of the pandemic for the cultural sector and possible measures for reconstruction*, **Kulturdirektoratet/** Arts and Culture Norway & **Norsk filminstitutt/** Norwegian Film Institute, 2022
- *Kartlegging av kommunale og fylkeskommunale tiltak rettet mot kultursektoren for å avbøte konsekvensene av coronapandemien/Mapping of municipal and county changes aimed at the cultural sector to mitigate the consequences of the corona pandemic*,

**Kulturdirektoratet/** Arts and Culture Norway & **Norsk filminstitutt/** Norwegian Film Institute, 2021

- *Kvalitativ studie av musikk- og scen kunstneres arbeidssituasjon etter coronapandemien/Qualitative study of the working situation of music and stage artists after the corona pandemic*, **Kulturdirektoratet/** Arts and Culture Norway, 2023
- *Kultur-Sápmi i tider med Covid-19/Culture-Sápmi in times of Covid-19*, **Sámiráddi/**The Sámi Council, 2021
- *Kulturstrategi for Nordland fylkeskommune 2023 – 2027 /Cultural strategy for Nordland County Municipality 2023 – 2027*, Nordland fylkeskommune/ Nordland county municipality, 2023

## Sweden

In Sweden nationally, the government investigation *Från kris till kraft/Restarting the Arts and Culture in Sweden* was the most extensive. A special investigator was appointed to examine, among other things, how the pandemic had affected the cultural sector, but also to develop proposals for support measures for the affected cultural life in Sweden. The description of the pandemic's impact concerned both negative as well as positive effects. The review of the cultural sector that the investigation conducted also resulted in highlighting structural problems that existed regardless of the pandemic. The investigation took its starting point in the Swedish national cultural policy goals, and the proposals concerned both how culture could be restarted and also a strong and sustainable cultural life in the long term.

The Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis annually produces reports on the cultural habits of Swedes. However, the report *Kulturvanor i Sverige 2020/ Cultural habits in Sweden 2020* clearly shows how the corona pandemic has affected the country's residents' cultural activities. Above all, the report showed that visit activities related to culture decreased significantly during 2020, mainly in the art forms of performing arts as well as visits to cinemas and museums. However, the report showed that people's own cultural activities increased among Sweden's population during this period and that they watched movies, read books, and listened to audiobooks or music to a greater extent.

Furthermore, the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis presented an additional report linked to the corona pandemic, *Ett år med pandemin/A year with the pandemic*. The Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis was tasked with examining how the cultural sector was affected by the pandemic, and examining which efforts had been made at the political level to meet the crisis, and how effective the public efforts had been in mitigating the negative consequences of the cultural sector. What emerged in the report from the investigation were three overarching consequences that the pandemic brought with it:

- Reduced and changed cultural offerings and participation
- Loss of income and revenue for cultural activities and creators
- Deteriorated cultural job market. The pandemic has not only contributed to short-term consequences but has also highlighted structural challenges in the cultural sector – problems that existed before the pandemic but have been reinforced and clarified during the acute crisis.

From the Sámi Parliament, the report *Pandemins effekter på det samiska kulturlivet/The effects of the pandemic on Sámi cultural life* was published. The report presented a compilation of how Sámi cultural actors and practitioners have been affected by the pandemic. Among other things, the pandemic caused a heavy economic burden for Sámi cultural activities, and individual cultural creators lost large parts of their income. Furthermore, the pandemic prevented Sámi people from travelling and meeting throughout Sápmi.

In the Västerbotten region, a survey was conducted in the spring of 2020 with the aim of gaining a better understanding of how the coronavirus pandemic affected professional cultural creators in the region. The survey questions revolved around two main issues: the work situation of cultural creators and their current and future needs. This survey was called *Enkät: Kulturskapares situation i Region Västerbotten, på grund av covid-19/Survey: The situation of cultural creators in Region Västerbotten, due to Covid-19*.

Furthermore, a report was produced by the Norrbotten region called *Coronapandemins påverkan på kulturområdet i Norrbotten 2020/The impact of the corona pandemic on the cultural area in Norrbotten in 2020*. This report showed that the pandemic has strongly affected and reduced access to culture in Norrbotten and Sweden. It has affected both audiences and visitors, practitioners, and organisations. Cultural venues have been closed, cultural activities, events, and performances have been cancelled, and community and cultural projects have been put on hold. At the same time, there has been an increased digital adaptation and expansion of digital offerings during the year. The Norrbotten region and the state have announced special crisis support for cultural organisations and professional cultural creators. Cultural organisations and creators express concern for the future regarding economic conditions, disappearing expertise, and unpredictability of how changes in cultural consumers' behaviours and habits may affect the cultural sector.

- *Från kris till kraft/Restarting the Arts and Culture in Sweden, Kulturdepartementet/Ministry of Culture, 2021*
- *Kulturvanor i Sverige 2020/Cultural habits in Sweden 2020, Myndigheten för Kulturanalys/The Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, 2021*

- *Ett år med pandemin/A year with the pandemic, Myndigheten för kulturanalys/The Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, 2021*
- *Pandemins effekter på det samiska kulturlivet/The effects of the pandemic on Sámi cultural life, Sémediggi/Sami Parliament, 2021*
- *Enkät: Kulturskapares situation i Region Västerbotten, på grund av covid-19/Survey: The situation of cultural creators in Region Västerbotten, due to Covid-19, Region Västerbotten/The Västerbotten region, 2020*
- *Coronapandemins påverkan på kulturområdet i Norrbotten 2020/The impact of the corona pandemic on the cultural area in Norrbotten in 2020, Region Norrbotten/The Norrbotten region, 2021*

## Nordic cultural exchange

The pandemic has had a profound impact on the cultural sector across the world, and the Nordic countries have not been immune to its effects. In response, Kulturanalys Norden, a Nordic cultural analysis organisation, has conducted an extensive investigation into the pandemic's impact on the cultural sector, culminating in a comprehensive report titled *Covid-19-pandemiens effekter på kultursektoren i de nordiske landene/The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the cultural sector in the Nordic countries*. Additionally, they have undertaken a feasibility study, *Kartläggning av gränshinder för nordiskt kulturutbyte/Mapping of border obstacles for Nordic cultural exchange*, to assess potential barriers to cooperation between the Nordic countries.

The feasibility study is particularly relevant to this summery, as it underscores concerns about the pandemic's effects creating additional barriers between countries in the Barents region. When the nations closed their borders during the pandemic and held differing opinions on societal shutdowns, numerous obstacles arose for cross-border collaboration. This proved especially problematic for the Sámi people in the northern border areas, who frequently engage in cultural collaborations across borders. Interestingly, the study's interviews suggest that the pandemic could potentially lead to stronger Nordic cultural collaborations as the difficulties in collaborating with more geographically distant countries have been brought to light.

According to the report, *Covid-19-pandemiens effekter på kultursektoren i de nordiske landene/The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the cultural sector in the Nordic countries*, the pandemic has had significant negative consequences on the cultural sector, particularly in the Nordic countries. The report emphasises the substantial impact on art forms and culture that depend on physical presence, such as performing arts and art exhibitions.

Despite the various Nordic countries implementing different pandemic management strategies, their cultural sectors appeared to be similarly affected. The report also highlights certain cultural expressions that have experienced positive effects due to the pandemic, such as international platforms for television, film, music, and books.

The most pressing challenge identified in the report is the economic losses incurred by cultural actors because of the pandemic. Besides concerns about future job opportunities and income, many cultural workers have sought employment in other industries, leading to repercussions throughout the entire cultural sector. All Nordic countries have introduced significant support measures to bolster the cultural sector during the pandemic, although each nation has taken a distinct approach. Norway has been one of the countries that provided the most support, while Finland has offered the least assistance to the cultural sector during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the report predicts that the production and consumption of culture, as well as cultural policy in the Nordic countries, will undergo long-term changes. The cultural sector will adapt to new circumstances, and people will work differently than before. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that cultural production, consisting of international collaborations and travel, will recover and return to its pre-pandemic state. This highlights the resilience and adaptability of the cultural sector and the importance of continuing to support and foster cultural exchange and collaboration throughout the Nordic countries and the Barents region.

The feasibility study, *Kartläggning av gränshinder för nordiskt kulturutbyte/Mapping of border obstacles for Nordic cultural exchange*, provides further insights into the potential barriers to cooperation between the Nordic countries. It is important to understand the implications of the pandemic on the overall cultural landscape and the potential for collaboration in the future. The study found that the pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges for cross-border collaboration, such as differences in administrative and legal systems, language barriers, and varying levels of financial support for the cultural sector.

One of the key issues raised in the study is the impact of border closures and travel restrictions on the Sámi people in the northern border areas. The Sámi people, who have a long tradition of cultural exchange and collaboration, have been significantly affected by the pandemic. This has resulted in the disruption of cultural events, projects, and collaborations, as well as the loss of opportunities for the Sámi people to engage with their cultural heritage and practices.

- *Kartläggning av gränshinder för nordiskt kulturutbyte – En förstudie/Mapping of border obstacles for Nordic cultural exchange, Kulturanalys Norden, 2022*
- *Covid-19-pandemiens effekter på kultursektoren i de nordiske landene/The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the cultural sector in the Nordic countries, Kulturanalys Norden, 2021*



Lapland Chamber Orchestra. Photo: Marco Borggreve



The KulturSápmi conference that the Sámi Council organises annually as an industry meeting place for Sámi art and the cultural field. Photo: The Saami Council Nordic Storytelling Center in Skellefteå. Photo: Patrick Degerman

# Collected voices from the Barents region

## – Summary of survey responses

A survey has been sent out to representatives of cultural life in the northern parts of Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The survey is part of a knowledge base that maps the situation of cultural life in the Barents region after the pandemic, in an economic recession, and during the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine. In addition to forming the basis for an analysis of the current situation, proposals for efforts to strengthen and increase international cooperation are also included.

Through this survey, the cultural activities of the Barents region have contributed by analysing the current situation and contributed with thoughts about development.

*In the survey, questions have been asked that deal with:*

- the situation today for the businesses/organisations
- what challenges and opportunities exist for the cultural sector right now
- what international cooperation looks like
- what obstacles exist to increased international collaborations
- what efforts need to be made for increased international cultural cooperation

*The survey questions are divided into three parts:*

- Part 1: The current situation**
- Part 2: International operations**
- Part 3: Needs and strategies going forward**

The respondents who were included in the survey are managers and other representatives of cultural organisations, and individual professional cultural creators within the entire cultural area in the Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish parts of the Barents region, including Sápmi. The actors already work internationally today or have international ambitions.

The survey was designed in three languages: Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish respectively. Data collection was carried out via questionnaires in Google Docs in the spring of 2023. All respondents can be found listed on page 100.

The majority (41%) of the survey responses have come from independent groups, associations, foundations, and similar activities that have public support. Freelance art and cultural creators and publicly-owned cultural institutions each make up a fifth of the respondents (21% and 20% respectively), while a smaller number are

made up of companies and private actors (9%) and other forms of organisation (8%).

Of the respondents, most are active in art and visual arts (24%) and performing arts (23%), which here includes theatre, dance, circus, musicals, opera, performance, and storytelling. Next come cultural heritage and museums (12%) and music (11%). The rest are made up of representatives for festivals, literature, arts and crafts, form, film as well as libraries, premises run by non-profit associations, municipal cultural administration, and various organiser/producer activities.

## • Summary of the survey

For the cultural activities in the Barents region, the economic recession and Russia's war against Ukraine have a greater impact on the activities now than the effects left behind by the pandemic. Most of the cultural activities state that they have recovered after the pandemic and that they have received some positive effects from it, such as a broadened and increased offer. The pandemic has also brought about increased flexibility where remote work has become "the new normal", which is perceived by many as predominantly positive. Digitisation has created a springboard towards the future in the form of increased opportunities for international contacts and international operations as well as an opportunity to reach a larger audience.

The pandemic has, however, changed the structure in terms of funding, competence provisioning, and planning. For example, by allocating extra funds outside of the regular grant schedules that are standard for cultural organisation and their planning, or by postponement of projects that will now be implemented well after the regular grant and planning timelines. Many respondents state that the cultural organisations are now forced to exist more "hand to mouth" than before, with shorter planning horizons.

When it comes to relations with Russia, the map has literally been redrawn. Previous collaborations with Russian cultural activities and artists have been throttled

to basically zero. Most cultural activities believe that the Barents cooperation has played its role in Russia's war against Ukraine, because cooperation with Russia was the basic idea of the Barents project.

Intra-Nordic collaborations already existed before the Barents concept was established and these are still current and lively.

The survey shows that there is a strong desire to develop this cooperation in an east-west direction between the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, including Sápmi. This is interesting since there is a common cultural identity as well as many practical and geographical challenges – such as sparsely populated areas and diversity of languages – that unite the region.

The Sámi cultural activities are well advanced and can in many ways be said to be driving the issues surrounding international activities. These businesses have a long experience of both Nordic and international collaborations, but are also considered to have a strong development potential regarding international exchange. The intensified and global interest in indigenous cultures means an extra-large potential for increased international cooperation.

The biggest obstacle to increased cooperation both within the Barents region and internationally is the economic recession – it erodes cultural support, and audiences do not have sufficient financial means to spend on culture.

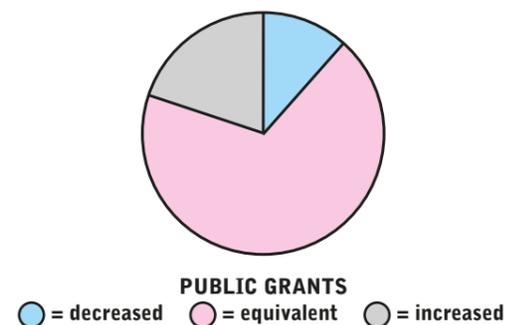
The survey confirms that the cultural activities believe that increased cooperation both within the Barents region (except for Russia) and internationally is of high value – both for the economic development of the region and the individual cultural activities, but also to strengthen the identity of the region, preserve cultural heritage, strengthen democracy and freedom of expression.

The efforts that are deemed most valuable for a favourable development of collaboration are: increased financial resources in general; specially-dedicated funding opportunities to support international collaborations and projects; establishment and promotion of networks and collaboration forums, preferably in the form of a coordinator or organisation that can coordinate collaborative projects. Finally, there is a need to increase awareness of the opportunities for collaboration, funding sources and infrastructure for collaborations in the Barents region, for example through a joint platform or database.

## • Part 1: The current situation

Here we have asked what the situation of cultural activities is right now with regard to finances, operations, organisation, audience and digitisation. We have also asked the cultural activities to state which threats and challenges, respectively opportunities and strengths, they see right now.

### Economics and financing



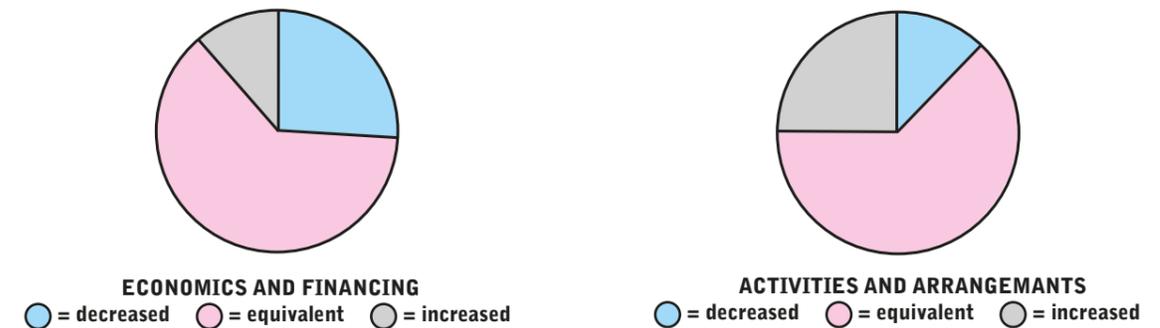
### Public grants

The financial situation for cultural practitioners within the Barents region in terms of public grants remains at an equivalent level today. Compared to before the pandemic, there has even been a certain increase. The increase is explained to a significant degree by the restart support that has been distributed and which has led to many businesses also being able to increase their operations compared to before the pandemic. The regular public contributions have mostly remained at the same level as before the pandemic. Most actors point out that this is in reality a reduction in grants, because inflation and increased wages and production costs lead to the businesses receiving less art per kroner today compared to before the pandemic.

*“In particular, 2022 and 2023 have been good years for own revenues, which is mainly due to the fact that thanks to restart support we have been able to invest.” (FIN)*

*“No change in allocations, but the world situation with inflation and increased spending is digging a hole in the economy. A small percentage increase combined with a sharp increase in inflation produces a negative outcome.” (NO)*

## Activities and arrangements



### Own income

Regarding the cultural activities' own income – this includes the sale of tickets and goods as well as sponsorship income – almost every third cultural activity in the Barents region states that this income has decreased compared to before the pandemic. The dominant type of own revenue is ticket revenue, which has fluctuated widely. The majority saw an increase in ticket revenue immediately after the end of the pandemic when the audience had saved money to spend on culture, while today instead you notice that the economic recession has made the audience less able to buy.

The roughly one-tenth who see an increase in their own income link this to the fact that they were able to increase the scope of their public activities thanks to the restart support. The share of sponsorship income is hardly commented on, which may be explained by the fact that many of the cultural activities are free groups or freelance artists where sponsorship is not common.

*“We had increased revenue in 2021 when the restrictions for the pandemic eased and people had money they had saved. We are now at roughly the same level as before the pandemic, for example in terms of ticket revenue.” (NO)*

*“Most of our activities and performances are free for the public. But by using the technology, we have received diverse projects and collaborative funding, especially from international parties.” (SVE)*

*“As sponsorship income, I count income from companies or other private parties, unsolicited grants or scholarships. They are a very small part of our business and have remained small.” (SVE)*

Despite eroded contributions and reduced own income, the dominant trend is that the degree of activity in the form of activities and events remains at the same level as before the pandemic. A smaller percentage of cultural activities in the Barents region, about 10%, indicate that the degree of activity has decreased, while the majority believes that it is at approximately the same level today as before the pandemic.

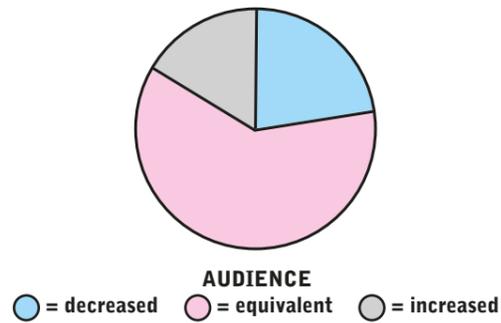
Of the quarter who state that business has increased, there are various explanations: partly it depends on the restart support distributed after the pandemic, partly on targeted project efforts that were made during the pandemic. Several also mention that during the pandemic they developed new forms of activities and events, mostly digital, which have led to being able to increase the number of activities and reach out to a larger audience in different ways.

*“With the development of digital tools, we have diversified our projects and thus increased the number of audiences. (FIN)”*

*“The business has roughly the same level of activity as before the pandemic, but during the pandemic special projects gave extra impetus to several new types of activities.” (NO)*

*“Extra covid funds and restart funds have given us the opportunity to expand productions and tour.” (SVE)*

## The audience



The audience's return to cultural life has been in focus after the pandemic, and the big question has been whether the audience would find their way back to previous consumption patterns. The cultural activities in the Barents region give mixed answers to the question and it is difficult to discern a clear pattern.

The majority, 63%, indicate that the audience and the number of visitors is at approximately the same level as before, while a quarter indicate a decrease and a fifth an increase. Several express a positive effect that several hybrid and online events have increased audience numbers, while some believe that the very fact that they have changed their business in terms of supply makes it difficult to compare the current situation with the situation before the pandemic. Among the proportion experiencing a decrease in audience numbers, higher ticket prices and a change in audience behaviour are the dominant reasons.

*"A reduction in local events, but hybrid and online activities have become more common and through this we get domestic and foreign audiences." (FIN)*

*"Difficult to compare, you have changed your business, e.g. more digital now than before, so you can have more visitors." (NO)*

*"Higher prices and a habit of going to events after the pandemic led to fewer visitors." (SVE)*

## Organisation

### Organisation and competence supply

As in the picture drawn above of the current situation in terms of finances and scope of activities among cultural activities in the Barents region, there is no clear picture to give of the organisational situation. Some state that colleagues quit and/or changed industries, and that cutbacks were necessary during the pandemic. In contrast to this, there is an increase in the number of people employed on a project basis as an effect of the restart support.

The above pattern also reflects the fact that most cultural activities in the Barents region are categorised as the so-called "free cultural life", the group that, in contrast to the institutions, was hit hardest by the closed cultural life that prevailed during the pandemic.

A change in the mental state can be discerned among the comments – the relative stability of business planning is gone, and the businesses are now forced to think short term with more ad-hoc solutions in terms of artistic activities and with shorter project assignments. There are no longer the same conditions for long-term planning structures.

The supply of skills is mentioned as a challenge for businesses in the Barents region – not only in the cultural sector. The lack of stage technicians mentioned in many previous reports and analyses of the effects of the pandemic in cultural life is also noticeable in the Barents region. It is also mentioned that recruiting competence to the northern parts of Sweden, Norway and Finland generally requires long-term planning and financial resources, and the situation today is consequently worse than it was before the pandemic, seen from this perspective. The single country within the Barents region that stands out from this perspective is Finland, where cultural activities consider the situation in terms of organisation and supply of skills to be stable.

*... "it is very difficult to recruit technicians, communications staff etc because we cannot compete with the salary levels in the private sector." (NO)*

*"We have a BIG need for resident competence in the region in both the administrative and artistic activities. For longer assignments, a larger economy is required than in southern Sweden, as the conditions for leaving one's hometown (for a limited or permanent time) need to be sufficiently attractive." (SVE)*

*"We have been able to recruit, but only for project positions." (SVE)*

### Work environment and remote work

Among the cultural activities in the Barents region, the patterns of how the activities have been affected in terms of psychosocial work environment, sick leave and remote work vary. Some mention increased sickness absence linked either to post-pandemic stress, i.e. high workload and stress for a long time which has now resulted in sick leave. Others link sickness absence to the negative effects of the increased proportion of people working from home, such as reduced social contact and increased proportion of administrative work in relation to artistic/creative work. There are several comments that it was challenging and heavy for the staff during the pandemic because of all the uncertainty, but that the situation has now stabilised again and that the staff is no longer affected by the effects of the pandemic.



Scherzi Musicali playing in the Kuhmo church during Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival 2023. Photo: Juuso Westerlund

Most of the cultural activities in the Barents region have incorporated work from home, or remote work, into their organisation as “the new normal”. Several of the advantages of remote work, such as increased flexibility and efficiency, have had an overall positive effect for the employees, and many of the respondents see it as an opportunity to develop new work structures and as a tool to expand international operations and contact network.

The objections to remote work are that it makes the creative and artistic processes more difficult – people still prefer to meet physically. The work tasks performed remotely are increasingly administrative. It should be added that even before the pandemic, many were used to digital meetings and working remotely due to the great physical distance of the Barents region.

*“We do a lot of remote work within the organisation, but we have expanded our international operations with the help of remote tools. Our goal is to build a permanent studio location, from which we can conduct practical distance exercises and hybrid performances, thus expanding our national and international operations.” (FIN)*

*“Distance and hybrid work has increased a lot, sick leave has not changed, the workload has increased somewhat, remote management and remote well-being methods have developed.” (FIN)*

*“A lot of work from home during certain periods, but also a lot of work on site that increases social contact.” (NO)*

*“We who operate far from cities and decision-makers feel an equalisation in conditions as more people want to have non-physical meetings.” (SVE)*

*“The business has definitely been affected, but above all during the pandemic, certain consequences remain to a limited extent. Essentially, the business is back to normal, the new normal.” (SVE)*

## Digitisation

For the cultural activities in the Barents region, most positive lessons learned from the pandemic have remained and led to a development and diversification of the activities. In part, new ways of both creating and showing art have been able to develop, inspired by and with the help of technical solutions that were tested during the pandemic.

Examples of this are mobile art galleries, performances that meet the audience in other formats than the planned ones, and live-streamed performances that could be conveyed in more languages than the original. Hybrid productions, for example a theatre performance that is shown simultaneously to an audience in the salon and

to a digital audience, have become much more common. This has also led to the possibility of increasing the number of audiences, both numerically but also to a broadening of the audience geographically and being able to reach more nationalities.

*“Remote meetings clearly make operations more efficient. There hasn’t been as much demand for streaming anymore, but the readiness and know-how to organise them increased significantly.” (FIN)*

*“Increased digital competence among employees, increased digital accessibility for visitors. Mix of physical, digital and hybrid meetings/programme elements.” (FIN)*

*“We started with mobile viewing rooms in public spaces and art projects that could be experienced from outside and through the window. Our projects worked well during the pandemic. We used a new method where the sound from the art film went through smartphones and headphones. It was synchronised with the film inside the mobile screening room. This was a new technology and very educational. We received a lot of positive feedback and have taken this method forward with us.” (NO)*

*“We have created radio theatre for children from a production that could not tour, and it is now animated for children’s audiences in two languages.” (SVE)*

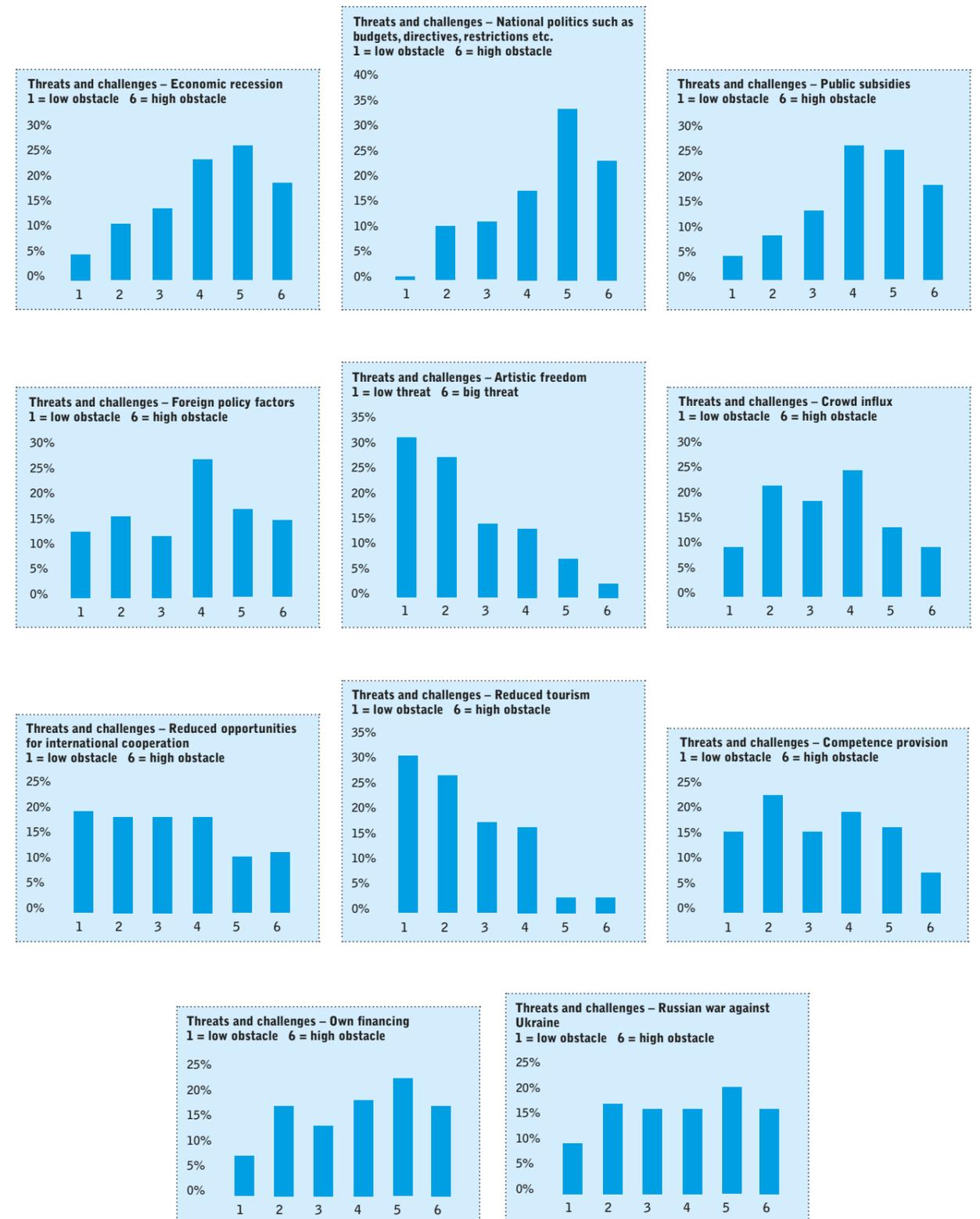
## Summary of the current situation

The overall current situation for the Barents region’s cultural activities is characterised by the fact that the activities are feeling the effects of the pandemic and the recession – through grants being eroded by increased costs, through a shorter planning horizon, and through a changed work environment where remote work has partly been incorporated as “the new normal”. The positive effects of the pandemic and increased digitisation have been captured and the businesses diversified. They have also created a springboard towards the future in the form of increased opportunities for international contacts and international activities as well as an opportunity to reach an increased audience.

## Threats and challenges

### Biggest threats: economy and war

In the survey, we asked the cultural activities to evaluate threats and challenges. The most clearly prominent threats are economic. The economic recession worldwide is the biggest threat, which reduces the audience’s ability and willingness to pay to take part in culture plus the costs of producing culture increase. Close behind comes the threat of cuts in the respective nation’s budgets and/or



directives and restrictions that may affect cultural activities. A reduction in public subsidies, as well as the consequences of Russia’s war against Ukraine, also pose tangible threats and challenges to cultural activities in the Barents region.

A certain threat, albeit not imminent, is also posed by factors such as competence provision, own financing, as well as foreign policy factors in the Barents region such as the security situation, climate factors and military rearmament.

The cultural activities in the Barents region indicate that they do not currently experience any direct threat, or a low threat, to artistic freedom. Nor is the crowd influx and ticket sales perceived as a specific challenge or threat now. Reduced tourism or reduced opportunities for international cooperation are not defined as a tangible threat or a major challenge either.

*“The Russian invasion has significantly changed our operating environment and we have oriented ourselves more towards the Nordic countries and the Baltics.” (FIN)*

*“Brexit has given us greater challenges as we have many artistic contacts that way. The war in Ukraine has meant that we cannot count on Russian cooperation, something we previously had sporadically. Cuts in the cultural sector mean that everyone is under more pressure.” (NO)*

*“On a national level, it feels like there is a tightening around culture. People have less money available and there is a general concern about the state of the world, which makes people tighten the purse strings. The costs of holding events have increased, everything from venue rentals to various supplier costs. Generally speaking, it is difficult to produce events from a climate perspective – there are a lot of unnecessary emissions in the form of travel, consumables, etc. Making it carbon-neutral is very difficult and cost driven. The sponsors had prioritised sponsoring events out of their budgets after covid, so there was less support from companies.” (SVE)*

*“As a cultural association, we are not affected as much as the business world by war and inflation, even though inflation has tangible consequences for the economy. For us, the threats tend more to be of the nature that cultural policy is not prioritised and that cultural policy in turn is not prioritising us – the free and non-profit organised. In general, cultural policy has the problem that it has not been renewed in 50 years. This lack of inclusion is starting to reach a critical mass.” (SVE)*

*“Minority issues and educational issues are threatened with the current government.” (SVE)*

*“We are one of the few investments in Sámi cultural infrastructure. We depend on public support and political decisions.” (SVE)*

## Opportunities and strengths

### Biggest opportunities: artistic freedom, financing, and digitisation

Regarding the perception of the strengths and opportunities of the cultural activities in the Barents region a fragmented picture is drawn where the factors are partly valued differently in the Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish parts of the Barents region. What is common, however, is that artistic freedom is valued as the greatest strength, while funding, that is, ticket revenue and sponsorship revenue, is not considered to have any potential for development and growth. Increased digitisation is seen as a strength and an opportunity. On the one hand, digitisation provides increased flexibility internally, and on the other hand it enables collaboration across national borders and long geographical distances. It also provides the opportunity for diversification and innovations in the range of activities. Cultural activities in the Swedish Barents region stand out as those that value increased digitisation more heavily than the cultural activities in the Norwegian and Finnish Barents regions.

The public grants are seen as a valuable strength and opportunity for the cultural activities in the Norwegian and Finnish Barents regions, while they end up lower for the cultural activities in the Swedish part of the Barents region. Sticking out also makes the possibility that increased tourism and increased opportunities for international collaboration within the Barents region could mean. These two factors value cultural activities in the Finnish part of the Barents region as significant, while those for Swedish and Norwegian cultural activities in the Barents region are seen as a small opportunity.

The cultural activities in the Norwegian part of the Barents region see ticket revenue and audience influx as a great opportunity and strength, while in the Swedish and Finnish parts they do so to a lesser extent. The cultural activities within the Swedish and Norwegian part of the Barents region indicate domestic political factors such as budgets and directives as a small opportunity, in contrast to the cultural activities in the Finnish part of the Barents region which see these as a strength and a relatively big opportunity.

*“Using technology as an integral part of artistic work is our absolute strength, the importance of which has been emphasised with the pandemic and the climate crisis. It also gives our association new opportunities to find new financing channels.” (FIN)*

*“Since Russia is no longer relevant as a partner country, the focus will shift to Finland and Sweden, and for our part also Svalbard and active member countries of the Arctic Council.” (NO)*

*“Digitalisation is a big issue for us as a cultural heritage institution where we need to collaborate both nationally and internationally. Both a great opportunity and a great challenge.” (SVE)*

*“We see our opportunity to collaborate internationally with a focus on our neighbouring countries as a very big opportunity and look forward to resuming that work now that restrictions and limitations linked to the pandemic have eased. Operations and collaborations in the northern region are for us in many ways more interesting than national collaborations with southern Sweden.” (SVE)*

## • Part 2: International operations

In this second part of the survey, we intend to make an overview of the current situation regarding international cooperation compared to before the pandemic. What the cooperation with Russia and Sápmi looks like is also covered in depth in separate questions.

We are also looking to take a more general picture of the current situation in each country for international operations. Here we focus on strengths and weaknesses, art areas that are judged to have the best and worst conditions for international exchange, as well as what opportunities for national or international co-financing or cost sharing exist today. Finally, we have also asked the question of how cultural activities generally view the Barents region as a concept and as a geographical area.

### The current state of international operations in the Finnish part of the Barents region

The international activity in the cultural life within the Finnish part of the Barents region is the one that claims to have been most negatively affected by Russia’s war against Ukraine. The geographical proximity to Russia makes the Finnish part of the Barents region extra vulnerable and the situation is described as “drastic” and “in upheaval” – the Finnish cultural activities are forced to seek new ways for international collaborations. Established collaborations with other countries continue to function. The upcoming Capital of Culture in Oulu 2026 is judged to have great potential for the development of cultural life in the region and as a generator of new international collaborations and exchanges.

A frustration is felt over wasted potential regarding international collaborations, as well as the fact that the financial resources limit the possibilities. The lack of formal support structures for international collaborations is also pointed out. Like other cultural activities in the Barents region, the long geographical distances are a challenge – both the actual distance and the “mental” distance create difficulties financially and in terms of cooperation for international exchange.

The performing arts, especially dance and circus, is considered to have good conditions for international operations, partly because the art form is language-neutral and because these areas were already prioritised by the state export council before the pandemic. Residency activities and artistic activities that are at the forefront of IT and technological development, as well as activities that profile themselves through environmental and climate themes, are also deemed to have good conditions for international activities. Finally, the music industry is mentioned as having good conditions, mainly the commercial part.

On an organisational level, the pattern in Finland looks like the situation in Sweden and Norway – larger institutions have the best opportunities to get support for international activities, just as individual artists usually work internationally through exchanges and residencies. The smaller and/or free cultural activities have too few resources and competence to apply for funds and end up outside from the system.

### Strengths and weaknesses

Among the strengths mentioned is Lapland’s international appeal – here is a unique and, from an international perspective, “exotic” place to manage. The Finnish cultural activities in the Barents region mention networks and competence in marketing as a weakness.

*“After the Russian border was closed due to the war, international cultural activities have ceased. The weakness is our location in eastern Finland.”*

*“The Oulu 2026 project improves opportunities in all areas.”*

*“The best opportunities for international exchange are for established institutions that are covered by operating grants. Individual artists or associations do not have enough funding or time for networking.”*



"Ghost stories" and "Stories around the fire" 2023 from the Nordic Storytelling Center's visit to the Storytelling Municipality of the Year, Dorotea. Gunnar Eklund about the author Torgny Lindgren during the **Storytelling Festival 2017**. Photo: Patrick Degerman. Stina Wollter and Micke Olsson Wollter during the **Storytelling Festival 2019**. Photo: Ulf Johansson. "Hiking for stories" Nordic storytellers in Skellefteå. Photo: Jonas Lundqvist. **Skellefteå Storyteller's Association** during Storyteller Night "Wild stories" 2022. Photo: Patrick Degerman

## The current state of international operations in the Norwegian part of the Barents region

The international activities in the cultural life within the Norwegian part of the Barents region have also been negatively affected by Russia's war against Ukraine through interrupted collaborations and opportunities for exchange. The overall picture gives the impression that international activities are now limited, both because of the war, but also largely due to the economy, the long distances as well require air travel which has become more expensive, something that affects both the inflow and outflow of cultural activities in the form of networking, collaborations and activities.

Collaboration within the Nordic region and within the Barents region, the North Calotte and with Sápmi appears, however, based on the survey responses, to be vital, as well as collaboration with Europe, the USA and the Baltics. The visual arts and film areas are considered to have good conditions for international operations. The film area in particular is suitable for international collaborations due to the region's attractiveness and distinctive nature. On an organisational level, there are several national activities in Norway – Davvi – Senter for Scenekunst, Dansens Hus, and CODA Oslo International Dance Festival – which actively work to increase international exchanges and networks and for decentralisation that will create opportunities for cultural activities in northern Norway.

### Strengths and weaknesses

Many state that there are good opportunities for cooperation in the region and with Sápmi, and that the Nordic cooperation is strengthened because of the fact that there are no longer opportunities to cooperate with Russia. The EU's investment in culture and minorities is cited as a strength, while the complicated application procedure is seen as a weakness. One opportunity mentioned is the weak Norwegian krone which enables more international businesses to be able to afford to collaborate with Norwegian businesses.

In 2024, Bodø will be the European Capital of Culture, which will be the largest cultural investment in Norway in over 10 years and the largest ever in northern Norway. This venture is considered to have great potential.

*"The weakness is partly due to weak finances, we don't have enough resources to travel and establish new networks and relationships at the same time, and we can't invite independent artists to come here. The geography is always a challenge, we are remote*

*and with increased flight prices we have fewer opportunities to carry out international projects. The opportunities are in smaller international networks, not only tour networks but also think tanks."*

*"Increased travel costs have reduced the number of international artists (and national!) coming to northern Norway."*

*"The region is characterised by strong international cooperation. Financial limitations, however, affect the possibility of carrying out international collaborative projects and reduce the risk-taking surrounding the projects – both financially and artistically. We have the best conditions for cooperation in Sápmi and northern Norway, and have close cooperation with both Beaiwvás Sámi Nasunálateáhter and Kvääniteateri. However, larger international collaborations have proven to be difficult to finance."*

## The current state of international operations in the Swedish part of the Barents region

The international activities in the cultural life within the Swedish part of the Barents region have also been negatively affected by Russia's war against Ukraine. Several representatives of businesses mention interrupted collaborations, both in individual collaborations and larger contexts such as festivals. Most cultural activities are included in international projects and exchanges – everything from a single visual arts residency in France to participation in Bothnia Business Heritage, exchanges with libraries in friendship towns in the rest of the Barents region and participation in, the Moskosei Creative Lab and the Luleå Art Biennale are mentioned here.

The Sámi cultural activities are prominent in the issues surrounding international activities. These businesses have a long experience of both Nordic and international collaborations and are also considered to have a strong potential to develop regarding international exchange. The fact that the Sámi cultural activities are part of the global indigenous culture means extra potential for international activities. However, the limited financial resources regarding Sámi culture are mentioned as an obstacle.

A positive impact on cultural activities is expected in connection with the new industrialisation of a large part of Norrland that is now underway. Along the entire Norrland coast from Sundsvall up to Kiruna, over 1,000 billion kronor is to be invested until 2030. There is an awareness that it requires creating attractive living environments where culture is an important part.

Skellefteå municipality is known, for example, for the establishment of the Northvolt battery factory but also for its new cultural centre Sara.

The investment has put the spotlight on northern Sweden and culture has taken its place in the general conversation about how a society should be built to attract labour in the long term. This is considered a positive opportunity for increased financing and for increased internationalisation. Several of the cultural activities also reflect on the coming influx of international labour, which creates the conditions for a wider cultural offering that is not language dependent. Music and visual arts are mentioned here as areas expected to benefit from a more internationalised audience.

Consistently, even among the Swedish answers, the picture is given that the larger institutions have an easier time getting funds for international projects and exchanges than the free cultural life. Individual artists in the fields of the visual arts and music are also mentioned as activities that have great opportunities for international exchanges. The organisation of cultural life in institutions, non-profit and/or free cultural associations as well as individual artists provides different economic conditions for participation in international cultural life. Many also point out that the international collaborations are relatively few in relation to local, regional, and national collaborations.

The art areas that are considered to have the best conditions for international exchange are visual arts, music, and performing arts in the form of dance. Theatre and literature are also judged to have good conditions for international exchange, while children's culture is judged to have worse less prospects.

## Strengths and weaknesses

Among the strengths are the unique Sámi culture, strong cultural institutions with structured support to provide opportunities for networking, exchanges, etc. as well as the new investment from the battery factory Northvolt and the new cultural centre Sara in Skellefteå. Weaknesses include limited financial resources, the lack of resources to coordinate and manage the international collaborations, and the long distances that are costly in time and money.

*“We are part of the indigenous scene. Here there is great potential for development globally. Sámi culture is also international per se, if you start from the borders of nation states, that is.”*

*“The proximity to Nordic collaborations is greater than outside the Nordics because of the distances that lead to high travel costs. Performing arts is an art form that thrives in meeting live and is difficult to fully digitise.”*

*“Dance and circus should be at the forefront of collaborations within the Barents region as it is a language-free art form. However, the structure and funding for strong organisations that can collaborate in the region is too weak. Regionally, I lack support specifically aimed at collaborations in the northern Nordic region. Another weakness is means of transport and the infrastructure for travel. The easiest means of transport is by car, which is both very time-consuming and burdensome for the person or people travelling.”*

## The effects of the pandemic on international cultural cooperation

The answers to the question of what international cooperation looks like for cultural activities today compared to before the pandemic give a mixed picture. For some businesses, there has been little change to an already limited scope, while others have expanded their international operations and established new contacts and networks. The lack of financial resources and lack of coordinators and producers has affected the possibilities for international cooperation in a negative way.

Around a quarter of the cultural activities describe international cooperation as unchanged compared to before the pandemic, with neither noticeable improvement nor deterioration. Several comments indicate that they are now up and running again after the pandemic, and that it has not caused lasting effects on the international collaborations.

Several of the cultural activities in the Barents region state that they had no, or very modest, international activities outside the Barents both before and after the pandemic. This is explained by the fact that many cultural activities lack resources, competence and/or commitment for international activities, or that their activities are not suitable for collaborations, for example individual authors. Several businesses point out that they have regional missions, and it is important that their resources are used primarily in their own region.

Some changes compared to before the pandemic are noticeable. For example, it is mentioned that international travel has decreased, but that the degree of international cooperation has been increased digitally. Russia's war against Ukraine has also affected the cultural activities' international collaborations through, for example, projects where Ukrainian artists are offered Artists in Residence and projects in various forms with Russian artists in exile. Several also mention that there has been an increased focus on cooperation between the Nordic countries now, because of Russia's war, increased travel costs and climate impact. In Norway, it is mentioned

that Brexit has had a greater impact on international cooperation than the pandemic.

Several express a positive image of international cooperation compared to before the pandemic. Several new initiatives are specifically mentioned – for example the cultural capital years in Bodø 2024 and Oulu 2026, international collaborations with museums, artists and dance organisations in neighbouring countries. In addition to these existing initiatives, many also express a positive attitude towards possible new ideas for international exchanges and potential international collaborations.

Of those who indicate a reduced degree of international cooperation after the pandemic, several indicate that this is not connected to the pandemic and its effects, but rather to the recession, the climate crisis, and Russia's war with Ukraine.

The fact that there are few grants for international activities to apply for, and that the grants for cultural activities are generally reduced, has contributed more to the reduced international activities than the pandemic. Many mention the changed attitude towards travelling in connection with the climate crisis. For some, international collaborations have become less interesting because people do not want to be forced to travel by air or time-consuming train journeys.

*“International cooperation is gradually returning to the pre-pandemic level. In Oulu and its surroundings, the cultural capital year brings significantly more international cooperation.” (FIN)*

*“Travelling in general is shameful, so internationalisation is no longer the main goal.” (FIN)*

*“The cooperation is as it was before the pandemic, but we see that many international cooperation partners have been financially affected by Covid-19.” (NO)*

*“It's easier to collaborate internationally, but fewer physical invitations to seminars, conferences, exhibitions, etc.” (NO)*

## Cooperation within the Barents region

There is a majority opinion that the cultural cooperation in the Barents region today is unchanged in scope compared to before the pandemic. Either it remains at the same level, or it was non-existent before the pandemic and still is.

This depends on various factors. Some activities, for example individual artists and writers, by their nature are

probably not as focused on collaboration, while others do not have the resources to finance or implement collaborations. Some have continued the collaboration as usual, while others have carried out exhibitions and established collaborations with specific actors.

Although the degree of cooperation is similar in scope, the majority state that the character has changed and many mention that Russia's war against Ukraine also affected these cooperations – more than the pandemic. There are also those who have not noted any significant changes or who lack sufficient information to assess the situation.

A smaller number answered that cultural cooperation within the Barents region has decreased after the pandemic. This may be due to fewer artists to choose from or fewer visiting visitors from other countries or that the organisation still has a backlog of activities after the pandemic. Some respond that cultural cooperation looks good or has increased compared to before the pandemic. New initiatives have been taken, to some extent depending on the upcoming capital of culture years in Bodø 2024 and Oulu in 2026.

In general terms, there is a positive attitude towards cultural cooperation within the Barents region, and that it is something they want to continue to develop.

In the Finnish parts of the Barents region, the cultural activities paint a slightly more positive picture than those in Sweden and Norway, with a higher proportion of comments regarding increased collaboration compared to before the pandemic. The comments also give a more positive picture of the degree of cooperation, and that the fact that Russia is no longer relevant for cooperation has instead improved the cooperation between Sweden, Norway, and Finland. It is pointed out that there is room for improvement and for exploring new opportunities for cooperation within the Barents region, particularly with a focus on minority cultures, minority languages and indigenous peoples, as well as cultural tourism.

*“When Russia is not involved, the possibilities for cooperation with other actors in the area seem to improve. This must be nurtured.” (FIN)*

*“Cooperation in the field of art and culture in North Karelia with Sweden and Norway has been quite limited. One reason may be the long distances, and this challenge has not gone away. In addition to the personal interest and activity of individual artists, there are certain signs that a somewhat broader community has been activated.” (FIN)*

*“Not very different, except that planned cooperation with Russian institutions has been postponed, and we are intensifying work towards Sweden and Finland.” (NO)*

*“We have relatively good cooperation with the Sámi museums in Norway, Sweden and Finland.” (NO)*

*“The pandemic meant that collaborations had to be paused. They can now be resumed, which is happening slowly but surely.” (SVE)*

## Sápmi

Many cultural activities in the Barents region state that the collaboration with Sápmi is unchanged compared to before the pandemic. This applies to both those who have regular collaborations and who describe the degree of collaboration as extensive and/or prioritised, and those who neither before nor after the pandemic collaborated with Sápmi.

In the Norwegian part of the Barents region, however, the overall perception is that the collaboration with Sápmi has intensified and thus increased somewhat today compared to before the pandemic. The majority also express a desire for more intensive cooperation or see a strengthening of cooperation due to increased awareness and recognition of Sámi culture. Several businesses that do not currently have a collaboration with Sápmi express a desire to start one.

Overall, there is a positive tone from the Swedish and Norwegian cultural activities in the Barents region regarding the cooperation within, respectively with, Sápmi. Collaborations with, for example, Det Samiske Nasjonalteatret Beavivás and Saemien Sijte are mentioned positively in the survey, and initiatives such as the Sámi archive portal nuohhti.com, an interregional project collaboration for an increased strategic effort for Sámi cultural development and the international indigenous residence Sápmi Salasta are mentioned.

From the Finnish part of the Barents region, however, the cultural activities indicate a more multifaceted picture and percentage-wise the distribution is even between improved, unchanged and reduced/non-existent degree of cooperation with and within Sápmi compared to before the pandemic. Those who see an increase are explicitly positive, while there are also comparatively more cultural activities that have no contact with Sápmi at all.

*“Strengthened, due to increased political focus and recognition of Sámi culture.” (NO)*

*“The international cooperation is a cornerstone for the Sámi institutions as their cultural sphere and arenas are fundamentally international due to Sápmi’s multinational sphere. At the same time, the Sámi have suffered from too limited forms of national support, which has made pan-Sami cooperation more difficult.” (SVE)*

*“Good and important cooperation with Sápmi, but we wish for even more and closer cooperation in the future, as there is great potential in Sámi culture that is interesting and engaging on a high artistic level, which creates great international potential. I see this personally in Sámi music, film and performing arts.” (SVE)*

## Russia

For cultural activities in the Barents region, cooperation with Russian cultural life is very limited or in principle non-existent. Some mention that, for example, they continue to perform plays by Russian playwrights, but no one has any active ongoing collaboration anymore. The majority mention that they previously had good relations and collaborations, but that these have been completely interrupted since Russia started the war with Ukraine – except for some actors who try to maintain networks with free Russian cultural actors, institutions or artists who have explicitly distanced themselves from the Russian regime and Putin. Some actors have experienced that there is a fear of reprisals. Many of the cultural activities answer that they have no cooperation today and that several of them did not before the war either.

For cultural activities in the Finnish part of the Barents region, Russia’s war against Ukraine has had the greatest effect: previous collaborations have ended or have been drastically reduced to sporadic contact with individual Russian artists via social media. No longer being able, or even wanting, to cooperate with Russia has a major impact on cultural life and there is a concern for the future and a feeling that cooperation will not resume for a long time.

*“Cooperation with Russian cultural actors was very significant and extensive before the war, but it has now almost completely ceased in practice. The pandemic has made cooperation difficult, but planned cooperation projects have been suspended or ended because of the war.” (FIN)*

*“Totally unrealistic to collaborate with Russian state-funded institutions, but we can collaborate with artists who have actively expressed their opposition to the war of aggression/occupation, preferably by settling in the West.” (NO)*

*“Completely stopped. Official Russia is a pariah. Free Russian cultural actors hard to find/support.” (SVE)*



Norrbotten Chamber Orchestra. Photo Maria Fäldt

## National and international co-financing

Many of the cultural activities in the Barents region answer the question about what the possibilities for national or international co-financing or cost sharing look like by stating that they do not know of any such possibilities, or rather that they do not have the resources to investigate and therefore do not have the possibility to apply for international funding.

However, several state that they are aware that there are opportunities for co-financing through various national support programmes, but also through, for example, Nordic Culture Contact and the Nordic Culture Fund. Special investments such as the upcoming culture capital years in Bodø 2024 and Oulu 2026 also generate new funding opportunities.

While many are positive and make use of these supports, many objections are heard regarding the degree of complexity in both the Nordic and European application procedures – many do not consider that they have the resources to achieve the multi-country cooperation required in both Nordic and European applications, plus the EU applications have a significant amount of reporting and accounting requirements.

Some state that they have opportunities for co-financing by collaborating with other institutions, organiser networks or artist groups in different types of networks, which in some cases can generate joint projects. Several mention that there are opportunities for co-financing by first creating specific projects and activities and then seeking collaboration partners for the projects.

In summary, the cultural activities in the Barents region show that knowledge about the possibilities for national or international co-financing and cost sharing is variable. Some businesses have identified specific funding sources and collaborations, while others experience limitations and difficulties, mainly in the form of awareness of the funding sources and resources to seek funds. There is also an assumption that larger institutions are prioritised for such funds over free cultural life.

*“There are different funding mechanisms for culture and creative industries. The knowledge and use of these should also be increased in international collaborations.” (FIN)*

*“In practice, there is no support, because co-financing is labour-intensive and often requires individual development projects.” (FIN)*

*“There are many opportunities for co-financing, for example we have Music Norway and the Norwegian*

*Directorate of Culture, but it is often about smaller amounts. The larger international investments from the north usually take place through EU projects, which does not suit everyone (bureaucracy, reporting, etc.). There are some good opportunities through Creative Europe, but there is little funding available for operations abroad.” (NO)*

*“Difficult with collaborations, lacking a coordinator and human resources who can follow up.” (SVE)*

*“National and regional organiser networks are useful/important. Has previously been part of Interreg projects but does not have the resources to run/initiate it myself.” (SVE)*

## “Barents region” as a concept

To the question about how the cultural activities view the Barents concept, the answers can be divided into two main groups. The largest group answers that the concept has no meaning for them. Some even state that they do not know the term, or that they know the term but have no knowledge of what it means. The other main group answers that they know the concept but that it has no relevance for them.

For most of the businesses that are familiar with the concept, the cross-border cooperation, the geographical similarities, and the shared cultural history are significant. However, they believe that the term must be redefined or reformulated now because of Russia’s war against Ukraine, which has made continued use of the name impossible. Several organisations have suggested using the term North Calotte (Nordkalott) instead, which only includes the Nordic countries.

There is consensus that Russia’s actions have made continued collaboration or cooperation with Russia impossible. A great deal of concern among the cultural activities is also noticeable regarding Russia’s continued political actions and what it may lead to for them in the future.

Several businesses are explicitly positive about continued cooperation within the Barents region – however, where Russia is excluded – and emphasise the importance of developing and strengthening cooperation between the countries. Some experience a strong community within the area, despite linguistic differences, and see opportunities for collaboration in various cultural and artistic fields.

Some cultural activities have extensive experience of collaborating within the Barents region and have positive experiences of collaboration and support from various institutions and organisations. These also consider the

Barents region as still interesting, and with potential for developing collaborations in various artistic and cultural areas.

*“Barents as a name is now considered problematic as a result of Russia’s warfare.” (FIN)*

*“The cooperation between the northern areas beyond the capitals is a fantastic idea. The distinctive aspects of the north can be developed together.” (FIN)*

*“The activities within Oulu 2026 show that there is a need and desire for cooperation in the northern municipalities. However, the Nordic financing opportunities are relatively small and open to competition.” (FIN)*

*“The Barents region is a well-known and interesting smaller part of the enormous Arctic. It is large enough to be overviewed and maintain collaboration. In addition to the unique characteristics of each individual region and culture, there are many common features within the region.” (FIN)*

*“The Barents region is no longer as interesting when Russia is excluded. The basis was the cooperation with Eastern Europe/Russia.” (NOR)*

*“I feel that the concept of the Barents region, both as a concept and as a geographical area, still makes sense because it is a region that shares many of the challenges.” (NOR)*

*“It feels like the Barents region, which includes Russia, is on hiatus and that right now it is the North Calotte that applies, i.e. the Nordic countries.” (SVE)*

*“For cultural life, this division becomes quite abstract and unfortunately there are no good conditions for being able to finance far-reaching collaborations and exchanges, as inclusive financing structures are missing.” (SVE)*

## • Part 3: Needs and strategies going forward

In this last part of the survey, we focused on the businesses’ needs for increased international cooperation. We have asked what is the purpose of the cultural activities and what are the vision and goals for international cooperation, as well as what obstacles they perceive. We have also asked the cultural activities for proposals for important efforts partly in terms of development issues, partly for a favourable continued development of the international activities in the Barents region.

## Purpose and goals of international cooperation

The cultural activities in the Barents region span a wide range in terms of art areas, organisational forms, and the scope of the activities – from individual artists, free and non-profit organisations to larger institutions. The responses explaining why cultural activities have, or aspire to have, an international presence provide a comprehensive overview. Some common themes and goals that emerge are the following:

### • Visibility and contact creation

Many of the cultural activities want to be recognised outside their own country and make contacts across national borders. The aim is to increase understanding, knowledge and belonging by meeting people from different cultures and being exposed to different art forms and cultural expressions.

### • Creative and artistic exchange

Several answers emphasise the importance of creative and artistic exchange between, for example, writers, artists, musicians, and dancers. The goal is to broaden knowledge through these meetings, gain new perspectives, create community, but also to preserve and pass on the cultural heritage.

### • Development and knowledge building

International collaboration is seen as a way to develop the business and take part in new knowledge within the various areas of the cultural area. For example, indigenous issues, digitisation, archival pedagogy, film, art and performing arts are mentioned.

### • Audience and market development

Many cultural activities strive to increase the number of performances, gigs, broaden the target group and offer exciting content to attract an international audience. The aim is to spread and promote high-quality music, film, art and culture in various genres and to create networks between producers.

### • Multiculturalism and minority rights

Several responses emphasise the importance of international collaboration to promote Sámi literature, indigenous literature, and minority culture. The purpose is to strengthen cultural heritage and create networks for writers and artists from different cultures and indigenous peoples.

### • Exchange of knowledge and experience

Many organisations emphasise the importance of the exchange of knowledge and experience between different countries and cultural actors. It’s about learning from each other’s working methods, building sustainable structures, and developing collegial networks.



From Norrbottenmusikens "Arctic Pulse" project 2020: **Huutajat, Duvvene** and **Meänland** – all performed at the Nordlys Festival/Arctic Frontier Congress 2020 in Tromsø.

• **Democracy development and social impact**

Some answers highlight international collaboration as an important factor in strengthening the role of culture in society, promoting democracy, the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples and sustainability. Through international collaborations, you can draw on international experiences and create relationships between countries and nations.

## Positive effects of increased cooperation

When asked what positive effects can be achieved with increased cooperation both within the Barents region and internationally, there is a variety of answers that span concrete effects, such as increased revenue to humanitarian values, strengthened democracy, and increased artistic freedom. Below is a thematic summary of the responses:

• **Financial benefits**

Through increased cooperation and cultural exchanges, more economically sustainable events and opportunities for cultural tourism can be created, which can benefit both the cultural activities and the regional economy in general. Through collaborations in the form of, for example, shared production costs and joint marketing, cultural activities can become more financially sustainable and attract more visitors and more revenue.

• **Knowledge exchange and innovation**

Through cooperation, there can be an increased exchange of knowledge, experience and competence between the cultural activities, which contributes to increased competence, quality, efficiency and professionalisation in the cultural field. Increased cooperation can also lead to cultural activities inspiring each other and developing new ideas, as well as to artistic and creative development.

• **Shared understanding and strengthened identity within the Barents region**

Cultural collaborations can contribute to creating a common understanding and a strengthened identity within the Barents region, where historical and contemporary relationships are made visible. The inhabitants of the Barents region can feel a greater sense of togetherness and community, while at the same time be inspired by the culture and artistic expression of the neighbouring countries. Increased cooperation in the field of culture can also create understanding and tolerance between different cultures and the countries within the Barents region, as well as for different cultural expressions. Through increased access to culture and cultural activities within the Barents region, residents can experience an improved quality of life and a richer

cultural environment to live and work in. The collaboration can have a positive effect on the entire development of society.

• **Strengthened democracy and development**

Increased cooperation can contribute to a stronger democratic culture and increased respect for freedom of expression, which is important for promoting an open and inclusive social debate. Open and inclusive cultural exchanges in turn strengthen society's democratic foundation. Increased cooperation can cause the entire cultural area within the Barents region to develop and grow, which creates opportunities for the improvement and expansion of cultural activities. Through collaborations, artists can have greater freedom to explore and express their artistic vision.

*"Shared mental landscape and experience of belonging. Sharing resources and expertise benefits all parties." (FIN)*

*"Increased importance and impact of culture, increased employment and opportunities for cultural actors. Culture contributes to vitality, attractiveness, and success." (FIN)*

*"Development of cultural tourism can lead to economic gains and sustainable cultural activities." (FIN)*

*"Cultural exchange, joint performances and better inclusion of Sámi areas." (FIN)*

*"Both social and professional effects – increased competence in several countries, sharing of knowledge, preservation of cultural heritage with craft traditions, continuation of the fight for human rights." (NO)*

*"Economic, security policy, cultural and identity-strengthening gains." (NO)*

*"An increased attraction to live and live in Norrbotten. More jobs. A richer cultural life. Greater cultural offer." (SVE)*

*"Artistic diversity, artistic renewal, broadened participation – really everything the national cultural policy for Sweden strives for. In addition, for example, assignment opportunities, skills development, societal development in the long run, increased familiarity between cultural creators and actors, and so on. In general, this contributes to interpersonal meetings and hopefully increased understanding between people in different parts of the world." (SVE)*

## Contribution of cultural activities

The survey supports the fact that the cultural activities in the Barents region want to contribute to increased collaboration through exchanges, collaborations, networking, support and resources, international collaboration, focus on cultural heritage and cultural understanding, and by taking initiatives and being active participants in collaborative projects based on the activities' resources, knowledge, and capacity. Some of the cultural activities have responded with examples of how they contribute through their current activities, and some have responded with new ideas and suggestions for how increased cooperation could be generated. The answers can be grouped according to the following themes:

### • Exchanges and collaborations

Many want to increase exchange and collaboration through concrete activities such as author exchanges, collaborations between festivals, artist exchanges, residency activities, etc.

### • Networking

The businesses want to create networks and participate in network meetings with other actors in the cultural field. Through networking, they can create contacts, exchange knowledge, and collaborate on exhibitions, tours, and other projects.

### • Knowledge sharing and experience exchange

Several cultural activities want to contribute by sharing their knowledge, experience, and competence. This may include giving advice, providing views on needs, offering guidance, and supporting other activities in the area. This can, for example, involve supporting guest performances, workshops, exhibitions, conferences, and other activities that promote skills development and creative processes.

### • International cooperation

Many businesses in the Barents region are already involved in international collaborations and want to continue developing and maintaining these networks. They emphasise the importance of promoting the artists themselves (and not administrators), reaching new audiences, and continuing to contribute to international cultural exchange. Some want to offer residencies, host guest performances, and arrange artistic exchanges. They also express a desire to participate in international cooperation projects and organise events that promote collaboration and the development of cultural life.

### • Cultural heritage and cultural understanding

Some cultural activities focus on preserving and conveying the cultural heritage in the region. By offering exhibitions, guided tours, and other activities,

they can promote cultural understanding and shared art experiences that create togetherness and development.

### • Funding and resource requirements

Many businesses mention the need for increased financial resources and personnel to be able to carry out more projects and collaborations. They emphasise that with more funds and time, they could plan and implement collaborations, both within the Barents region and internationally, in a more strategic way. A strengthening of the finances of cultural activities would help to promote cooperation and exchanges within the Barents region and globally.

### • Nordic cooperation

Some businesses are interested in developing cooperation with other Nordic countries and exchanging experiences and projects within the Barents region.

*“We are already working to increase international collaboration by inviting international artists to Oulu.” (FIN)*

*“By being active and participating in various net-working events, even online, you can promote increased collaboration. You can also organise events yourself and offer opportunities to invite visitors to events.” (FIN)*

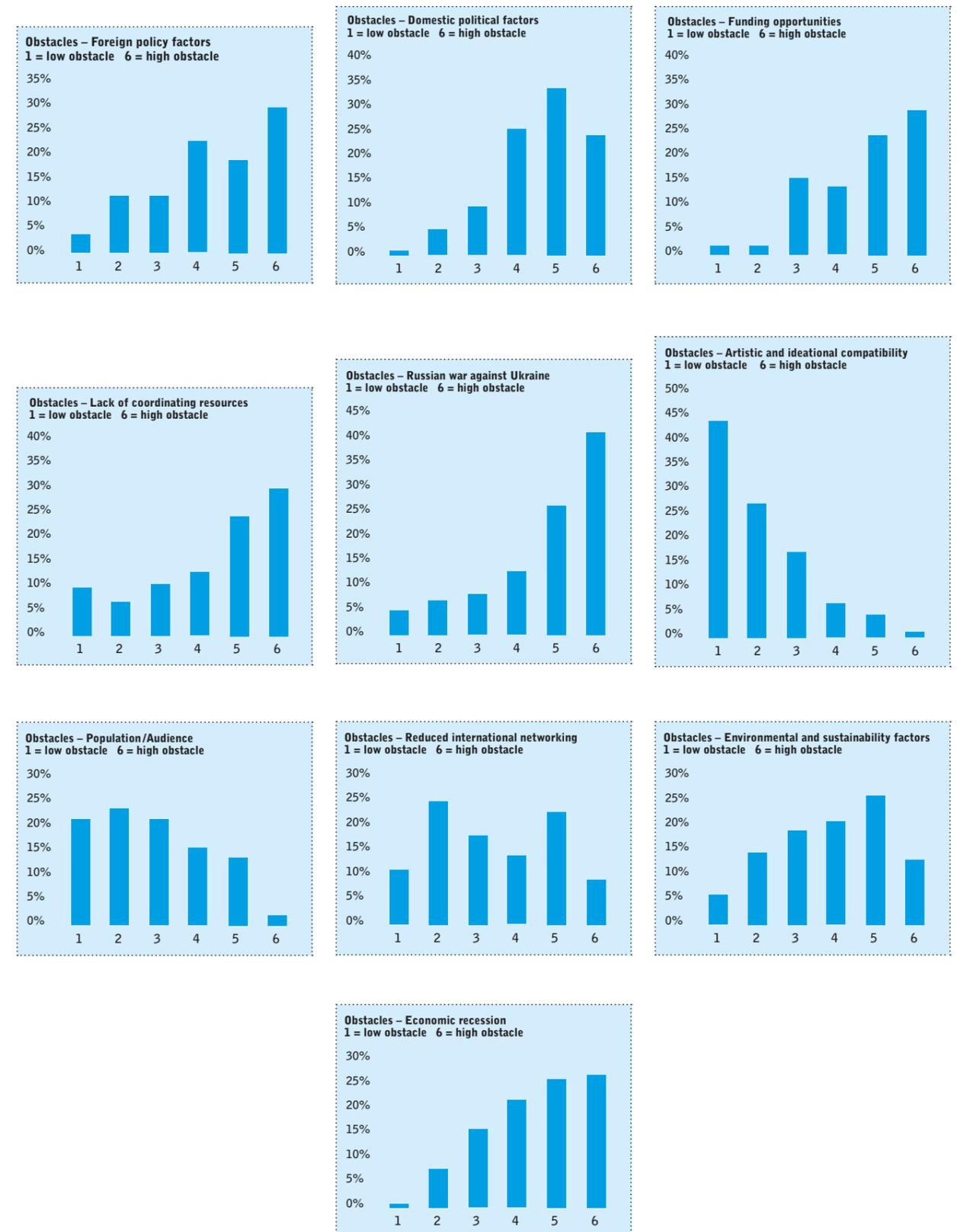
*“We provide guidance, arrange seminars and industry meetings, and initiate targeted projects, such as the Northern Expo, which aims to showcase selected and export-ready artists to the international industry.” (NO)*

*“We are willing to coordinate exchanges, project hire active choreographers/dancers. Support guest performances in exchange for workshops for skill-enhancing and inspirational purposes.” (SVE)*

*“We are probably the only fully functioning opera house in the Barents region with a capacity to tour, which we place in Sweden in a north-south direction. I see no obstacle to this developing to also take place in a west-east direction.” (SVE)*

## Obstacles to international cooperation

The obstacles that are perceived to exist among cultural activities from Finland, Norway, and Sweden for cooperation within the Barents region and international cooperation are primarily *the economic recession in the rest of the world and Russia's war against Ukraine. Domestic political factors linked to budgets and directives constitute a relatively high obstacle.*



It is then possible to discern some minor differences regarding the answers from the various countries. Regarding the funding opportunities, the cultural activities in the Swedish part of the Barents region see this as one of the two biggest obstacles, while it is a medium obstacle in Norway, and a relatively low obstacle in Finland.

Foreign policy factors in the Barents region, e.g. security situation, climate issues, military rearmament constitute a fairly high obstacle overall, while lack of coordinating resources constitutes the highest obstacle of them all for Swedish cultural activities in the Barents region. For the operations in Norway, this is a medium obstacle, and in Finland, there too, a relatively large obstacle.

The lowest barrier overall from all respondents is considered to be artistic and ideational compatibility with other activities/organisations which hardly constitute any barrier at all. Close to that comes the population size, which is considered to be a low barrier to cooperation. Environmental and sustainability factors as well as reduced international networking constitute a slightly higher obstacle but are not directly distinctive.

## Efforts for increased international cooperation

We have asked what initiatives the cultural activities believe would favour an optimal collaborative situation, both from a regional and national perspective, and whether there are initiatives that can be done via the EU, at the Nordic level or within the current Barents cooperation. The cultural activities in the Barents region have given expression to a variety of wishes, thoughts, and concrete proposals. From the answers, several themes and measures can be identified:

### • Simplified application procedures and lower thresholds for funding

Many cultural activities in the Barents region request lower thresholds and less complicated application processes when it comes to financing international collaborations. There is a need for simpler and more accessible financing options for different types of cooperation as well as simpler processes for reporting. Special mention is made here of the EU and the Nordic funds, which require several partner countries in order to be able to apply for funds. The burdensome administrative part of EU applications discourages many from even applying, especially smaller cultural activities.

*“Meeting places where you meet on different levels. Political, administrative, and artistic. The Arctic Art Summit is a good example of such an arena. That there are funding opportunities for collaboration, including bilateral collaborations, is crucial.” (NO)*

*“It is needed: The recognition and integration of art in regional cooperation and strategy. Simple and effective financing options. Networking and effective coordination. Encouragement and shared commitment.” (FIN)*

*“Open up to new funding opportunities. Especially in the border areas of Eastern Finland, opportunities deteriorated significantly after Russia’s war against Ukraine. Resources should be allocated to the area to facilitate a course change.” (FIN)*

*“Projects, support and scholarships, predictability are necessary needs.” (NO)*

*“Create some major international event in the region. Get businesses to support the northern cultural vitality and attractiveness in a wider way!” (FIN)*

*“Start the Barents region’s joint cultural forum.” (FIN)*

### • Increased knowledge and improved information

The importance of disseminating information about the possibilities for international cooperation is emphasised, especially to smaller municipalities and actors and to the free cultural life. An increased knowledge of what resources and collaboration opportunities are available is required. It is suggested that there should be an independent organisation or coordination function that can collect and disseminate relevant information and facilitate bookings and tours. Many point out that access to a coordinator/producer is essential for increased cooperation. They also mention increased professionalism on the part of the organisers and a strengthened infrastructure to facilitate collaboration.

*“That one sees the value in connecting the areas across the Nordic region. For example, in Nordland there are fantastic actors in art just over on the Swedish side. But it is difficult to achieve proper cooperation without it becoming a larger project.” (NO)*

*“Create an overview of where you can find cultural resources within the Barents. Tips on how to overcome language barriers.” (SVE)*

*“The EU and the Nordics contribute to our operations, but not specifically for the Barents region. There are no grants within the Barents region, so the activities are therefore aimed at other regions.” (NO)*

*“Travel grants with the aim of building networks.” (NO)*

### • Increased exchange within the Barents region

Many of the cultural activities in the Barents region emphasise the importance of communicating and increasing awareness of the opportunities that exist for cooperation. It is proposed to show good examples of completed projects and to arrange recurring conferences

and festivals where participants from the Barents countries can meet and exchange experiences.

*“It is needed: The recognition and integration of art in regional cooperation and strategy. Simple and effective financing options. Networking and effective coordination. Encouragement and shared commitment.” (FIN)*

*“Possibilities for long-term planning and project horizons longer than one year. It is very difficult to plan international projects and have time to implement and report with such short time intervals, as is often the case.” (SVE)*

*“A festival that moves around in different countries.” (NO)*

*“Reuse and circulation of art and culture instead of hysterical focus on new productions.” (NO)*

*“Open up to new funding opportunities. Especially in the border areas of Eastern Finland, opportunities deteriorated significantly after Russia’s war against Ukraine. Resources should be allocated to the area to facilitate a course change.” (FIN)*

*“Create some major international event in the region. Get businesses to support the northern cultural vitality and attractiveness in a wider way!” (FIN)*

### • Stronger networking and coordination

Many respondents emphasise the importance of establishing stronger and more organised networks that can lead to actual collaborations on equal terms. The importance of establishing institutional collaborations in various art fields and promoting network meetings and meetings between actors is emphasised. Role models and confidence-building measures are needed to promote increased international cooperation. It is suggested that independent organisations or consultants be established to coordinate and facilitate collaborations. The proposals also include exchange trips, artist in residence programmes and collaboration between amateur organisations across national borders.

*“More opportunities to work within Sápmi and more establishment of Sápmi as its own agency/geographical area/decision-making party.” (SVE)*

*“Right now, the art consultancy business is structured so that there are only resources for very small efforts and short impacts. One wish would be for networks, seminars and the like in the art field to exist for the artists more than for us white-collar workers.” (SVE)*

*“Collection of cultural actors in an international organisation/database where we can communicate with each other digitally at least.” (NO)*

*“From a regional perspective, increased support and a pronounced will for international collaborations are needed. Simpler applications. Maybe seed money to create collaborations, e.g. for study visits at another institution. The EU – simpler application procedures are needed there.” (SVE)*

*“End of war, funding and reduced bureaucracy (application and reporting).” (FIN)*

*“Manager with particular focus on international exchanges linked within Barents. Network for actors operating within the Barents.” (SVE)*

*“A continuous grant system for projects within the Barents.” (SVE)*

### • Financing and resources for cooperation within the Barents region

Many of the cultural activities in the Barents region emphasise that financial means and support measures are needed to enable international collaborations as well as collaborations within the Barents region. There is a demand for increased funding, clear grant schemes, and an overview of funding opportunities for different types of cooperation. It is emphasised that there is currently a lack of specific support for cooperation within the Barents area. Many answers also point to the need for support schemes and grants that can cover the costs of travel.

*“A strengthened east-west infrastructure. For example, air connections and fixed relationships like a bridge. Expanded mobility funding to be able to invite partners.” (SVE)*

*“Targeted funds with EASY application procedure. Coordinator. Subsidised travel.” (SVE)*

*“Start the Barents region’s joint cultural forum.” (FIN)*

*“Create a digital platform for actors in the art field where you can search for collaboration partners.” (FIN)*

### • Political interest and prioritisation

There is a demand for a higher priority and a stronger interest from authorities and financiers to support and promote international cooperation in the field of culture. Clarity, resources, and a clear goal are needed to create incentives for cooperation. It is also mentioned that governments should show greater interest and provide increased funding for cooperation in specific regions or areas.

*“Interaction. Common strategies and visions. Collaborative project. The cooperation at the grass-roots level as well as at the level of the decision maker and the organisations. Transfer of information and communication between the previously mentioned actors.” (FIN)*

“A fund where independent artists/groups can receive project support for joint initiatives and the existing Artists in Residence programmes receive operating support.” (NO)

“We should have a joint TV channel for the Barents area – with a focus on the Kven language and culture.” (NO)

“Public funding. Pan-Sámi work. Networking.” (SVE)

“It would be good to have an organisation or person within the Barents region with a mandate to support cultural projects with and within the region.” (SVE)

“Cultural offerings are part of welfare and vitality. By creating and strengthening connections within the Barents region, the opportunities for the exchange of information and experience, as well the joint development of new solutions and insights, increase.” (FIN)

• **Better planning and longer project horizons**

Many of the cultural activities in the Barents region point out that it is difficult to plan and implement international projects with the short time intervals that often apply in cultural life, where you only get information close to the implementation as to whether you have been awarded funds or not. Many believe that the grant procedure generally needs to be more long-term and with longer planning horizons that extend beyond one year.

“Common platform with information about the collaboration. Infrastructure for collaborations. Officials with a special focus on the Barents.” (SVE)

• **Increased focus on the free and non-profit organised cultural life**

Several of the respondents point out that the free and non-profit organised cultural life needs better funding opportunities and opportunities to participate in networks to be able to participate in international collaborations and increase its visibility.

• **Small scale and different forms of cooperation**

Several responses emphasise the importance of not making the collaborations too large and expensive, but instead collaborating on a smaller scale and in different ways. Examples include author exchanges, residencies, digital meetings, and cross-border collaborations between different art forms.

“Better networks between producers, cultural organisations, festivals and arenas across national borders. More opportunities for longer touring activities, so that you don’t have to travel to and from Norway to play a show here and there.” (NO)

• **Support for indigenous peoples, minority languages and culture**

The Barents area with Sápmi is a multicultural region. Among the responses from the cultural activities, the need to support different languages and cultural projects that promote the cultural identity of indigenous and minority groups is raised. It also mentions the need for language teaching and translation services to promote cooperation across language boundaries.

• **Respect for local knowledge**

It is emphasised that respect for the local expertise and knowledge is required.

“Exchange trips for artists where they get the financial means to visit and host colleagues from other countries. Economic conditions for running and being part of artistic networks across borders.” (SVE)

• **Other input as requested**

Other factors mentioned include peace and political stability in the region, open borders, support for free cultural life and cultural exchange, and an emphasis on knowledge, skills, and training in the cultural sector. It is also desirable to strengthen cooperation between different countries within the Barents region and to promote cooperation with Russia – on the condition that peace is concluded with Ukraine.



Joensuu Art Museum



Interior from **Sámi Duodji Samesløjdstiftelsen** in Jokkmokk. Photo: Carl Johan Utsi. Artwork by **Vebjørn Hagen Thoe**: From a tent meeting, “Kjøletårn” and “Mausoleum” (mining landscape from Niger). “**The Sweetness of Living**” at Festspillene i Nord-Norge 2023 in Harstad, curated by Pikene på Broen. Photo: Oleg Khadartsev

# Individual voices from the Barents region

## – Interviews with cultural workers

Here are interviews with people who in many ways represent parts of the cultural life in the Barents region parts of Finland, Norway, and Sweden. There are representatives of cultural institutions and independent businesses but also individual artists and cultural workers. They are selected because they represent different parts of the cultural sector and can therefore provide different aspects and perspectives on the inquiry's questions.

In the interviews, they have been asked to give their views on the situation today for the businesses/organisations, what challenges and opportunities exist for the cultural sector right now, what international cooperation looks like, what obstacles exist to increased international collaborations and what efforts need to be made for increased international cultural cooperation.

### • Kirkenes, Norway •

**Neal Cahoon**  
Curatorial Leader (2020 – 2023)  
Pikene på Broen



PHOTO: MICHAEL MILLER, PIKENE PÅ BROEN

**K**IRKENES, WHICH IS located 15 km from the Russian border and 50 km from the Finnish border, is, according to Pikene på Broen (“The Girls on the Bridge”), a perfect starting point for cross-border cooperation and cultural exchange in the Arctic. Pikene på Broen has been active since 1996 and consists of a collective of curators and producers. In Kirkenes there are over 60 nationalities and, right from the start,

Pikene på Broen has had as an idea to create cultural meeting places with the local cultural life and international actors.

It started when the Russian border was opened. Suddenly there was an opportunity to meet neighbours! At the same time, the iron ore mine which was so important to Kirkenes was shut down (it is currently prospecting to open again). “Pikene på Broen did a lot to create a desire and an attractiveness to live here, and that is still very much our role,” says Neal Cahoon, who came to Kirkenes in 2020. He is one of nine employees working year-round. The operations consist of, among other things, the annual festival Barents Spektakel, the Terminal B venue which can accommodate everything from art exhibitions to concerts, and an artist residency programme, BAR International.

“The two pandemic years were challenging,” says Neal, “even though the corona outbreaks in northern Norway were not so extensive. And we have a lot of space here, so everyday life went quite well.” Much was done digitally, of course. “It had its limitations but it was also easier to make contact and it made it possible to both take care of old networks and create new ones,” he says. The festival in 2021, for example, was mostly conducted digitally and outdoors, with satellite events in different locations. Even when the vaccine arrived and travel was opened, the cooperation difficulties remained. “In practice, the Russian border was closed right up until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, because Russia had a different vaccine and there were strong travel restrictions on both sides,” he says.

The war broke out the day after Barents Spektakel opened in February 2022. “We had the theme ‘Where do we go from here?’, which was conceived from a post-covid perspective, but it got a completely different context with the act of war,” Neal says. Everything was affected by the war – it became more difficult to show nuances in the debates, but also difficult in practical terms. “We couldn’t pay independent Russian artists if they lived in Russia, and it was difficult to get a visa and a lot of other administrative hassles.”

The big challenge right now is the consequences of the ongoing war. “Before, Russian artist collaborations were the focus, now the opportunities are smaller. We are still in contact with individual independent and pro-democracy Russian artists and artist organisations who are in

exile, but it is also dangerous for people to speak out,” he says. Now Pikene på Broen is very much in a period of transition where they are looking at new ways of cooperating throughout the Arctic, where they see that there are similar challenges and opportunities.

The business is made possible thanks to projects and project support. Only 25% is covered by operating support, and now they are waiting for the important financiers BarentsKult and the Barents Secretariat to show the new direction for their funding schemes, which was previously based on Norwegian-Russian collaborations. In addition to funding, it is also a general challenge for Kirkenes to create a desire to move here and to stay. “There is a lack of people between the ages of 20 and 40,” says Neals. “They move here to work for a few years, but then they leave.” How to get people to want to stay here in Northern Norway and settle down is something that Pikene på Broen thinks a lot about: “We really want to do something good here so that Kirkenes is not just an industrial town,” he says.

The name “Barents” probably means different things to different people, Neal believes. His view is that for the Russians, the Barents have a great significance – they become part of a larger community. “Kirkenes is clearly part of the Barents, but if you ask someone in northern Finland, it’s not as certain.”

*“We want to learn something, find new perspectives – that’s why we collaborate with others”*

The Sámi imprint is very noticeable in Kirkenes. In 2026, it will mark 200 years since Sweden and Russia decided on the new border between Norway, Russia, and Finland, which has not least affected the Skolt Sámi. The Pasvik river is also important, both symbolically and practically. It runs from the Lake Inari in Finland, forms the border between Norway and Russia, and flows into the Barents Sea. The river has created power for the mine in Kirkenes but also affected people’s lives.

Most of Pikene’s networks outside Norway are in Russia (now with diaspora communities who have fled the country), in Finland, and others internationally, but to a lesser extent in Sweden. “It’s important to meet each other,” he says. “Many of us work project-based and have a lot to learn from each other.” Through his many years of experience in project collaborations, Neal sees that Pikene på Broen can work more around the Arctic in a circumpolar sense. He mentions two Finnish festivals

– Baltic Circle and Silent Festival – as important contact points that have visited during the Barents Spektakel and shared their experiences.

More collaboration is positive in every way, he believes. It creates cohesion with other places and communities, inspires artistically and culturally, gives visibility to the region, and contributes to the transfer of knowledge.

International operations are a fundamental issue for Pikene på Broen. “We want to learn something, find new perspectives – that’s why we collaborate with others. And the collaboration must be based on a meaningful foundation and on high artistic quality,” says Neal, adding: “We don’t want to become an exotic destination for artists, but create a real dialogue and collaboration between artists and local knowledge holders.”

### Read more:

[www.pikene.no/](http://www.pikene.no/)  
[www.balticcircle.fi/english](http://www.balticcircle.fi/english)  
[www.hiljaisuusfestivali.fi/about](http://www.hiljaisuusfestivali.fi/about)  
[barents.no/en/barentskult](http://barents.no/en/barentskult)

### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- A system for long-term support – not only for networking but also for creating together.
- Cooperation between the countries’ regional bus services. “We want transport that’s environmentally friendly but today there is a lack of infrastructure for bus travel between Norway, Finland and Sweden. Can a common Nordic structure be created without destroying more nature? Which means that the journey between Finnish Inari and Kirkenes does not have to mean flying to Helsinki and then Oslo, Tromsø and Kirkenes, but with three hours by bus?”
- More fixed studios and production sites for art which would create more permanent residency opportunities. Preferably together with different municipalities.

• *Karasjok, Norway* •

## Christina Haetta

Head of the Cultural Unit  
Saami Council/Sámiráðði



PHOTO: THE SAAMI COUNCIL

THE SAAMI COUNCIL is the non-governmental organisation for Sámi organisations in Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Finland. Since its founding in 1956, it has worked actively with Sámi political endeavours with the main goal of promoting the rights and interests of the Sámi as one people across four national states. The main issues are human rights, the EU, the Arctic and the environment, and Sámi culture. Support is given to cultural activities that strengthen Sámi artistic freedom, for example through project support, study trips and work grants.

Christina Haetta is Head of the Cultural Unit: “In addition to various supports, we also arrange the meeting place KulturSápmi, which aims to strengthen networks and more collaborations,” she says. The fourth meeting was held in September 2023 in Anár/Inari in Finland and gathered Sámi professional cultural workers and artists from all over Sápmi.

The challenges for the Sámi cultural field are many, including financing and the lack of basic support structures. “Sámi art and culture are severely underfunded,” she says. “Compared to many other organisations, the Sámi operations have a fraction of the national ones.” For instance, the International Sámi Film Institute has one tenth of the funding of its Norwegian counterpart. “Together with other organisations, the Sámi field will now begin a survey of how skewed the distribution is when it comes to public grants,” she says.

“The Sámi art and cultural field lack fundamental support mechanisms which today the Nordic countries take as a matter of course, for example strong funding systems, professional organisations, and bodies, but also infrastructural deficiencies such as a Sámi art museum. Today much of our art is stored in attics and wardrobes at people’s homes,” she says.

Another challenge is the lack of statistics and research. “Since no long-term statistical measurements or research are carried out, there is a lack of basic information about the current situation of the Sámi art and cultural field and therefore little is known, for example, about how the current support schemes affect the field and how to facilitate effective cultural policy priorities,” she says, and sums up: “We have very few facts about the art and cultural field in Sápmi and what needs exist.”

She sees a growing understanding of indigenous issues in general in society and believes that after, among other things, the Black Lives Matter movement, awareness has grown about the conditions of a people who have been colonised. “There is a window ajar right now for our questions, and it is more open than just five years ago,” says Christina, and believes that there is a clearer political will to change and improve the situation. She emphasises that the Sámi are not a minority, but an indigenous people who have a different position than the existing national minorities.

Christina also sees a great and growing interest in Sámi art, literature, film, and music, even outside the Nordic countries. “Internationally, we see that everything from streaming giants to the Venice Biennale highlights Sámi and indigenous culture,” she says, citing examples such as Disney+ making a television series based on the book *Koke Bjørn* (“To Cook a Bear”) by Mikael Niemi, a Netflix film based on the book *Stöld* (“Stolen”) by Ann-Helén Laestadius, and the fact that at the last Venice Biennale the Nordic pavilion was transformed into a Sámi pavilion.

*“There is a window ajar right now for our questions, and it is more open than just five years ago”*

Speaking of the term “Barents,” she points out that the Sámi do not traditionally use this term. Sápmi is their home. “In 1826, national borders were drawn that went straight through the entire Sápmi and changed the Sámi’s conditions forever,” says Christina. Russia’s war is, of course, another challenge when it comes to the Barents – the entire Saami Council’s work with Russia is on hold. “Russia is a natural part of Sápmi,” says Christina. “Our family and our friends are now behind the Russian border, and it is a difficult challenge, not least for individuals.”

Christina continues: “For us, they are first and foremost Sámi. We always work on a people-to-people level and now it is completely impossible to work with Russia.” She says that the working situation for duojárás (Sámi handcrafters and artisans) becomes very noticeable when they cannot sell handicrafts across national borders, and the Saami Council cannot include Sámi cultural workers from the Russian side in their various activities. “Sámi cultural workers on the Russian side had a very difficult time during the pandemic and now it is even worse. Now we are just waiting for the war to end, so that we can be united people again,” she sums up.

The Barents perspective of recent decades has positively strengthened and benefited the conditions in Sápmi, according to Christina. “Will Nordic authorities want to invest in the Barents cooperation in the future in view of the war?,” she asks herself.

According to Christina, there are some practical obstacles to collaborations across national borders including customs and VAT costs. “We don’t see it as export if a duojáre (handrafter) from the Norwegian side sells on Jokkmokk’s market because we are in Sápmi.” She points to the increased costs, but also all the administration and bureaucracy in connection with sales. She says that there are also different rules for trade in the various Nordic countries, which make it difficult for individual traders.

“A will and understanding that the Sámi art and cultural field is one field across four nation-states is needed to redeem the potential that exists in Sápmi for Sámi art and culture,” she says, adding: “It takes time to change the view of unjust, fundamental conditions. We liken it to ‘grouse steps’, the slightly wobbly, short steps that a grouse takes.”

### Read more:

[www.saamicouncil.net/en/cultural-unit](http://www.saamicouncil.net/en/cultural-unit)

[www.kulturSápmi.com/](http://www.kulturSápmi.com/)

[isfi.no/](http://isfi.no/)

[about.netflix.com/en/news/ann-helen-laestadius-](http://about.netflix.com/en/news/ann-helen-laestadius-acclaimed-novel-stolen-to-come-to-netflix)

[aca.no/theSámipavilion](http://aca.no/theSámipavilion)

[jokkmokksmarknad.se/en/](http://jokkmokksmarknad.se/en/)

[kulturanalys.se/en/kulturanalys-norden/](http://kulturanalys.se/en/kulturanalys-norden/)

### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- Funding for Sámi culture must increase, otherwise we cannot work long-term or take advantage of the power and potential that exists.
- Financing must also change. Now the Nordic cultural councils work across national borders. How can they promote and strengthen Sámi culture and work together with the Sámi Parliaments in Sweden, Finland, and Norway in a collaborative way?

- Collective knowledge and research. What do the conditions look like for Sámi art and culture? Can Kulturanalys Norden (Cultural Analysis North), which is the Nordic knowledge centre for cultural policy, have that as one of its tasks?

• *Luleå/Piteå, Sweden* •

## Peter Hauptmann

Project Manager

Norrbottnen Music/Norrbottnemusiken



PHOTO: NORRBOTTENMUSIKEN

NORRBOTTENMUSIKEN, THE REGIONAL music institution for the whole of Norrbotten, offers music in collaboration with many other actors. It focuses on children and young people, collaboration with the free musical life, and the ensembles Norrbotten Big Band, Norrbotten Chamber Orchestra, Piteå Chamber Opera with Church Opera and, until the turn of the year, the chamber ensemble Norrbotten NEO.

Peter Hauptmann has been project manager for several of the international projects that Norrbottensmusiken has been involved in, which affect not least the Barents area.

He first talks about the situation right now, one year after the pandemic. “Now the audience has found their way back, even if they buy tickets closer to the date of the concert, which means that it creates a little more uncertainty for the organiser,” he says. Otherwise, it’s like in many other workplaces: “It’s a little more empty in the office, many people work from home a lot,” he says, and this means that internal communication becomes a little more difficult and the shared coffee breaks become fewer. A big challenge is that one of the ensembles is to be shut down after 15 years and they are now looking for a new musical concept. On the other hand, it is positive that a choral centre is being developed which will gather choir leaders and choir singers.

Peter Hauptmann was project manager for Arctic Pulse 2019 – 2022, a large Interreg project via the EU, together with Scene Nord in Norway and the City of Oulu in Finland. The project aimed to increase the exchange of music productions throughout the North Calotte and make the region's music selection visible in the hospitality industry. It posed the basic question: How does the Arctic Pulse sound? "It was also very much a project that would increase musical collaboration with the tourism industry," says Peter.

*"It makes a big difference when there is proper funding in a project"*

Now they have a big new three-year project, which includes Norrbottensmusiken and Norrlandsoperan from Sweden, Scene Nord, Nordnorsk Jazzsenter and Musikk i Nordland in Norway, and the City of Oulu and Novia in Jakobstad, Finland. The project is entitled Arctic Music Circles and began in autumn 2023 in collaboration with the European Capitals of Culture, Bodö and Oulu. "The idea is to create a network through conferences for producers, organisers and cultural managers, to develop music forms that favour minority languages such as Sámi and Kvenska, in order to be able to contribute to Arctic world music and ensure that young talents can meet more experienced music creators", says Peter.

Instead of Barents, Norrbottensmusiken often uses the term Arctic Europe. "A term that has found resonance in the EU, we notice", says Peter. Even before Russia's war against Ukraine, Russia was not included in the various projects. "I feel that we have a completely different culture, and the great distances have felt like difficult obstacles," Peter says.

For Norrbottensmusiken's ensembles, international distribution is extremely important. "We have a big band at the highest artistic level, which can attract the best musicians in their genre, because we get so many requests from interesting concert organisers," says Peter. "We want to spread our music."

There are several obstacles to more cooperation across national borders. "We have a lack of information about each other, what is available in the different countries," says Peter, pointing out that there is also a lack of a structure for inventorying which businesses exist. And money, of course. "It makes a big difference when there is proper funding in a project. There are large costs to send a large orchestra on tour, with travel, accommodation, and allowances."

Peter believes that Increased internationalisation creates more diversity in the cultural offering. "In small towns and in the countryside, there is a limited supply. Not all places can have symphony orchestras or big bands," he says. He believes that this speaks for the need to spread the culture to more people, and that it will benefit everyone who lives here because they will enjoy more interesting living environments.

**Read more:**

[norbottensmusiken.se/en](http://norbottensmusiken.se/en)  
[www.arcticpulse.eu/](http://www.arcticpulse.eu/)  
[norrlandsoperan.se/en/](http://norrlandsoperan.se/en/)  
[www.scenenord.no/](http://www.scenenord.no/)  
[musikkinordland.no/](http://musikkinordland.no/)

**Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:**

- Stable networks with long-term financing. The big cultural institutions can take turns organising conferences. If music directors from Norway, Finland and Sweden meet, things will happen. Networks are also needed at the political level.
- Regions must think more cross-border and also in an east-west direction. Political visions in the cultural plans must have serious impact.
- Targeted project funds that steer projects and collaborations in a positive sense. There must be earmarked money to travel across national borders.

• *Oulu, Finland* •

**Tuomo Heikkinen**  
*Executive Manager*  
*Oulu Writers Association/*  
*Oulun Kirjailijaseura ry*



PHOTO: TERO KYLLÖNEN

THE OULU WRITERS association (Oulun Kirjailijaseura ry) gathers around 100 writers, all professionals but in different genres. The purpose of the association is to promote work opportunities for professional writers in Northern Ostrobothnia in various ways, but also to strengthen their situation through networks and various activities. The association runs the Oulu House of Literature, publishes an online newspaper, organises a literature festival, oversees a literary prize, and maintains the Black Hole Network which focuses on foreign rights. To mention a few of their commitments.

"The pandemic was a trial, even if it did not exactly affect the authors' normal work situation, which is to write in solitude. On the other hand, many of our authors make appearances at various kinds of events, and of course they were cancelled," says Tuomo Heikkinen, Executive Manager. "It was largely replaced by digital events."

Now it is mainly live events again, but there are still some hybrid events, which can reach a larger audience. During the pandemic, fewer books were published, though this has since recovered. Overall, there are more and more debut novels every year, thanks in large part to the fact that there are more publishing houses today.

For the Oulu Writers Association, the challenges include a lack of sufficient financial support. "Much of my job involves looking for money to finance various projects that we want to do," says Tuomo. In addition, he is the only employee in the office, which means that there are

limits to how much he can accomplish in a working day.

However, the association has high expectations for when Oulu becomes a European Capital of Culture in 2026. It is already known that at least one of the association's projects will be funded, which is about organising activities and events in the Oulu House of Literature and inviting authors to write new texts about the area.

There have been fewer international activities due to the limited resources. Projects mainly involve writers from the Oulu area and Lapland, but also Helsinki. Last year there was a residency collaboration between Oulu and Iceland and through the Black Hole Network they promoted the translation of Finnish authors into other languages, but right now there is a lack of funding for a continuation. "Unlike art exhibitions and music, literature needs to be translated," says Tuomo. "Author appearances in other countries have to be interpreted and if we are going to introduce a Norwegian author, the author's text must first be translated into Finnish or English."

The Oulu Writers Association has not had pure Barents collaborations, but the association is very interested to do so if it finds partners.

Tuomo hopes that Oulu 2026 will mean a greater international focus in general for culture in northern Finland. For the association, more international cooperation would lead to more Finnish authors being translated which could lead to new readers, more income, and the possibility of invitations to events abroad. "Foreign collaborations open doors, of course," he says. It would

*"More collaborations could be achieved through people getting to know each other"*

bring more income to the authors and enrich the cultural life of the inhabitants. But then money and partners are needed. And when it comes to book translations, active promotion to various foreign publishers is required. "Finland is a small country

in many ways. Here we have around four agencies that sell foreign rights abroad, while in Sweden there are maybe 20."

"More collaborations – both within the Barents and internationally – could be achieved through people getting to know each other. For example, you could have literary network meetings for those active in the Barents," says Tuomo, who believes that it is important to meet face-to-face in order to think of new projects together and collaborate with each other. "Perhaps, as a first step, we should have a first Barents literature meeting in Oulu during the Capital of Culture 2026?" he says, and also suggests that other writers' organisations are welcome to get in touch and seek cooperation.

**Read more:**

[www.oulunkirjailijaseura.fi/en/home](http://www.oulunkirjailijaseura.fi/en/home)

[www.stiiknafuulia.fi/](http://www.stiiknafuulia.fi/)

[www.oulunkirjailijaseura.fi/botniapalkinto](http://www.oulunkirjailijaseura.fi/botniapalkinto)

[www.oulunkirjailijaseura.fi/newliteraturefestival](http://www.oulunkirjailijaseura.fi/newliteraturefestival)

[www.blackhole.fi/](http://www.blackhole.fi/)

[oulu2026.eu/en/](http://oulu2026.eu/en/)

**Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:**

- A literature network is created in the Barents region, with both physical and digital meetings to generate more projects.
- A literature festival that moves around the Barents, maybe five cities that take turns.
- More funding for translation. The language – and translation costs – are an obstacle for literature to reach out.

**• Umeå, Sweden •****Jans Heinerud**

*Head of the Cultural Environment Department  
Västerbotten Museum*



VÄSTERBOTTEN MUSEUM'S OWN history began approximately 100 years ago, when the local history society (Hembydsföreningen) in Umeå began collecting objects. This laid the foundation for the Västerbotten Museum's collection. It is the cultural history museum of the region. The organisation also houses the Gammlia open-air museum with around 30 historic buildings. The museum is tasked with collecting, caring for and displaying the entire county's cultural heritage – objects, works of art, photographs, films, memories and stories. In addition to the collec-

tions, archives and exhibitions, they work with archeology and building maintenance.

Jans Heinerud, who is Head of the Cultural Environment Department, sees several signs of light now. "The public has found its way back after the pandemic, and especially in a recession the public sector tends to build a lot so the mission activities for our archaeologists are going well," he says, but notes that the museum's costs for operation, maintenance and materials have increased just like for

*“In order to achieve collaborations with other countries, finances and personnel resources are needed, otherwise fantastic ideas stay on paper”*

other segments of society. "But together with our board we have a good and constructive dialogue about ways forward and how to develop the business," he says.

The museum has always seen itself as local, regional, national, and international, says Jans. And speaking of Barents, he sees many common cultural-historical aspects. "Everyone who lives in the circumpolar area, of which Västerbotten is also a part, has historically been united by the fact that they are descended from hunters and gatherer to the Sámi culture that has always moved in an east-west direction rather than north-south, and that is part of a common cultural area," says Jans. He points to the fact that there are similar petroglyphs in the different countries and that timber constructions look similar. "It is a common cultural area," he states.

Jans mentions the work and cooperation with the Sámi reference group with representatives from associations and Sámi villages, which for 30 years has been an important source of knowledge in the museum's work, for example how to work archeologically and ethnologically. The first reburial of Sámi remains in Sweden took place in 2001 and was the result of a collaboration between the Västerbotten Museum and the Vapstens Sámi association, Vadtejen Saemiej Sijte, by Soejvengeele, the so-called "shadow man" at Atoklimpen in Tärnaby. And precisely at Atoklimpen, which is a cultural reserve and a sacred Sámi place, the museum has collaborated with the county administrative board and Sámi organisations regarding trade-offs from, for example, tourism and accessibility aspects.

Västerbotten Museum has for a long time worked together with colleagues in Norway and Finland, precisely because there are so many cultural similarities. The common cultural history, the forest, the coast, and the mountain area have been themes that have resulted in several books. Together with the Baltic states, Finland and initially Russia, they started a network collaboration, "Forestry and our Cultural Heritage" and in a Norwegian-Swedish Interreg project, the museum together with the Helgeland Museum, among others, has explored how the cultural landscape can be used as a teaching arena for schools. Likewise, there was much collaboration with its counterpart in Petrozavodsk – a sister city to Umeå – in the Republic of Karelia regarding petroglyphs, which resulted in book publishing and exhibition collaborations.

The museum's aim with international cooperation is to establish contacts and find new collaborations. "It gives the organisation so much and boosts everyone involved," he says. It also counteracts sinkhole thinking within one's own operations, he believes. It contributes to social sustainability, which is a goal in Agenda 2030, where common platforms are needed to create contact and consensus. "But in order to achieve collaborations with other countries, finances and personnel resources are needed, otherwise fantastic ideas stay on paper," says Jans.

He believes that cultural heritage and cultural environments are a resource for society and mentions cultural tourism and when municipalities develop communities. "See our museums as a resource and opportunity," he urges. "It is part of our social mission."

**Read more:**

[www.vbm.se/en/](http://www.vbm.se/en/)

[www.vbm.se/en/gammlia/](http://www.vbm.se/en/gammlia/)

[www.vbm.se/utforska/projekt/vandring-i-kulturlandskap/](http://www.vbm.se/utforska/projekt/vandring-i-kulturlandskap/)

[www.vbm.se/utforska/projekt/kulturspar-i-landskapet/](http://www.vbm.se/utforska/projekt/kulturspar-i-landskapet/)

[www.vbm.se/utforska/projekt/norrlands-vattenanknutna-kulturmiljoer/](http://www.vbm.se/utforska/projekt/norrlands-vattenanknutna-kulturmiljoer/)

**Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:**

- Find consensus solutions and contact points in municipalities, at national authorities, and also internationally to take advantage of the common cultural heritage.
- Meeting places where people can discuss similar issues and form networks.
- Coordinators and strategists in the regions, who can act as receivers of good ideas and be responsible for organisation and logistics.

**• Skellefteå, Sweden •****Robert Herrala**

*Head of Department  
Nordic Storytelling Centre/Nordisk  
Berättarcentrum, Västerbotten  
Theatre/Västerbottensteatern*



PHOTO: PATRICK DEGERMAN

THE NORDIC STORYTELLING Centre (Nordiskt berättarcentrum) is a resource centre for developing the art of storytelling under the motto "Everyone's story is worth listening to." It is part of the Västerbotten Theatre (Västerbottensteatern) in Skellefteå and works with storytelling both as performing arts and as a pedagogical method. The biggest public event is the annual International Storytelling Festival, which attracts 9,000 visitors to 150 programme points. They also work with networking initiatives, workshops, courses and collaborate with Umeå University.

Robert Herrala, who is the head of the department, tells us that the business has recovered a lot after the pandemic. "The situation is relatively stable, the audience and our

*“When people come and say that they have been fulfilled and changed, that is the reward”*

operations have returned to normal," he says. The challenges now revolve around adapting to the new environment after having moved into the newly built Sara Cultural Centre in Skellefteå, where they coexist with restaurants, hotels, and conference facilities. He believes that the role and status of culture in society, as well as the ambition of politics to reach out with culture in an international context, is limited.

He sees that there are opportunities in the future for international cooperation. “There are also new financial opportunities for our business, which we have experienced several times before,” he says. The Nordic Storytelling Centre has had many international collaborations over the years. At the Nordic/Baltic level, work is being done to develop the Nordic Baltic Storytelling Meeting network, which was supported by the Nordic Culture Point in Helsinki and aims to create collaborations including continuing education and festival collaboration. They have also had multi-year collaborations with theatres in, for example, England and Scotland, and they are on the board of the Federation for European Storytelling.

“Meetings across borders brings people closer together,” he says. “When people come and say that they have been fulfilled and changed, that is the reward. Culture in the broadest sense can be life-changing for individuals.” Robert welcomes new initiatives and ideas. “The Nordic Storytelling Centre has great experience and knowledge of methods for cooperation – and a large new cultural centre – so everyone is welcome!”

#### Read more:

[vasterbottensteatern.se/nordiskt-berattarcentrum/nsc-summary/](http://vasterbottensteatern.se/nordiskt-berattarcentrum/nsc-summary/)  
[vasterbottensteatern.se/en/](http://vasterbottensteatern.se/en/)  
[www.sarakulturhus.se/en/](http://www.sarakulturhus.se/en/)

#### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- People with the right skills whose job it is to create cooperation and are on site within the Barents region.
- Resources. New funds must be provided to create time and conditions.
- Establish meeting places where people can meet on site. It is important that these arrangements are placed at the beginning or end of a season, not in the middle.

## • Hammerfest, Norway •

### Perttu Mutka Film Commissioner East Finland Film Commission/ Itä-Suomen elokuvakomissio



PHOTO: BUSINESS JOENSUU

**I**N FINLAND THERE are seven regions that have film commissions, for example Oulu and Lapland in northern Finland. Perttu Mutka is the Film Commissioner for the operations of the East Finland Film Commission (Itä-Suomen elokuvakomissio) which is stationed in Joensuu in North Karelia. It has many advantages, he says: “We are the easternmost region of Finland and in the European Union and have vast forests, long summer days when the sun never sets, and a magical winter environment with the most snowfall in Finland.”

The East Finland Film Commission acts as a cooperation body and coordinator in North Karelia for national and international film and television productions. The organisation is part of Business Joensuu Oy and funding comes from the Regional Association of North Karelia’s future fund. An important part of the work consists of assisting the production companies with the help of funding applications and the actual execution of recordings, for example finding recording locations, actors, and local service providers.

“Now that Finland is in NATO, everything feels much better,” says Perttu. When the Russian invasion of Ukraine started, all international recording in northern Finland stopped. During the pandemic, all recording was also domestic. Whereas now international companies are ready and focused on recordings in Finland as well.

Perttu sees many new possibilities. “The situation for film is in many ways much better now than before the pandemic,” he says. In addition to NATO membership, he mentions the fact that the film industry in Finland has grown. Before, there were maybe 20 – 25 Finnish films per year in cinemas and now, after the pandemic, there

are maybe 40. He also sees that an important reason why many production companies are looking to North Karelia is that there is a lot of talent and good local craftsmen and it will be cheaper for the companies to hire locals who do not need allowances, expensive travel, and accommodation.

The challenges also relate to the fact that there may be a de facto lack of specific technical craft skills and, above all, that the film economy in Finland is small. “We would need more public funding for the film industry, both nationally and regionally.

There are more productions now and each film’s budget is higher than before,” says Perttu.

In a German, British or American production, there can be up to 200 people working. “People like to come to us if they need snow scenes because we are the southernmost place that has had snow but also the most daylight, so you can film more hours in the day,” says Perttu. He also says that Finnish productions are often filmed in the summertime when it is simpler logistically and practically and thereby less expensive.

Finland and especially Russia have had many film collaborations. Perttu mentions Juho Kuosmanen’s successful “Compartment No. 6” (“Hutti number kusias”) as a recent example. Perttu and the East Finland Film Commission had a lot of cooperation with upwards of 15 different production companies in Petrozavodsk in the Republic of Karelia in the LOKKI project, which was part of the EU project Karelia CBC. Formal cooperation ended in 2020, but there were plans for the future, which are now completely on hold after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

In the Barents, Perttu has made many contact attempts, but perceives that it is generally difficult with collaborations due to long distances, the lack of people and the language barriers. Generally speaking, his experience is that it is more difficult the more countries and organisations that have to cooperate. “On the other hand, there are good support programmes in the EU,” he says.

The whole purpose of the activities of the East Finland Film Commission is to create more film. “We need small Finnish productions to develop new talent, and larger international productions that also generate international funding,” says Perttu. “It’s about cooperation, competence and learning from others.” He believes that people work differently in different countries: “Finnish productions can be a bit overproduced, we want perfection and sometimes it becomes a bit engineering-like. We would need a little more roughness, more rock-and-roll. I have noticed that, for example, Swedish production companies have a more open, international attitude.”

More international film collaborations would come about if there was better funding, he believes. Culture does not have the same position in society, he believes, because cultural activities do not generate as many jobs or contribute to the economy as much as industry. “Forests are the biggest business here, followed by mines and the metal industry,” says Perttu. He believes culture deserves a higher position and more status.

What would benefit increased international collaboration is to do projects together with experienced leaders who have strong projects, with large projects timed three years in advance, according to Perttu. The benefits would be many. “It’s a lot about politics and symbolism. If we had more collaborations and projects between the Scandinavian countries, it will make us stronger allies, not only at prime minister level, but in more areas,” he says.

#### Read more:

[www.effc.fi/](http://www.effc.fi/)  
[www.filminfinland.com/en/regions](http://www.filminfinland.com/en/regions)  
[kareliacbc.fi/en/projects/ka3008-lokki](http://kareliacbc.fi/en/projects/ka3008-lokki)

#### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- Large productions, such as “Sisu” (2022) directed by Jalmari Helander, involving several Nordic countries.
- A responsible, experienced person tasked with creating co-productions.
- Special funds for co-productions – which presupposes that local politicians recognise the value of culture.

## • Joensuu, Finland •

## Susanne Næss Nielsen

Director

Davvi – Centre for Performing Arts/  
Senter for scenekunst

PHOTO: TS FOTO DESIGN

**D**AVVI – CENTER FOR Performing Arts was founded in 2021, but has a longer history in the organisations Dansearena Nord and RadArt for independent performing arts. They work to support the entire performing arts sector – theatre, dance, circus, performance – through, above all, residencies, various project support, networking and lobbying. Approximately 80 performing artists from the independent arts field are affiliated with the activities of the Davvi. Davvi means “north” in northern Sámi, and it is available and present in three northern Norwegian cities: Hammerfest, Tromsø and Bodø.

Susanne Næss Nielsen is Director at Navvi. “Here in the north, there is a lack of cultural institutions and infrastructure for cultural activities. Our task is to promote and support all freelancers from the independent performing arts field. We now face big challenges after the pandemic”, says Susanne and points out that the increase in all costs in northern Norway has had a dramatic effect. “Everything that is included in tour costs such as transport and hotels has increased, and the grants have not kept up,” she says. She also sees that the administrative handling of applications and reports has increased due to financiers increasing their requirements for details.

“It is also a fact that the lack of foresight regarding decisions about the grants is great. Both rejection and approval for allocation of money come late, so it is difficult for a director or choreographer to hire artists. Another challenge, according to Susanne, is that key

skills in the sector are drained, such as technical specialists, many of whom were laid off during the pandemic and have not returned, and there is a shortage of producers needed for tour planning.

The lack of cultural institutions in northern Norway brings along other issues to deal with. “It’s a shame that there is a lack of understanding of what cultural activities bring to a community. We need some cultural engines that are able to lift the sector and help start businesses with some kind of predictability” she notes, and continues: “In Norway, we claim to have a strong regional policy. Everyone must have equal access to health, education, and culture, regardless of where they live. But political intentions are now being carried out and investments are not made. In a time of decreasing population in the north, it would make a lot of sense to also build cultural muscle, she says. In Hammerfest in particular, culture has been used to develop the community. In order to attract labour to the gas plant in Melkøya, Hammerfest decided to build a cultural centre, the Arctic Culture Centre, where the Davvi – Centre for Performing Arts has its headquarters.

The opportunities in this part of the Nordics and the Arctic are great, she believes. “We are extremely good at cooperating here. There is a strong culture of trust among us in the Barents and we have a great desire to help each other. It is a glue that is invisible, which we only discover when it is not there.”

Speaking of Barents as a concept, she says: “When you live here, you are surrounded by a large patchwork of different identities. We live in northern Norway, but also in the Barents, the Arctic, the Nordics, Scandinavia, Sápmi. There are many different identities at play all the time and no one trumps the other. We tend to use the identity that best suits each context.”

If you work as a performing artist in northern Norway, the market is limited. Working across borders becomes a natural way to self sustain and is completely obvious for most artists in the north, says Susanne, and continues: “When we talk about cooperation with our nearest neighbouring countries, we don’t think of it as ‘international’. We are probably affected by a Sámi way of thinking, which is borderless and about east-west, rather than north-south. Both Finland and Russia are closer to us than Oslo is – they are part of our extended family.”

Russian collaborations in particular have been seen as important, because, according to Susanne: “There is a

sense that collaboration and contacts are not found in Putin’s office, but within the culture.” Russia’s war against Ukraine was shocking and caused all contacts with Russian partners to cease because it could put them in danger. Through Davvi – Centre for Performing Arts’ support, two Russian exile artists now have a long-term residence in Tromsø.

Cooperation across national borders always involves challenges. “It’s always easier to do things yourself,” says Susanne. “If you want to collaborate, you have to have dialogue, find mutual solutions – many things take more time than if you decide everything yourself”. Collaboration also requires that you have the capacity and financial resources. “Here, we always have high travel costs if we have to get to and from other places,” she says. This is a huge problem for better interaction with other parts of Norway and international collaboration.

In general, she would like the funds available to finance culture to be more free, preferably a large pot of money, and less controlled. As it is now, both the municipalities and the counties have only very few free funds. And many shy away from applying for EU funds because it is complicated and time-consuming. “Seeking money internationally is not the first thing you do when you have graduated from an art college”, she says.

Speaking of Barents, she may also think that from the Norwegian side, it has been very focused on cooperation with Russia and not really given room for cooperation with Sweden and Finland. But she sees that there is much that could be developed that favours cultural cooperation within the region. There is already a structure for residency that could be developed. She also believes in developing the role of producers and curators, where one could have a strong Barents perspective.

**Read more:**  
www.davvi.org/  
www.davvi.org/radart  
www.aks.no/

### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- Robust cultural institutions, which are strong and supportive of long-term collaboration.
- Available labour within different parts of the cultural arena. There is a lot of focus on industry and business, but not on culture and the humanities. If we want to get people to stay or move back here, actors and lighting technicians also need to feel that there is an industry to work with.
- Build on and strengthen the trust that is so crucial. The best way is through cross-border collaborations of all kinds, so one needs to find a structure for that.

## • Dearna/Tärnaby, Sweden •

## Oskar Östergren Njajta

Filmmaker/Managing Director  
Aejlies – Sámi centre

PHOTO: NINA ANDERSSON

**O**SKAR ÖSTERGREN NJAJTA is a versatile filmmaker, both as a producer (including Amanda Kernell’s famous “Sámi Blood”) and screenwriter, as well as the initiator of the Sámi cultural centre Aejlies, which opened in Tärnaby in 2020.

“Aejlies” is Southern Sámi and means “sacred.” The centre houses a Sámi museum, meeting place, showroom for artisans and much more, including a sound studio and craft workshop. It organises exhibitions, courses and programme activities, and has also run a residency programme, “Sápmi Salasta,” for indigenous artists. This autumn it is starting a collaboration with Riksteatern in Sweden, the programme “Jårh” which is aimed at choreographically interesting artists from all over the world.

“Aejlies is created by the Sámi for the Sámi, and is about our culture, our cultural heritage and our present,” says Oskar. He explains that there has been a long-standing need for just such a place. A Norwegian organisation with which they have good cooperation is the Sámi culture and language centre Sijti Jarngje in Hattfjeldal.

From the filmmaker’s perspective, the special crisis support that was available made it possible for the company, Bauta film, to survive the pandemic years. “We normally have many clients in the public sector, and no orders came from there, and there were no international co-productions either,” says Oskar. The pandemic offered the opportunity to focus on working with various development projects and script ideas. “But many others did, too, so now it is difficult to get their various artistic project applications through.”

Oskar sees opportunities after the pandemic. “Now we have better projects going on because we have been

forced to think properly and enter new development processes.” He also realises that it is much more difficult to work with southern Sweden because everyone works more digitally now. “Before, I could go to Stockholm to have a half-hour meeting with Sveriges Television.”

“The Sámi in Sweden are structurally a second-class people, compared to the majority population,” he says, and believes that Norway, Australia and New Zealand have come much further. In Norway, for example, there is the International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI), which promotes Sámi films.

*“Between us humans, it has always been completely natural to cooperate”*

On the other hand, he sees an increased interest in indigenous peoples in general, which benefits both Aejlies and Bauta film. “The big companies, like Netflix, need new stories, original stories. They see that they can make money from a diversity that generates new stories,” says Oskar. He also sees that knowledge about indigenous peoples has increased significantly, not least thanks to the fact that the United Nations has long had an indigenous focus. But also, that the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements have increased awareness of inclusion.

From a Barents perspective, Oskar has no experience of working specifically with Russia, but on the other hand cooperation between Finnish and Norwegian partners is standard. “Within feature films, we always work with broad financing and have financiers from strategically important countries within the Nordic region. And for Sámi cultural projects, co-financing is completely natural,” says Oskar.

International cooperation means not only money in the production stage but also reaching a wider distribution. In practical terms, there are obstacles to cooperation within the Barents and it is above all linked to travel. “Travelling north without a car from Tärnaby is impossible,” says Oskar, and traveling in the eastern and western directions is very cumbersome. And so he believes that cooperation with Russia feels very out-of-date for a long time to come.

According to him, the “Barents project” has been focused so much on accessing natural resources, which is completely contrary to the culture within Sápmi, and there is therefore some reluctance to be part of the “Barents project.” “But between us humans, it has always been completely natural to cooperate,” he says, and

continues: “If there is an investment in Sámi culture, there will automatically be more Barents.”

**Read more:**

[aejlies.se/lorem-ipsam-eng](https://aejlies.se/lorem-ipsam-eng)  
[bautafilm.se/?lang=en](https://bautafilm.se/?lang=en)  
[isfi.no/](https://isfi.no/)  
[sijtjarnge.no/en/](https://sijtjarnge.no/en/)

**Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:**

- Joint financing fund for cultural projects within the Barents.
- More strong Sámi cultural institutions throughout the area.
- Easily accessible networks.

• **Jokkmokk, Sweden** •

**Johanna Njaita**  
*Executive Manager*  
*Sámi Duodji Handicraft Foundation/*  
*Samesløjdstiftelsen Sámi Duodji*



**I**N 1993, THE Sámi National Confederation and the national organisation Sámi Átnam founded the Sámi Duodji Handicraft Foundation (Samesløjdstiftelsen Sámi Duodji), which has as its main task the protection, preservation, and development of the Sámi craft, duodji. This is done, among other things, through scholarships, exhibitions, projects, and the production of educational materials for schools about duodji. The assignment also means creating better conditions for the craftsmen, which is done by, for example, arranging courses in how to make a knife or a belt. The executive manager is Johanna Njaita, who leads the office in Jokkmokk.

“Duodji, which is a major identity marker for us, is based on traditional craftsmanship, which is passed down from

older generations and it is difficult to learn via digital channels,” says Johanna. During the pandemic, several courses were held online, but now courses are again mainly arranged on-site in collaboration with Sámi associations, Sámi villages and individual entrepreneurs. “The pandemic has actually meant that we have developed,” she says, and talks about an increased demand for handicrafts, not least via the online store that Sámi Duodji opened last year.

The big challenge right now regarding the online store is meeting demand. “There is simply a lack of craftsmen.

Products in wood and horn go well. Knives, which are a bit more expensive, are seen as investments and also sell well. Paradoxically, there is a reduced number of students at the Sámi Education Centre in the two different duodji courses that exist: leather/textile and wood/horn. “It’s worrying, and we have to help in different ways,” says Johanna.

They would like to sell outside Sweden. Currently, they do not do that because there is a lack of resources to take care of forms and customs declarations. Other areas of development are to reach more interested people and to increase knowledge through webinars and by expanding exhibition activities, where craftsmen can show themselves and their products.

The foundation is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, and it will be recognised, among other things, with a conference in the autumn. And so, in collaboration with the Saami Council, they have relaunched the brand Sámi Duodji, which functions as a certification and shows that the product is a genuine Sámi handicraft. New for this year is the Sámi Made brand, for other types of products, such as jewellery, souvenirs, and books.

“We don’t use ‘Barents’ as a term, we operate in Sápmi,” she says, so she sees the collaborations with Finland and Norway as “national” from a Sámi perspective. Lack of financial and personnel resources limits international connections. “We would like to work more with other indigenous peoples. We have received the question from Australia, but do not really have stated goals with international work,” says Johanna.

She sees that conferences and different platforms can be an effective way to connect with others, to seek collaborations. She herself participated in the Arctic Art Summit in Canada in 2022. She sees that Sámi Duodji’s activities not only touch on handicrafts and applied arts, but also tourism development, business affairs and entrepreneurship. “We have knowledge of many issues, but not the resources to switch up,” she states and explains that both their exhibition activities and various lectures could be

spread even more to other countries and enable more collaborations within the Barents.

The benefits of increased collaboration within the Barents are numerous, she believes. It would spread knowledge about craftsmanship, reduce the risk of

*“We have knowledge of many issues, but not the resources to switch up”*

plagiarism and cultural appropriation, and – hopefully – also lead to reduced racism and fewer prejudices. She also sees great opportunities for individual traders to increase their income.

Johanna sees two important structural aspects that affect the possibilities of increasing the

business. On the one hand, the financial resources of the Sámi Parliament’s culture committee, which distributes the Swedish state grants for everything related to Sámi culture, have not increased, and on the other hand, the three specially hired craft consultants whose task was to promote Sámi crafts are no longer there. “Imagine if there were, for example, a Northern Sámi consultant who would work in Sweden, Finland and Norway, and a Southern Sámi in Norway and Sweden,” she suggests, reminding that there are nine different Sámi languages.

**Read more:**

[samesløjdstiftelsen.com/eng/](https://samesløjdstiftelsen.com/eng/)  
[samitrademarks.com/?lang=en](https://samitrademarks.com/?lang=en)  
[www.sapmi.se/](https://www.sapmi.se/)  
[www.sameatnam.se/](https://www.sameatnam.se/)  
[www.samer.se/2571](https://www.samer.se/2571)  
[arcticartssummit.ca/](https://arcticartssummit.ca/)

**Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:**

- Platforms and networks where people can meet others who are working on these issues.
- Directed money for collaborations of various kinds.
- An organisation within Sápmi of all who work with handicrafts.

• *Nuorgam, Norway* •

## Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman

*Musician, Yoiker*



PHOTO: MAIJA ASTIKAINEN

ANNA NÄKKÄLJÄRVI-LÄNSMAN is a Sámi musician who lives, and whose work is based, in Nuorgam, northernmost Finland. As an artist she is known as Ánnámáret. Her music is inspired by the life and the nature in Sápmi. Ánnámáret's strength as an artist springs from having grown up between two cultures and, thus, in understanding these cultures – their collisions and similarities. With her band she has created the multi-form work of art called Nieguid duovdagat – Dreamscapes, in which joik, the sound of the Finnish bowed lyre jouhikko and modern live electronics are combined with live visuals. They released an album in 2021. They are currently working with a new album that is going to be launched in 2024.

Her own band Ánnámáret Ensemble has released two records (Beallječinat 2011 and Gollehilmot 2016), which consist of yoiks and songs that Anna has composed and written the lyrics for in the Sámi language. From 2012 to 2015, she worked as the Regional Artist for Sámi Culture. Alongside her own music career, she is also the artistic director of the music festival Ijahisidja, "The nightless night", which is organised in Inari every year – the only festival in Finland entirely dedicated to Sámi music.

Just this autumn, Ánnámáret Ensemble was selected as the showcase artist at the prestigious and important trade fair Womex, Worldwide Music Expo, in Spain. "It feels fantastic to be there. There is really a lot of interest internationally when it comes to culture created by indigenous people," says Anna.

On the other hand, she can experience that people are not as interested in Sámi culture in Finland. "It should be obvious that Sámi artists are part of the celebration on Independence Day, for example, but when the state of Finland arranges things, the Sámi are not officially recognised," she says. In addition to the fact that there is a great demand for Anna as a musician internationally, she also experiences financial security, as she has received a personal work grant for two years.

The challenges are partly linked to travel costs, which have increased drastically after the corona pandemic, and partly to the living conditions for the Sámi. "It is difficult to live a Sámi life at all in today's society, to preserve the Sámi culture," she says and believes that there are more and more economic stakeholders in Sápmi and the Arctic: expansion of wind turbines, mining, the tourist industry, competition for reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting. "Our reindeer and our income are threatened," she says. "Climate change is endangering the Sámi way of living, because the environment is changing so much in the Arctic. All of this is totally a new situation for the Sámi people living from the traditional livelihoods, and we are obligated to find new ways to be able to do maintain our traditional livelihoods", she adds.

"We must by all means persuade the young people to stay here and not just move to big cities. We need young people. And then apartments are needed as well as interesting work opportunities. The young people should have opportunities to create a life here. We need help for that from the government. For example, lower taxes and lower petrol prices when you are living in these most remote areas", she says.

*"Not everyone has to travel everywhere, we take the world with us to different places"*

She sees collaborating within the northern part of the Nordic region as completely natural and self-evident. "On the other hand, it is difficult with the long distances," she says and calls for an investment in electric flights.

She recently participated in KulturSápmi, which was organised by the Saami Council for the 4th time, but for the first time on the Finnish side of Sápmi. "It is a very important gathering place for Sámi artists and cultural workers. Many came from far away, driving 800 kilometres and even further away," she says.

She sees international cooperation and cooperation in general as a given, as a basis for all of us humans. "Expanding our worlds, connecting and understanding different people, that's vital", she says, and continues: "We indigenous people also have so much in common in our mindsets and experiences, so it's very healing and energising to meet".

"Not everyone has to travel everywhere, we take the world with us to different places", she says. For her own part as a musician, she also sees the importance of finding and meeting an international audience. "It's important feedback for me, but also a way to tell about my people", she says and points out that as a Sámi artist you are often a representative of an entire people, something that probably cannot be avoided.

Making a living as a Sámi artist is very difficult. "There are no steady jobs for artists in Sámi cultural life," she asserts. She also believes that more specially allocated financial resources are needed for Sámi culture. "The big money to be sought is available nationally, and then I feel that there is often a lack of knowledge about Sámi culture," she says. She also points out that on the Finnish side of Sápmi there are no major Sámi cultural institutions and no Sámi education in performing arts.

**Read more:**

[www.annamaret.fi/](http://www.annamaret.fi/)  
[www.ijahisidja.fi/en/](http://www.ijahisidja.fi/en/)  
[www.kultursapmi.com/](http://www.kultursapmi.com/)

**Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:**

- Encourage good project ideas and ensure adequate funding for them.
- Give artists work opportunities, preferably longer and recurring – create the opportunity to live on their art.
- Ensure that the countryside is also filled with life and culture.

• *Tromsø, Norway* •

## Igor Shaytanov

*Tromsø International Film Festival/  
Tromsø Internasjonale Film Festival  
(TIFF)*



THIS IS THE 33rd year in a row for the Tromsø Internasjonale Film Festival (TIFF) which has as its stated goal to be the meeting place for the film industry in the north, and also a viewing window for challenging quality films for a local, national and international audience. The festival is held every year in January and one of its hallmarks is outdoor screenings held in the dark polar night.

"Now it definitely feels like we are back after the pandemic," says Igor Shaytanov, producer for various events within TIFF. This year to attract visitors to the festival events they chose not to offer film screenings via digital channels. Instead they offered director's talks and various workshops and interactive discussions as hybrid solutions.

"Since we haven't done any major live events for three years, we sense a skills shortage after the pandemic," says Igor. "We organisers lost our fitness and the audience got used to watching movies in the cinema. We all became a little more relaxed." Other challenges are that grants, operating funds and sponsorship income have not increased, and even though costs increase he does not want to raise ticket prices more than absolutely necessary.

On the other hand, one of the joys is that there is so much interest in the festival. "We notice that restaurants really see the festival as an opportunity to get people out of their homes and that the bar owners are really happy that we exist," he says, and explains that the interest among volunteers – TIFF engages approximately 300 people on a non-profit basis every year – is as large as before the pandemic.

“The open borders that existed created great opportunities,” says Igor and believes that: “Russian cultural life made Barents richer, now we have lost it.” Over the years, TIFF has cooperated a lot in the entire area and played a big role in the cultural exchange, not least between Norway and Russia. This has been done, for example, through a special investment in short films in the festival’s “Film from the North,” export of Norwegian film to Russia, collaborations with film festivals in north-west Russia, or the highly noticed silent film concerts that have toured the north – most recently the Ukrainian war film

## “Wherever things are happening, people want to go there”

“Arsenal” from 1929, with live music by the Norwegian metal band Attan.

The tours with the silent film concerts have meant many collaborations with cinemas, different cities and festivals – not least in Russia, before the invasion of Ukraine. “Because we had so many Russian contacts, we came out early and condemned the aggressive action. We still have a lot of our Russian partners who believe in film and culture as important acts of resistance,” he says.

Just as TIFF sees itself as part of Barents, it is also part of Sapmi. “The Sámi is a natural part of all our programming,” he says, and talks about collaborations with both individual film artists – for example, Ole Giæver’s “Let the River Flow” (“Ellos eatnu”) was the opening film this year – and with the International Sámi Film Institute (Internášunála Sámi Filbmainstituhtta).

In general terms, TIFF sees itself as an international player. “Film is international, we as a festival are international, and we act on an international market,” he says. He believes that the international perspective is important for the art of film, for the filmmakers and for our society. But there are several challenges. “It’s about practical things, logistics for example”, he says and points out that getting from Tromsø to Umeå or Rovaniemi takes both a long time and costs money. He thinks that a lot of power and energy is spent on financing various projects, energy that should be used to create art instead.

Investing in culture leads to so much more, says Igor. “Look at Tromsø and what the film festival has contributed. Now you can’t get hotel rooms in January.” He believes that larger cultural events create so many positive effects. “Wherever things are happening, people want to go there.”

“Society must invest in relationships between people,” he says, and continues: “It is in interpersonal

relationships that ideas come to life and seeds germinate that lead to collaborations.” He believes that, for example, festivals are important meeting places and that you should invest in developing already existing contexts: “The whole idea of the Barents region is good, it should definitely continue.”

### Read more:

[www.tiff.no/en/isfi.no/se/](http://www.tiff.no/en/isfi.no/se/)

### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- Coordination in the Barents area. A common platform and a manifesto for culture should be produced.
- Stimulate co-production between different countries. Not just money, but also promotional efforts to stimulate cross-border cooperation.
- A larger, visible project owned by the Barents, not by a single country but a joint project for the Barents.

## • Stamsund, Norway •

### Vebjørn Hagene Thoe Textile artist



PHOTO: PRIVATE

THE TEXTILE ARTIST Vebjørn Hagene Thoe was born in Fredrikstad and educated at the Art Academy in Krakow, Poland. Since the end of the 80s, her work has been shown in solo exhibitions around Norway, and in Tanzania and Sweden, among other places. Among the most recent group exhibitions she has participated in are: “The World We Made” in Oslo, “Snap” in Alta, “Hildring” in Tromsø, “Equinox” in Bodø, and at the Stamsund Theatre Festival and the Meiriet Culture Center in Leknes. Vebjørn has also held several prominent positions in Norwegian art world, including board assignments for Norske Billedkunstnere, Nord-norske Bildende Kunstnere, Kunstkvartret Lofoten, Sparebanken

NN Kulturnæringsstiftelse, but also for the Tanzania Cultural Trust Fund. Alongside her own artistry, she collaborates with the artist Scott Thoe in Gallery 2, which is next to their own studio in Stamsund, “100 metres from Hurtigruten”.

“The pandemic meant that people bought more domestic art”, she says, because they could not travel abroad,” so it was beneficial both for me and for the Norwegian artists we exhibited”. Now, when everything is fairly normal again, the usual challenges for all freelance artists remain. According to Vebjørn: “The funding is weak, both at the national and Nordic level,” she says, and continues: “It takes so much work to get financial support for artistic endeavours ” and refers to the bureaucracy around seeking money from different sources.

She points out the importance of residency opportunities and the importance of the Backyard Project, which was organised by Troms and Finnmark County Council. Vebjørn herself took the initiative to create residency opportunities at Kunstkvartret Lofoten (“the Art Quarter Lofoten”) ten years ago. So far, 50 artists from 15 countries have had the opportunity to work for one or two months with their own artistry, but also hold workshops and seminars. Throughout the 2000s, she has worked within a Barents context, which began with a group of Russian artists who came to Lofoten. Since then, it has continued with many contacts at least with Russians, and she herself has exhibited several times in Russia, and she still has pieces from colleagues in her gallery.

“The Russian war against Ukraine has been a harsh awakening, a big blow,” she says. “Even though Russia is now outside of all Barents cooperation, there is a lot going on,” she says, and believes that it is important to continue the other ongoing collaborations that work well. She sees international cooperation as completely natural. “I have it in my spinal cord”, she says, “not least because I grew up partly in Tanzania”. As an artist, she has

## “Cooperation between people is always easy, there may be some practical issues that need to be resolved”

been involved in various exchange programmes with Norwegian youth in southern Africa, where some have later chosen to work in various projects there. “See what meetings between people can lead to,” she says.

International collaboration leads to new impressions that give increased competence, she asserts. “There will also automatically be interpersonal effects that ultimately contribute to peace and increased human rights,” she says. She also believes that there is a responsibility to support dissidents and critics of the regime.

She believes that we divide the world into different parts, but it is important to understand that we live in the same world. “And cooperation between people is always easy, there may be some practical issues that need to be resolved,” she says. We humans must meet, talk and network, she believes. “Trust the artists that something will be done, there are ideas and potential”, asserts Vebjørn.

### Read more:

[vebjorn.hagene.thoe.no/](http://vebjorn.hagene.thoe.no/)

[www.galleri2.no/](http://www.galleri2.no/)

[kunstkvartretlofoten.no/](http://kunstkvartretlofoten.no/)

[www.pikene.no/seminar-conversations-in-the-north-2/](http://www.pikene.no/seminar-conversations-in-the-north-2/)

### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- Searchable money for example for pre-studies or for travel.
- Strengthen the existing sites of residence and point out the important destinations in the Barents - it is politically important.
- Invest in the young, find a method of mentoring where the older can learn from the younger and vice versa.

## • Tromsø, Norway •

## Maria Utsi

*Independent consultant and project manager*



PHOTO: KNUT ÅSERUD

MARIA UTSI HAS BEEN a manager and leader in Norwegian cultural life for 15 years, including the Festspillene in Northern Norway (Festspillene I Nord-Norge) and daily manager for the Varanger Festival. Today she is vice-chair of the Norwegian Culture Council, and holds several board positions in the cultural field, including as board chair for Beivvas Sámi Teatner and Davvi Centre for Performing Arts. She is also the initiator of the Arctic Art Summit.

Speaking of the situation right now, she believes that the revolutionary events in the outside world also affect culture. “Russia’s war has created a completely unnatural relationship for us in the north. It has destroyed a collaboration going back more than a thousand years,” says Maria, and continues: “And for us Sámi and for Sápmi, the war is a disaster – part of our land is in Russia.” The economy is also a decisive factor for the possibilities of cultural life. “We live in expensive times – dyr-tider as we say in Norwegian. We have completely unreasonable inflation, which leads to a huge price increase.” She points out that since public funding has not increased, it leads to a real decline.

She also wants to stress the importance of the Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was presented in June and which has examined how the Sámi, Kven and Norwegian Finns have been treated. “It will make a big impression, will be the basis for many long discussions and will be binding.” The commission’s

report can really have a decisive significance going forward, she believes.

Another bright spot is digitisation as a post-Covid side-effect. “It democratised the whole discussion and contact opportunities. Now we can easily have meetings between people in Kirkenes, Ottawa and Rovaniemi,” she says, and believes that it strengthens relationships and creates new cultural encounters. The pandemic affected the culture in Sapmi a lot because there were boundaries drawn with different rules in the middle of the Sapmi nation, which affected both families, work colleagues and all kinds of relationships on different sides within the nation-states. Speaking of the pandemic, she also wants to emphasise that the crisis support created a basis for a restart, even if it has been difficult to get the audience to return.

“Right now, Sámi cultural life needs to build relationships with other indigenous peoples around the world,” she says, and believes that it is important to strengthen one’s sovereignty and autonomy together with other indigenous peoples in the north. She also believes that cooperation between Sámi and non-Sámi communities is quite good now. “There is an increased awareness and representation in large parts of society,” she says. But she points out that many necessary structural changes haven’t been made where the Sámi have been given a more substantial place. “The important thing is that it is based on Sámi competence and on Sámi premises. Much remains to be done.”

Speaking about the fact that large global media giants such as Netflix are interested in stories from indigenous people and that the prestigious Venice Biennale shows Sámi artists does not really change the structure, says

Maria: “It strengthens the diversity profile of Netflix, but does not really change the premises – visibility in itself does not change the inequality.” She means that it is not in that way that we will get a more equal cultural field.

She sees international relations as the foundation of the area in the

north. “There is a diversity of identities here and always has been, long before the capital cities’ diversity among the population,” she says. Cross-border relationships exist not only in Sapmi but throughout the Arctic where societies and contexts with similar challenges and conditions exist. Digital investments, as well as political priorities, have enabled increased relationships in areas with long distances, she asserts. From both a northern and Sámi perspective, cooperation and exchanges across

borders are absolutely necessary. Culture is at the forefront and represents humans in the international discourse, she believes and says: “The cultural sector is not only a crucial industry, more importantly it represents and reflects the human reality and livelihood in the North.”

Maria is the initiator of the Arctic Arts Summit, which brings together representatives of Arctic countries and the Indigenous Nations of the circumpolar region. The Summits serve to strengthen arts and culture in the North and develop circumpolar cooperation to stimulate collaboration in arts and creative industries. Previously political discussions on the future development of the Arctic were led from the south and the northern perspectives were rarely taken into consideration.

The first Arctic Arts Summit was held in Norway, initiated by the Arctic Arts Festival, and hosted in 2017 by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Arts Council Norway. The second Summit was in Finland, hosted in 2019 by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, the Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taike), and the University of Lapland. The Canada Council for the Arts and the Government of Yukon were co-hosts for the third Arctic Arts Summit in Whitehorse, Yukon, in 2022.

Now the Arctic Art Summit is established and functions as a central arena, which creates collaboration opportunities and development. Many different actors and organisations want to be part of this, also from other parts of the world. Maria is also experiencing increased interest from financiers this year with, for example, support for the Arctic Council for the first time. In 2024, the meeting will take place in Iceland, and before 2026, talks and discussions are underway with Swedish representatives.

There are generally two primary barriers to international collaboration, as she sees it: money and transportation. “The idea of the Arctic goes against the nation-state’s logic of national borders,” she says. Today, there is a lack of opportunities for international financing that does not follow state borders. Any collaboration across the board becomes very difficult and complicated. As a colonial legacy, the transport system is also not developed for northern conditions. “We have to go far south via Oslo if we are going to another northern city if we don’t have our own car,” she says, giving the example of if Inuit in Nuuk in Greenland are to meet their relatives in Nunavut in Canada – which is an hour away – you must fly for 36 hours with several changes in Europe. “Mobility and collaboration opportunities are not the easiest under these conditions,” she points out.

## Read more:

arcticartssummit.ca/  
festspillnn.no/en  
varangerfestivalen.no/  
www.kulturdirektoratet.no/english  
beivvas.no/  
www.davvi.org/  
sanningskommissionensamer.se/en/start-en/

*Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:*

- An international programme that enables financing without the limitation of national borders. But also, that funds cultural exports and foreign collaborations can be distributed from here, based on a Northern and Arctic aspect.
- A structure for cultural competence based on an Arctic perspective. We must be able to train and create added value for art and culture creators, but also managers, curators and cultural producers of various kinds.
- Long-term meeting places with continuous operation.

## • Joensuu, Finland •

## Heidi Vasara

*Painter/regional artist, Arts Promotion Centre Taike*



PHOTO: HEIDI VASARA

HEIDI VASARA IS an established visual artist who mainly works with oil and watercolours. Common subjects are the natural environment and open spaces, and she constantly returns to landscape paintings. “I want to create an illusion of the three-dimensional space and make the viewer reflect on the environment,” she says. She lives and works in Joensuu in North Karelia and graduated from Imatra Art College in 1997. She has exhibited in several museums and

galleries around Finland and also made several public works, for example in the Honkalampi centre in North Karelia.

She has participated in residencies abroad, including in Petrozavodsk in Russia, but also carried out international art productions at the Möhkönvirta Contemporary Art Exhibition and the Northern Paradise project, which was an exchange project for young artists from North Karelia and the Republic of Karelia. Overall, she has worked a lot in various international contexts, for example in the group exhibition “Colour Go-Go,” with Finnish and Estonian artists, which was exhibited in several places in Estonia during 2022. Exhibitions on that theme have been held since 2016, then with Finnish and Russian artists with exhibitions in both countries. She is currently a regional artist at Taike, which is the Arts Promotion Centre in Finland, where her job is to promote artists and artistic life in Eastern Finland.

Heidi has clearly noticed a changed position for art in society after the pandemic. “Art and artists are no longer in their own little bubbles, but are a clear part of society,” she says. She also thinks that the view of art’s role as a health-promoting factor provides many new opportunities, not least because it creates job opportunities for many artists. A positive development is also that more and more artist residencies are being created. Near Joensuu there are several residency opportunities for artists, including in the village of Koli.

## “I can’t imagine just working locally”

The major challenges for the artists are perennial, namely uncertain income and the importance of scholarships. She also notes a greater interest among buyers in techniques other than painting, such as sculpture and textile works.

She sees “Barents” as a relatively unknown concept. “North Karelia is quite far from the Arctic Ocean, so we are probably not considered Arctic,” she says. But she also believes that there are many similarities: “We are a border country, with long distances and an older population, special climatic conditions, beautiful nature, and silence. We have the same challenges as other Barents countries which unites us.”

The many collaborations in North Karelia have been with the nearest neighbour, the Republic of Karelia, including a project called Karelian art-residency network and art-tourism. Russia’s war on Ukraine changed everything. “Not only cultural life, but everything in society is affected,” says Heidi. “Now everything linked to Russian cooperation is a big question mark.

The contacts I have had, what are they doing today, and will they remain? What will our collaboration look like?”

But she also sees that it is a bit difficult for many people to get to and from Joensuu from other parts of the world. “Now we feel even more isolated. We must find other ways abroad.” In general, you don’t work that internationally in our part of the world, she says. Through the organisation Taike, there is no established collaboration with operations in other countries, but each employee must create it themselves. Heidi has tried to establish a collaboration with, above all, Norwegian Tromsø, but of course the pandemic made everything difficult and then came the war, which meant that other things were in focus. This year she is involved in a project, “The making of...” which involves artists from Joensuu, but also Swedish and Danish artists with an exhibition in Malmö in Sweden.

International cooperation always gives something, she says, something new, something different. “I notice that myself as an active artist. You can have an idea when you arrive in a new place and so thoughts and plans change depending on the place, meetings with new people and circumstances. I can’t imagine just working locally.”

There are several obstacles to increased international cooperation, Heidi believes. There is a lack of knowledge about people, organisations, networks in other countries, and how a collaboration can be financed. Many networks are personal and tied to an individual. “How can you find a structure for networks,” she asks. She also feels that international cooperation has mostly focused on central Europe, rather than neighbouring countries or the Barents region.

“In order to create more collaborative projects, more long-term funding is needed,” says Heidi, and points out that the many different project funds mean that individual artists need to spend a large part of their time looking for money and administering applications. “Other structures should be found for that,” she says. She points out the importance of physical meetings and mentions “Backyard Projects,” a collaboration between Tromsø, Norrbotten, Lapland and North Karelia as a good example of important projects.

More international collaborations would have major positive effects, she believes: “It would provide more work for our artists in Joensuu. And if artist exchanges of various kinds were to come about so that more foreign artists would come here, it would increase the inspiration and influence from outside. We work very locally today, and we could expand.”

### Read more:

[www.heidivasara.net/](http://www.heidivasara.net/)  
[www.taike.fi/fi](http://www.taike.fi/fi)  
[www.kolinkulttuuriseura.fi/koli-residence.html](http://www.kolinkulttuuriseura.fi/koli-residence.html)  
[noba.ac/en/exhibition/international-group-exhibition-colour-go-go/](http://noba.ac/en/exhibition/international-group-exhibition-colour-go-go/)

### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- We must have the networks and contacts that create meetings between people.
- Funding – which is long-term.
- More collaborative projects involving artists from different countries.

## • Luleå, Sweden •

*Marie Wårell*  
 Managing Director and  
 Artistic Director  
 The Dance Initiative/Dansinitiativet



SINCE 2018, THE Dance Initiative (Dansinitiativet) located in Luleå mainly offers audiences in northern Sweden and the Barents region performances in the borderland between circus and dance in several different ways: they produce and tour their own performances, not least to schools, host various residencies, and arrange guest performances at their own stage with other performing arts producers. The company does not yet have a permanent ensemble but hires artistic staff for each production with ambitions for longer employment.

They were able to open their own stage in industrial premises in 2019. The pandemic led to a much-needed focus on both establishing the venue and working with partners. Then there was the momentum and desire from

the outside world for the business. The pandemic caused public activities to come to an end and a few years later they are still reaching out to the public – and politics. “Circus and dance are still quite new here,” says Marie Wårell, Managing Director and Artistic Director. “We are Norrbotten’s first free stage and company for contemporary dance and circus, so people are not that used to the art forms. In the region’s cultural plan, circus is mentioned only once, so it is, if possible, even more neglected than dance.”

## “There is a need for a flow, influences, more artistry, collegial exchanges”

“The audience in Norrbotten deserves art that is created based on its own context”, she says. The lack of local producers also results in a lack of organisers who are used to buying circus and dance performances, and thus it is also difficult for the audience to discover the art forms.

Marie also sees that “the green wave in the north”, which means many investments in more environmentally-friendly technology and industry in the northern part of Sweden, will certainly mean a lot. “I also hope that all business establishments and the influx of new employees will mean that all arts will be strengthened and that it will benefit the entire cultural life here,” she says. She also hopes that one consequence will be increased funding for culture. An increased investment in culture would make more people want to move here, it would improve the local economy with a larger tax base, increase tourism, boost travel communications, and tie the region together.

Speaking of the Barents as a concept, she believes that “9 out of 10 people on the street” do not have a relationship with the Barents region. It is a geographical name, not a “region.” However, she sees opportunities for cooperation: “We are closer to Oulu than to Stockholm.” And there is much that unites the area. “We have the same understanding and interest in living in this part of the world. Few are active, so you understand the need for cooperation and what challenges and opportunities exist.” The inspiration for many is the climate, the environment and weather-related issues.

In 2021, The Dance Initiative completed a three-year regional development project, “Dance Artists in Barents,” which among other things aimed to develop opportunities for movement-based artists in northern Sweden. The pandemic greatly affected the implementation of this project, but resulted in a follow-up collaboration

for Oulu 2026. Among The Dance Initiative's many partners outside of Sweden were TaikaBox in Finland, Stellaris DansTeater in Norway and DanseFestival Barents in Norway, and from Russian the Second School and Barents Bird.

The importance of international cooperation is great, she believes: "There is a need for a flow, influences, more artistry, collegial exchanges – this favours the expansion of the performing arts." She also considers various forms, such as residencies and co-productions, enable international exchanges and contribute to creating an inspiring context for circus and dance in the region.

There are several obstacles to increased cooperation across national borders, according to Marie: "The infrastructure for travel is very bad here. Either we must fly 100 miles south before we can get to neighbouring cities in the east and west, or you must be car-borne. Travel here is time-consuming and not climate smart." Another obstacle is the organisation of international cooperation, where someone must do the work around coordination and have it at their service.

The Dance Initiative is now looking at the possibilities of finding funding to improve the infrastructure for both circus and dance both regionally, in the Nordics, and within the Barents. "Each group has to try to find its own tour structure," she says.

#### Read more:

[www.dansinitiativet.se/](http://www.dansinitiativet.se/)  
[taikabox.com/](http://taikabox.com/)  
[www.stellaris.no/eng/home.html](http://www.stellaris.no/eng/home.html)  
[www.dansefestivalbarents.no/home.php](http://www.dansefestivalbarents.no/home.php)

#### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- Improve opportunities to travel between countries. If you could travel here more easily, it would be more attractive to live here.
- Create the financial opportunities to finance cultural projects in this particular region to benefit regionally produced culture.
- Arrange meeting places. If, for example, it were possible to collaborate from a regional perspective in several countries around a conference that includes workshops.

### • Oulu, Finland •

## Pirjo Yli-Maunula

Dancer, Choreographer,  
Artistic Director  
Flow Productions



PHOTO: JANNE-PEKKA MANNINEN

**P**IRJO YLI-MAUNULA has had a career spanning over 40 years as a dancer, choreographer, and artistic director. She has been awarded prizes such as the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Northern Ostrobothnia Regional Fund, and the Pro Finlandia medal. In addition to her own career, she has worked to develop the infrastructure for dance in northern Finland since the early 1980s in many ways. In 2006, Yli-Maunula co-founded a production company, Flow Productions, with dancer Maria Littow. The company presents 1 – 2 of its own productions each year. In addition, Flow invites 8 – 10 national or international visiting companies to perform in Flow Circus, a series of shows organised in collaboration with Culture Centre Valve and festivals and venues in the city. The total number of performances is 50 – 70 per year.

"The amount of programmes is roughly the same as before the pandemic," she says. "It's slowly going back to how it was." She received great – and very important – help from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish Cultural Foundation. "The crisis support helped us dare to take the risk of implementing our planned programme," she says. Now it looks pretty bright. They have received new support from the Finnish Cultural Foundation for this autumn's production "Nighttown," and a major grant from a new foundation called Nya Klassiker (New Classics) for a production in 2024. "Flow Productions," she says, "works just like water. We always find new ways and paths. The pandemic was an obstacle, but we found new ways and continued."

"Oulu is a strong dance city," says Pirjo, and explains that there are several dance schools for hobby dancing, programmes for dance teachers in Oulu University of Applied Sciences, and various dance groups and freelance



Flow Circus "Rollercoaster show". Photo: Fahimeh-Hekmatandish  
Theatre Rimpparemmi, Rovaniemi. "Positions". Photo: Antti Kurola

choreographers. At the cultural centre Valve, Flow Productions has both an office and a home stage. Flow Productions only has production-employed artists, but many return year after year and act as co-creators in the productions. She emphasises that artists have wonderful stage and technical conditions and affordable rents in Valve, and that the city of Oulu provides good and important support to cultural workers.

However, the big challenge for the art field is the same as it has always been: financing. The operating subsidies are not big enough to create a large new production every year, but you have to find new funds or production partners. “An important decision for us is not to cooperate with Russian partners. We did that earlier, but it is not at all relevant anymore,” she says.

Pirjo was previously involved in the Barents dance collaboration, which has not been as active as it was a few years ago. It was an important activity, she points out, which involved co-productions, joint tours, and guest appearances.

An important initiator was Solveig Leinan-Hermo and her Stellaris Danse company/Stellaris Dans-Teater in Hammerfest, Norway. Unfortunately, there was a lack of continuous funding and, as Pirjo notes, travel, and accommodation cost money.

Stellaris Danse company/Stellaris DansTeater was also the initiator of DanseFestival Barents, which takes place in Hammerfest every year since 2003. “It is an important gathering place for all of us active in dance throughout the Barents,” says Pirjo.

“For me personally, Barents is an area that gives a sense of togetherness,” says Pirjo, and continues: “It is a large area, where the major cultural centres are far from each other. The distance to the capitals gives us the freedom to choose our own artistic path, which stimulates originality. And then we have a dark sense of humour – we laugh at difficult things, that distinguishes us from people down south.” She also points out the similarity regarding climate and nature with bright summers and harsh winters and that it affects us. We are a patient, persistent people, we don’t give up.” Flow Productions has continuous, long-term collaborations with many groups from the rest of the Nordic countries but also Europe. When it comes to seeking funding for international operations, there are many challenges. “We have too small an organisation to apply for European funding as the lead partner, we don’t have the staff and resources for that,” says Pirjo. On the other hand, she has strong hopes that international activities will increase now that Oulu will be the European Capital of Culture in 2026.

Pirjo has collaborated a lot with Russian artists. “Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we started finding each other,” she says. But now she doesn’t see that it’s possible at all. “Even when the war ends, it will be a long time before there can be talk of cooperation, the trust is not there.” She talks about the shock and the difficulties in understanding the war. Also, what impact it has on the culture. “When Russian soldiers violate the Ukrainian cultural heritage, not only to steal but to destroy historically valuable objects, the war becomes an attack on the entire culture and cultural heritage. It’s getting harder and harder to separate the nation from its leader, at least for me.”

International cooperation is important, she states: “It broadens our views and gives us an understanding of how people think and reason, what interests them.” She thinks it is important to have inspiration from the outside, not only for artists but also for the audience. But to achieve international cooperation, funding is needed.

“It takes time to get to and from our part of the world to other parts of Europe. You must fly or travel for a long time, and that requires extra funding. It is expensive for foreign festival organisers to host a Finnish guest performance, it is cheaper for a French organiser to host a Belgian theatre group,” she says, and believes that the Finnish state must finance tours abroad to a greater extent.

Pirjo believes that events such as the Ice Hot Nordic Dance Platform, which is a collaboration between the five Nordic countries, is an important context for showcasing dance to a larger international audience of organisers. “We would need something similar in the Barents region,” she says, “an event that attracts organisers here.” One example is the Silence Festival/Hiljaisuus Festivaal in the small town of Kaukonen in Finnish Lapland which maintains a high artistic level.

#### Read more:

[www.flowprod.fi/en/](http://www.flowprod.fi/en/)  
[www.kulttuurivalve.fi/en/](http://www.kulttuurivalve.fi/en/)  
[www.dansefestivalbarents.no/home.php](http://www.dansefestivalbarents.no/home.php)  
[www.hiljaisuusfestivali.fi/about](http://www.hiljaisuusfestivali.fi/about)

#### Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:

- There is a need for meeting points (context and places) to find each other, both for individuals and organisations.

- Special support for the Barents area. “We have so much in common, we support each other and can take advantage of what we have and is unique to us.” She believes in supporting artist-driven ideas and then travel support is needed.

- In-depth artist collaborations with others. She sees the residency model as very interesting, as you can get more international artists to collaborate with local partners.

## • Kuhmo, Finland •

### Olga Zaytseva Director Juminkeko



PHOTO: JANNE-PEKKA MANNINEN

IN 1999, THE Juminkeko building in Kuhmo in the Kainuu region was completed as part of the 150th anniversary of the New Kalevala. The Kalevala is the Finnish national epic compiled by Elias Lönnrot in the first half of the 19th century. The stories were collected during his travels in the Kainuu region and on the other side on the border – in Belomorsk Karelia. At the Juminkeko information centre you can get to know everything about the Kalevala collections and participate in concerts, seminars, and other events. “Our main aim is to spread knowledge in a broad sense about the Kalevala,” says Olga Zaytseva, Director.

She talks about the pandemic period: “In many ways, we managed quite well. It was easier in a smaller town.” Like everyone else, we changed our way of working and became more digital. “It was good, otherwise we probably wouldn’t have taken the digital step to this day.”

What really overshadows everything for the activities at Juminkeko and in Kuhmo is the Russian war against Ukraine. “The war has a far greater impact than corona. Psychologically, of course, Russia is our closest neigh-

bour,” she says, but she also believes that the economic aspect is serious. “Normally, Kuhmo and I have a lot of tourists, but ever since the pandemic, people have been travelling.”

As a cultural institution, Juminkeko cannot have any cooperation with Russia and the Republic of Karelia. There was, for example, the large EU programme, CBC – Karelia Cross-border Cooperation, which financed several projects. “Normally, we have a lot of joint collaborations with Karelian cultural organisations, because our territory is close to each other historically and culturally. There are several Fenno-Ugric nations close to the Finnish nation living there, but now we cannot have any institutional collaboration because of the war,” she says.

“We can have non-governmental contacts, but then we also put our Russian friends in danger because they can be accused by the Russian state of being foreign agents.” Olga herself belongs to the Veps, the Finnish ethnic group from Karelia. She continues: “Now we are in new times. We thought that after the pandemic everything would be fine, but now we are trying to find how to work, how to find funding. It is difficult to find new paths.”

In general, she sees project financing as a problem for culture. “There is a lot of competition for the funds that are available, and I can’t see that there will be any change,” she says. But she sees two major positives as she looks ahead. Partly because the city of Kuhmo has been named a City of Literature by UNESCO, which means that it is part of a large creative network, and partly Juminkeko’s own archive. “We have been collecting folk poetry material from Belomorsk Karelia, Kainuu and other places since 1985 and the collection is precious. That makes us unique. It is open to everyone and much is also digitised.”

She emphasises that for being a smaller town - in addition to the forest - culture is important to Kuhmo: “Kalevala and music are the focus.”

*“We have extensive project experience and are happy to participate in larger collaborations and applications”*

In the past, Juminkeko cooperated with many countries, but the largest cooperation was with Russia. Now the international contacts consist of cultural actors within the Fenno-Ugric language area, Hungary, and Estonia,

but also with Norrbotten in Sweden, northern Norway and Finnish Sápmi. There is also collaboration on literary tourism with a university in Scotland.

The goal of the international work is to spread the knowledge of the Kalevala to more countries, including with exhibitions that tour abroad, for example in Germany and Vietnam. During the spring, they also had an exchange with a Palestinian artist who has Finnish roots. But one needs partly increased funding to be able to expand the collaborations, partly information on where to look for suitable funds. “We have extensive project experience and are happy to participate in larger collaborations and applications,” she says.

**Read more:**

[www.juminkeko.fi/en/frontpage/](http://www.juminkeko.fi/en/frontpage/)  
[kirjalisuuskaupunki.fi/en/city-of-literature/](http://kirjalisuuskaupunki.fi/en/city-of-literature/)  
[www.kareliacbc.fi/en](http://www.kareliacbc.fi/en)

**Three desirable efforts to increase international cooperation within the Barents:**

- Information about possible projects that people can collaborate on.
- Financing possibilities. Is there a special Barents remedy to look for? Most of the talk here is about the EU’s Interreg programme.
- Context where you can find actors with whom you have a lot in common, so that we can cooperate at grassroots level.



Juminkeko

# Analysis and summary

The assignment has been partly to describe the current situation for cultural work within the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish part of the Barents region, and partly to describe efforts to increase international cultural exchange. The assignment was originally also to report on the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on international cooperation across borders in the Barents region. The development, both with economic decline and the war in Ukraine, made it natural and more relevant to change the layout of the survey to also include those aspects.

After conversations, interviews, workshops, and questionnaire responses from 228 representatives from a wide range of the existing cultural actors in the area, we have made the following analysis.

## About the current situation

**– Wage increases and inflation erode the value of the contributions**

The effect of the various crisis and restart subsidies that have been distributed in Finland, Norway and Sweden respectively has been decisive for cultural life. But even if public funding remains in principle at the same level as before and during the pandemic, it is in reality less – inflation, a general recession and increased wages and costs have led to cultural activities having less funds. Revenue has decreased for several businesses, and it is apparent that the audience hasn’t the same purchasing power.

**– Digitisation has broadened and increased the range**

Although the grants have been eroded and income reduced, the scope of arrangements and events remains at approximately the same level as before the pandemic thanks, among other things, to the effects of the restart subsidies. But also, that the digital opportunities that were used during the pandemic have developed new forms to meet the audience.

**– Audience behaviour difficult to interpret**

It is difficult to give a clear picture of the audience influx. Many testify that the audience has basically returned to the theatre, concert halls and museums. A proportion testifies to a decrease, and some to an increase. Since several of the cultural activities work more digitally than before, it is also difficult to compare with the time before the pandemic.

**– The planning horizon is shorter**

An effect of the pandemic is that there is no longer the same long-term perspective in planning – not least among individual cultural creators and independent actors. They were hit harder financially by the pandemic in contrast to larger cultural institutions. In many ways, it is a mental change that you now have shorter foresight and do not dare to make major future planning decisions.

**– Supplying expertise has become even more difficult**

Finding the right specialists can be difficult in the northern part of Scandinavia – not just for the cultural sector. This fact was not improved by the pandemic when many cultural creators changed industries. The lack of stage technicians, for example, is also noticeable in the Barents area. Foresight and financial resources are required to be able to attract the right skills.

**– Remote work is “the new normal”**

Immediately after the pandemic ended, many saw major changes in the work environment, including sick leave because of the high workload and stress linked to the pandemic, but also reduced social contact due to remote work and an increased proportion of administrative in relation to artistic work. Now remote work is part of the regular way of working, which many think is positive. Communication with international networks and contacts has been significantly facilitated. Note, however, that remote work is about administrative work – when it comes to creative and artistic work, you want to meet physically.

**– More digital positive effects**

Digitisation has also had positive effects operationally – both for creating and exhibiting art. Hybrid productions are not uncommon where the audience can experience a theatre performance or an art exhibition both physically on site and via computer. This allows you to reach a wider audience over a greater geographical distance and in more languages. Increased digitisation is seen as a strength and an opportunity, as it enables collaboration across national borders and long geographical distances. It also provides the opportunity for diversification and innovations in the range of activities.

**– The economy and the war are the biggest threats**

The clearest threat is the economic recession worldwide, where one sees threats and/or signs of reduced public funding, but also reduced purchasing power of the public

and increased costs of producing culture and art. Next to the economy, Russia's war against Ukraine has had the biggest negative impact on cultural cooperation in the Barents.

#### – Artistic freedom greatest strength

The greatest strength is considered to be the artistic freedom in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Basically, the relatively strong public funding is also considered to contribute to the opportunities for culture, as well as increased digitisation, which enables collaborations across national borders and over long geographical distances.

## About international cooperation

#### – A complex current situation

For some businesses today there has been a small increase in international business, compared to the time before the pandemic, while other businesses have expanded their international business and established new contacts and networks to a significantly greater degree. Several cultural actors have had no or very modest international connection, either before or after the pandemic, due to a lack of resources, competence within the organisation, or their work does not include activities outside the regional border. It is also more difficult for individual cultural creators and small, non-profit actors to seek and engage in international collaborations, and significantly easier for institutions.

#### – National differences

There are differences between the countries regarding the current state of international operations and what is required to achieve increased internationalisation. Finland is the country where Russia's war is most concretely felt in the form of, for example, interrupted collaborations, exchanges that have disappeared, and close dialogue between cultural creators. The Finns are also the ones who point out that a lack of communication and competence in marketing is a noticeable obstacle to the development of internationalisation.

It appears that Norwegians see themselves as strongly affected by the recession and Brexit. According to the Norwegian answers to the survey Norway also stands out as one of the countries with great international activity, both within the Barents region, but also in Europe and globally. Possibly this is one reason why the economy was hit harder by internationalisation – the more money you have in circulation in international cooperation projects, the more noticeable the economic recession becomes.

In Sweden, the Sámi stand out as a great asset, and the large investment in industry that takes place in upper Norrland is a distinguishing feature. There is greater optimism in Sweden than in Norway and Finland for the internationalisation of cultural life going forward. The major shortcoming, apart from the economy, in order to be able to create more international collaborations is the lack of a coordinator or coordinating function, something that Sweden considers to be crucial for continued internationalisation.

#### – The great impact of the war

Russia's war against Ukraine, which started in February 2022, has affected cultural life in the Barents region to a very high degree. Representatives from cultural activities in the Barents region testify to many interrupted projects and collaborations. Due to its proximity to Russia, Finland is the most strongly affected by the war against Ukraine. The cultural actors have had a close, strong, and long-standing collaboration with many Russian counterparts – now one has to look for other international partners.

#### – Reduced travel

A noticeable change is that international travel has been reduced – much due to the economy and greater climate awareness. Instead, you participate and have a dialogue via digital channels.

#### – Long distances

Factors complicating international activity and cooperation that are common to all three countries, and not linked to current issues such as economic recession and war, are the great geographical distances – both actual distance and “mental” distance, and the lack of public transportation in the east-west direction. The longer distances also mean that travelling both within, from and to the Barents region becomes more expensive.

#### – International potential

A strong advantage that favours international cooperation is the unique and distinctive environment of the Barents region, which for many is considered “exotic”. You can also see the fact that two cities in the Barents region – Bodø in 2024 and Oulu in 2026 – are future European Capitals of Culture, which will serve as a catalyst for increased and new international contacts. In general, certain art forms can more easily reach an international audience due to the lack of language barriers, including dance, circus, music, visual arts and film.

#### – Demand for collaboration with Sápmi

Several cultural actors express a strong desire to collaborate with individual art creators and activities from Sápmi.

And for those who already have cooperation, they would like to see it intensified and expanded. One sees the potential in exploring new opportunities for cooperation with a focus on minority cultures and minority people.

#### – Lack of financing opportunities

Knowledge of the possibilities for national or international funding for international projects varies widely. Many cultural actors do not know what the possibilities are. Nor do they have the opportunity to find out – small businesses lack the opportunity to both navigate among different grant-giving authorities or foundations and to maintain the level of the administrative burden that an application entails.

#### – A community – but under a new name?

Many see an obvious community, togetherness and much that unites life in the north, both historically and today. But the concept of “Barents” is strongly linked to Russia, and in view of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, cooperating with Russia is considered out of the question. Many prefer that in the future collaborations should take place between Finland, Norway, and Sweden, but then under the term “Nordkalotten” (“The Cap of the North”), which has previously been used for the three Nordic countries.

#### – Arctic – full of opportunities

Along with the desire to cooperate within the Nordic countries, there is also a larger movement that is about seeing itself as part of the Arctic. Several cultural actors want to expand the cooperation area to the Arctic. Geographically, culturally, historically, and similar living conditions are some of the factors that are seen as common, and which form the basis for an increased interest in expanding the opportunities for cooperation.

## About needs and strategies going forward

#### – Many profits with international cooperation

The cultural actors see several positive effects of international cooperation. It has several internal advantages for one's own business and one's own artistic work – it means a creative and artistic exchange, strengthens knowledge of the area, creates more contacts and exchange of experience, but also a larger audience base and increased visibility. It is also seen as a way of promoting multiculturalism, the rights of minorities, and contributing to the development of democracy by strengthening the role of culture in society. Through cooperation with more actors, the finances of a project or

collaboration are also strengthened by the fact that costs can be shared and/or new funds can be added via various funding sources.

#### – Economic recession and war the biggest obstacles

The economic recession and Russia's conduct of war are considered to hinder increased cooperation within the Barents region and internationally. Other factors that contribute to reduced international collaboration are funding opportunities and a lack of coordinating resources.

#### – Lower thresholds for funding

There are several needs for change in the financing of international projects. Cultural actors are asking for more information about which funds are available to apply for, a less complicated application processes, and, above all, increased investment in specific support for collaboration within the Barents region. Funds should be available both for pure cultural and project collaborations, but also for travel and residence activities. Not least, the importance of the possibility of smaller, small-scale forms of cooperation is emphasized.

#### – A promotion function with a special mission

Many of the cultural activities lack the resources and opportunities to be part of an international project or to increase their international presence. Therefore, there is a demand for a function that has the task of working dedicatedly to promote and strengthen cultural cooperation within the Barents area.

#### – Strengthened networks and meeting places

The demand for organised networks and recurring meeting places is great. Knowledge of existing cultural actors who are interested in collaboration and knowledge of successful projects, which can serve as role models, are important. By organising both art-area-specific and cross-genre networks and meeting places, the opportunities for more international collaborative projects increase.

#### – Strengthened political commitment

The cultural actors are asking for a stronger interest and commitment to an increased investment in international cultural exchange from politicians, authorities, and public financiers. One likes to see that there is clarity and set goals with funding for cultural cooperation in specific regions or areas. From the public sector, cultural actors also wish for longer planning horizons than 1-year budgets and allocations, and for the free and non-profit organised cultural area to be strengthened and given better funding opportunities.

## – Support for minorities and indigenous peoples

The Barents area, which includes all Sápmi, is a multi-cultural region. The need to support indigenous peoples, minorities and cultural projects that promote cultural identity is important to maintain the distinctiveness of the region.

## • Conclusions

The following conclusions can be made regarding the current state of cultural life within the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish part of the Barents region and the situation regarding international cultural exchange due to the corona pandemic, the economic development, and Russia's war against Ukraine.

### A unique and culturally rich region

- The study shows what an extensive and, in many ways, unique cultural life can be found in northern Finland, Norway and Sweden. More than 300 cultural institutions and recurring events can be found in the northern Nordic region (see pages 15 – 25). There is a breadth both within different cultural expressions and what the different organisational conditions look like. There is everything from regional institutional actors in all cultural fields, to professional prominent cultural and art creators on an international level. There are also several completely site-specific, unique activities, not least within Sápmi, which cannot be found anywhere else. The intensified and global interest in indigenous cultures means an extra-large potential for increased international cooperation.
- The diversity and richness of experiences, stories, artistry, and cultural expression must be safeguarded and brought forward to an even greater degree. The existing cultural activities constitute power centres and knowledge nodes that are an inalienable part of societal development and contribute to increased social sustainability and regional attractiveness that, among other things, enables tourism and entrepreneurship. Cultural life should be made visible and included to an even greater degree in the promotion of social development where business, education and culture form a whole.

### Financial and audience uncertainty

- As has been established, the pandemic years were in many ways a favourable period for large parts of cultural life, thanks to the extra financial efforts from the national side. At present, the economic conditions are more uncertain – the grants are eroded by increased wages and prices. In addition, inflation has

meant that the purchasing power of individuals has decreased, which could possibly explain a difficulty in attracting audiences and visitors to the same extent as before the pandemic. The report shows that for every third cultural activity in the Barents region, revenue has decreased compared to before the pandemic.

- The relative stability of business planning before the pandemic is now gone, and businesses are now forced to think short-term with more ad-hoc solutions in terms of artistic activities, and with shorter project assignments as a result. There are no longer the same conditions for long-term planning.
- For many individual cultural creators, the working conditions are insecure right from the start, with low, irregular incomes and a poorer social safety net, which makes working conditions even more difficult in an economic recession.
- Within the cultural sector, many are also predicting that the public grants to the arts and culture will be subject to reductions in the coming years due to how the political winds blow, investments in other policy areas, and continued recession.

### A new situation presupposes a new order

- The changed political situation within the current Barents area means that the Barents cooperation should look different in the future. Cooperation between the remaining countries Finland, Norway and Sweden should, however, continue and develop.
- The war affects the entire Barents cooperation. Cooperation with Russia is non-existent today and is predicted to be so for a long time to come. Is there even something that can be called the "Barents area" when Russia, which is 75% of the current Barents, is a belligerent country? And even if/when the war ends, the big question remains about how trust and confidence can be assured with Russian representatives. Many also point out that cooperation with Russian cultural actors was made difficult even before the war due to linguistic and unequal economic conditions.
- The desire for cooperation between the Nordic countries is great. Broken contacts and collaborations with Russia increase the possibilities for increased Nordic contacts and promote Nordic cooperation. It is also believed that the Barents area is not as interesting when Russia is excluded because the foundation was a collaboration between the North Calotte and Russia.
- The historical and cultural similarities between the Nordic countries are many and tangible. The former Finnish finance minister Jan-Erik Enestam has, on

behalf of the Nordic cooperation ministers, carried out a strategic review to take advantage of the lessons learned from the corona pandemic, and presents several concrete recommendations to strengthen Nordic cooperation. Among other things, the report points to the importance of the Nordic governments, as well as the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, to secure sufficient funding for Nordic cooperation within the cultural sector – with the aim of maintaining and strengthening the Nordic identity, togetherness and trust, which form the basis of a common Nordic civil crisis preparedness. ([www.norden.org/sv/publication/nordisk-civil-krisberedskap](http://www.norden.org/sv/publication/nordisk-civil-krisberedskap)).

- Most of the interviewees in the report express a desire to increase and strengthen cooperation and collaboration with operations in other parts of the Nordic region. The cultural sector sees that increased international cooperation can lead to several positive effects in addition to artistic and societal aspects, such as a larger audience base and distribution of costs.
- Alongside the increased interest in cultural cooperation within the Nordic countries, another movement is also underway: to include the entire Arctic area. There are obvious factors that link the conditions for activities and for people within the Arctic. A changed approach and increased awareness have led to the focus not automatically being directed south towards the national capitals, but in a more east-west direction. The meeting place Arctic Arts Summit is a clear example. It has quickly emerged as a central arena for discussion around the role of culture and cultural politics in the development of the circumpolar area.

### Need for earmarked funds for the northern Nordic region

- Considering the special regional conditions that exist in the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden regarding, for example, population and traffic networks, which affect organisations and actors of all kinds, not least financially, special efforts should be made for international work. The long geographical distances are a challenge, both the actual distance and the "mental" distance create difficulties economically and cooperatively for international exchange.
- Within the Barents there is a natural east-west direction, far from the capitals. There is a clear need for a structure for support and specially-designated funding for cultural cooperation in the northern part of the Nordic region. Even in the future, it is of the utmost importance that the local knowledge that exists in each region is used.

- There is frustration over wasted potential regarding international collaborations, as well as the fact that the financial resources limit the possibilities. The experience of the lack of formal support structures for international collaborations is also pointed out in the report.

### Internationalisation provides added value

- The positive effects that can be achieved with increased cooperation both within the Barents region and internationally are many – in terms of economic benefits, business development, identity creation for the region, and social development and democracy.
- Through increased cooperation and cultural exchanges, more economically sustainable events and opportunities for cultural tourism can be created, which can benefit both the cultural activities and the regional economy in general. Through collaborations in the form of, for example, shared production costs and joint marketing, cultural activities can become more financially sustainable and attract more visitors and more revenue.
- Through cooperation, there can be an increased exchange of knowledge, experience, and expertise between the cultural activities, which contributes to increased quality, efficiency, and professionalisation in the cultural field. Increased cooperation can also lead to cultural activities inspiring each other and developing new ideas, as well as to artistic and creative development.
- Cultural collaborations can contribute to creating a common understanding and a strengthened identity within the Barents region, where historical and contemporary relationships are made visible. The residents of the Barents region can feel a greater sense of belonging and community, while at the same time be inspired by the culture and artistic expression of the neighbouring countries. Increased cooperation in the field of culture can also create understanding and tolerance between different cultures and the countries within the Barents region, as well as for different cultural expressions. Through increased access to culture and cultural activities within the Barents region, residents can experience an improved quality of life and a richer cultural environment to live and work in. The collaboration can have a positive effect on the entire development of society.
- Increased cooperation can contribute to a stronger democratic culture and increased respect for freedom of expression, which is important for promoting an open and inclusive social debate. Open and inclusive cultural exchanges in turn strengthen society's democratic foundation.

- Increased cooperation can be a catalyst for the entire cultural area within the Barents region to develop and grow, which creates opportunities for improvement and expansion of cultural activities. Through collaborations, artists can have greater freedom to explore and express their artistic vision.

## • Recommendations and suggestions

Below are several recommendations and suggestions based on the following principles:

- Promote longtermism and continuity
- Create the conditions for lasting changes
- Support and develop existing infrastructure between different parts within the cultural area
- Improve the opportunities to live and work as cultural creators
- Increase the place of art and culture in society
- Be relevant, reasonable, and realistic

### Efforts to strengthen increased internationalisation

*Starting point: Increased internationalisation more important than ever.*

The starting point for the conclusions and recommendations is that the need for increased efforts to promote internationalisation is greater today in the light of the post-pandemic, the economic situation in the world, and the proximity of war. Strengthening cooperation among the Nordic countries, also in the field of culture, is seen as more important than ever.

To summarise the necessary efforts to create a favourable situation for international cooperation in northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden, three equally important factors can be distinguished:

- Funding and resources
- Networking and coordination
- Communication and information

Here are suggestions for efforts to strengthen an increased internationalisation of cultural life in northern Norway, Finland, and Sweden:

### Funding and resources

- The financial resources and funding opportunities to support international collaborative productions, residencies and projects should increase.

- Funds for collaboration among cultural activities within northern Finland, Norway and Sweden should be earmarked.

- In addition to funds for projects and cultural collaborations, there should also be funds for individual scholarships and to subsidise trips for making contacts and for study purposes, both for individuals and in groups.

- Directed funds for international work should be available, regardless of organisational form, for professional cultural activities and cultural creators within the Barents region.

- The knowledge and experience of existing cultural actors in the region regarding international exchange and collaboration must be utilised and developed.

- Application procedures and accounting must be easily accessible.

### Networking and coordination

- Networks, meeting places and cooperation forums where cultural activities can meet, exchange knowledge, and identify potential cooperation partners should be promoted.

- A coordinator or organisation should be tasked with promoting and coordinating collaboration within the area.

- The existing platform and forum Arctic Art Summit should function as a recurring, larger platform for cultural issues.

- The state cultural authorities could find a consensus on the work vis-à-vis the northern Nordic region. Similarly, the regional cultural managers in the countries could create a forum for networking and exchange of experience.

- Individual cultural organisations within different areas of the cultural sector could be given special assignments to create industry-specific meetings and contexts.

- Culture should be given a greater place in the political, societal context both at the regional, national, and Nordic level.

### Communication and information

- There is a need for increased communication and access to information regarding the collaboration opportunities, funding sources, and resources available for collaboration in the Barents region.

- A common platform or database should be created to facilitate communication between cultural activities and enable digital collaboration.

- A communicator or organisation should be tasked with promoting and coordinating communication between cultural actors in northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

## • Proposals for implementation and development work

### 1. A dedicated Barents culture coordinator

To promote the development of increased international cultural cooperation, it is proposed that a position as Coordinator for Barents cooperation be established. The function should be organised within the existing structure for Barents cooperation, for example within the International Barents Secretariat, IBS.

The Coordinator should be tasked with partly promoting and coordinating collaboration between cultural actors within the Barents, and partly assisting with spreading knowledge about financing for international cooperation. The position should be full-time.

Alongside the coordinator, a position as Communications Manager is also recommended, someone who will promote and coordinate communication between

cultural actors within the Barents. The function can be in the form of a service or purchased via a supplier, corresponding to half time.

The establishment of a Coordinator should be set up initially as a three-year project, to be evaluated after two years.

Funding should be shared at the national level between Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

*Estimated costs per year:*  
*Salary/remuneration including social security contributions 1.5 positions: 110,000 euros*  
*Operating funds, overheads: 90,000 euros*  
*Total: 200,000 euros per year*

### 2. Development work among cultural policy actors

Responsible for initiating changes and taking the initiative for further measures are the existing national, regional and Nordic authorities, and cooperation bodies that exist within the cultural sector, including:

- The governments of Finland, Norway, and Sweden respectively
- The national, state cultural authorities in Finland, Norway, and Sweden respectively
- The cultural administrations in each county/region
- Barents Euro Arctic Council/IBS, Working Group on Culture
- Nordic Culture Point
- Nordic Culture Fund
- The Nordic Council
- The Nordic Council of Ministers
- European Commission



Oulu Theatre. Photo: Petteri Loeppoenen

# Contributing persons

The following people have participated in the report through conversations, discussions, survey responses or interviews

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+ a number of respondents who have wished to remain anonymous



Flow Poductions new performance “**Nighttown**”. Photo: Janne-Pekka Manninen



**Korundi Culture House** in Rovaniemi. **Sara Cultural Centre** in Skellefteå. Photo: Johan Wennerström. **Knut Hamsun Centre** in Hamarøy, Nordland



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