

## **7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Programming Committee (PC) of Kolarctic 2021-2027 Programme**

**Date and time:** Tuesday, 29 June 2021, 10.00 – 15.30 (Finnish time)

**Location:** Zoom meeting hosted by the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 MA

**Language:** English

### **Delivery to the Members and Deputy Members of the Committee (X= present):**

|                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (x) Tuulia Väliheikki             | (-) Helinä Yli-Knuutila |
| (x) Jatta Jämsén                  |                         |
| (x) Päivi Ekdahl                  | (-) Mika Riipi          |
| (x) Timo Jokelainen               | (-) Jaakko Ylinampa     |
| (x) Lisbeth Nylund                | (x) Jan Edøy            |
| (x) Marte Lauvhjell (until lunch) |                         |
| (x) Natalia Z. Karlsen            | (-) Bente Helland       |
| (x) Eilen W B Zakariassen         | (x) Stig Olsen          |
| (x) Vsevolod Vovchenko            | ( )                     |
| (x) Igor Kapryin                  |                         |
| (during agenda points 1-5)        | (-) Denis Moskalenko    |
| (x) Ilya Ostapchuk                | (-) Olga Yumatova       |
| (-) Sergey Kungurtsev             | (-) Natalia Lysak       |
| (x) Elena Demidova                | (-) Maria Kropacheva    |
| (-) Isabella Palomba Rydén        | (-) Maria M Eriksson    |
| (x) Bror Martin Karlsson          | (-) Kasper Andersson    |
| (x) Ylva Sardén                   |                         |
| (-) Susanne Friberg               | (x) Anna Degerman       |

### **Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 Managing Authority:**

- (x) Riikka Oittinen
- (x) Marjaana Lahdenranta
- (x) Laura Mäki
- (x) Maiju Jolma-Taylor
- (x) Katri Niska-Honkonen
- (x) Ekaterina Sujala

### **Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 Branch Offices:**

- (x) Julia Korshunova
- (x) Linda Mosand
- (x) Jan Martin Solstad
- (x) Kairi Pääsuke

### **European Commission:**

- (x) Filip Chybalski
- (x) Simona Pohlova

### **TESIM:**

- (x) Iveta Puzo

**Others:**

- (x) Maria Astakhova, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
- (x) Maria Hammar, Anthesis Enveco AB
- (x) Marina Nenasheva, Kola Science Center
- (x) Elena Klyuchnikova, Kola Science Center

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

### **1. Opening of the meeting, identification of those present, approval of the agenda of the meeting**

The Chair Lisbeth Nylund opened the meeting at 10.00 Finnish time. The heads of the delegations presented the meeting participants. The Chair proposed a new agenda item "*Updates on the programming process incl. timeline*" to be included to the Agenda as point 3.

Resolution

Participants of the meeting were notified and the quorum was established. No changes to the list of members and deputy members of the Kolarctic 2021-2027 PC were made. The updated agenda of the meeting was approved.

### **2. Update on the state of preparation of regulatory and legal processes, incl. financing and FA**

Simona Pohlova (EC) gave an update on the preparation of the EU Regulations for future Interreg programmes. The cohesion package will be adopted today (June 30) and published in the Official Journal in July 1. Pohlova informed that there are still three implementing acts under preparation concerning geography and budgets per Interreg programme and multiannual strategy which are foreseen to be adopted later this year.

The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Regulation has entered into force already earlier in June. According to Pohlova, the NDICI funding amounts can be confirmed by the end of summer.

The programme can be submitted to the EC after the adoption of the cohesion package. However, as the EC is putting in place a new IT system for communication (including programme submissions) in August, it is preferred that the submission would take place after it. The Commission has five months to examine and adopt the programme after its submission.

Pohlova reminded that parts of the draft Financial Agreement (FA) template (the provisions on recoveries and an updated table of content) have been shared for commenting in May, and the other parts will hopefully be communicated throughout the summer. Further discussion on the draft FA is expected to be held in coming fall.

Resolution:

The information was noted by the PC.



### 3. Updates on the programming process incl. timeline.

Riikka Oittinen (MA) presented the updated timeline for the programming, including tentative timeslot for the national approval processes for November (**Annex 1**).

Task Force members presented the main outcomes of the joint Partner Consultation on the selected priorities, which was held on 23 June with almost 80 participants from all four countries (**Annex 2**). Each priority was discussed in a separate session. In general, the received feedback was encouraging and positive regarding the priorities and selected specific objectives. The participants had emphasised the need for cross-border collaboration in applied research and digitalisation, and a request to include social innovation possibilities better in the programme content was brought out. Also many participants sought after more scope for climate change mitigation related activities. The combination of culture and tourism in the third priority was welcomed, as well as the people-to-people priority in ISO 1. The overall feedback supported the notion of and the need for connecting people to create social sustainability and to increase trust. In all sessions, many areas for cooperation were identified and new project ideas were already presented.

The PC discussed the possibilities to include climate change mitigation actions more prominently under the SO on *protection and preservation of nature and biodiversity, and recusing all forms of pollution*. It was also acknowledged that mitigation activities require innovative approach, thus also Priority 1 *A skilled, smart and innovative Kolarctic Area* could take into account the possibility for developing and supporting climate change mitigation related collaboration.

Simona Pohlova (EC) commented the intended nature of the SO-s in general, and the people to people actions specifically. The actions supported should be in line with the main aim of the chosen SO-s. The people to people actions are foreseen to be with and for people –focused actions for citizens in the cross-border areas, including for instance events for children, students, municipalities etc. These actions can promote, raise awareness or bring people together for example. The topics and themes of interaction can vary. It is expected that they have local nature, no cooperation of central level institutions only are seen appropriate.

#### Resolution:

The information was noted by the PC.

### 4. Presentation of the stage of the SEA processes by the consultants

The representatives of the SEA consultancy organisations gave a progress report of the SEA process (**Annex 3**). Maria Hammar from Anthesis Envenco AB presented the assessment process for the programme area in Finland, Sweden and Norway, and Marina Nenasheva from Kola Science Center presented the assessment process for the programme area in the Russian Federation. Both environmental reports produced in the SEA processes will undergo public consultation this fall.

#### Resolution:

The information was noted by the PC.

## 5. Decision on the Specific Objectives (SO) to be selected under the Interreg Specific Objective 1 (ISO1)

Maiju Jolma-Taylor (MA) gave an overview of the Programming Committee's previous discussion on the need for and possibilities of additional SOs to be selected under ISO1. The PC has previously unanimously selected SO3 *People to People actions for increased trust* as a Specific Objective for Interreg Specific Objective 1 (ISO1) on *Better Governance*. In the previous discussions no unanimous decision had been found on how the programme will support other areas covered in the ISO1. Jolma-Taylor recapped the two options presented by the Task Force in its meeting held in extended composition in June 16 (**Annex 4**).

The PC discussed the possibility to add the ISO1.4 to the programme, as with the help of this specific objective multilevel governance could be facilitated e.g. by strengthening strategic frameworks and networks for Arctic cooperation, and implementation and dialogue of territorial strategies (e.g. work done under Barents Programmes and Arctic strategies) could be supported specifically. Also, it was suggested that the ISO1.4 could help to develop and strengthen the ongoing Arctic Cooperation; the collaboration of the Arctic Interreg Programmes, including facilitation of project clustering.

However, in the end it was deemed that actions targeted for developing collaboration governance, especially in the frame of Barents and Arctic cooperation should be integrated in the already selected specific objectives.

### Resolution:

The Programming Committee did not select any additional SO(s) for ISO1 other than previously agreed ISO1.3 *People to people actions*, i.e. option A presented by the Task Force in the Annex 2 to the Agenda. Importance of developing and supporting Arctic and Barents cooperation will be emphasised and featured in the scope of chosen specific objectives where ever possible.

The final name of the 4<sup>th</sup> priority, as well as how to achieve the above intention through all the chosen SO-s, will be agreed upon in (the) upcoming PC meeting(s).

## 6. Discussion on the project selection procedure and the tasks of the MA and JS+BOs

Riikka Oittinen presented three possible models for the project assessment and selection procedures, according to the Annex 3 of the Agenda. The three alternatives presented were 1) Regional Assessment Groups (RAGs) – model used in the current programme; 2) Assessment made by the Joint Secretariat (JS) including the Branch Offices (BO), and; 3) Joint Selection/Assessment Committee model. The question of the project selection procedure is seen important for the programming, as it has a central role in the programme implementation and the chosen procedure will significantly affect the tasks of the MA and JS+BOs. Additionally, the Interreg



Regulation 2021-2027 gives a possibility to conduct the application evaluation by the JS and BOs.

The PC discussed the strengths and challenges of different assessment and selection models. Reliability, transparency and impartiality were identified as important assessment principles. The RAG model currently in use has a strong regional anchoring as it uses region experts in the assessment, and also contributes communicating the possibilities of the programme in the regions. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that the RAG model is heavy and organisational commitment does not always guarantee resources for the RAG tasks.

In the discussion, a possibility to merge the presented alternatives were examined. A developed version of RAG model, with cross-border dialogue during the assessment and larger preparatory work done by JS+BO was favoured by many. Iveta Puzo (TESIM) stressed the importance of trusted and efficient assessment process which stem from the principle of partnership and is secured by regional ownership.

Resolution:

The PC discussed the different alternatives for project assessment and selection procedures. The regional ownership and transparency in the assessment phase was deemed important in any proposed model. The discussion was noted and will be taken on board in the further planning of the tasks for the MA and JS+BO.

**7. Decision on Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) to be included into the programme**

Katri Niska-Honkonen (MA) made a presentation of the possibilities of simplified cost options (SCO) in the upcoming programme period (**Annex 5**). In the Proposal for Regulation laying down common provisions, the use of SCOs is mentioned as a particular recommendation for the programmes 2012-2027. Furthermore, in the projects with limited financial volume (up to 200,000€), the use of SCOs is mandatory.

Preliminary discussion on SCOs was held in the PC meeting in November 2020. In addition, the MA and TESIM organised a briefing session for the PC members in mid-June, to share more precise information on SCOs and possibilities and benefits they can offer.

Niska-Honkanen explained that the Interreg Regulation offers the possibility to use a set of predefined SCOs (*off-the-shelf*) for all the programmes. In case there is a need to create programme specific options, these SCOs need to be developed, approved by the auditor and included in the programme document.

The PC discussed the pros and cons of choosing off-the-shelf SCOs and/or creating programme specific SCOs. Off-the-shelf SCOs were seen as necessary tools for making the programme implementation lighter to the project beneficiaries, and might pave the way better for newcomers and/or smaller scale beneficiaries. At the same time, creating programme specific SCOs might confuse the partners as Kolarctic has not used SCOs extensively before.

Resolution:

The Programming Committee decided to use the off-the-shelf SCOs offered by the Regulation in the programme, and not develop Kolarctic programme specific SCOs at this point. The Russian delegation has requested from the MA the baseline studies which include the information and references to the backgrounds (analysis of the current salaries) based on which the calculation was made, as well as to provide the formula of this calculation.

## 8. Decision on practices for small projects

Iveta Puzo (TESIM) gave an overview of what the new Interreg Regulation cover regarding the small-scale projects (**Annex 6**). Interreg A programmes, incl. external border programmes, shall support projects of limited financial volume, either selected directly within calls for proposals, or within one or more Small Projects Funds (SPF). In November 2020, the PC endorsed the importance of the small-scale projects, but made the decision not to establish SPF, but to select small projects using calls for proposals.

Puzo explained that there is no clear definition of the projects of limited financial volume, and it is up to each programme to define the approach to these small-scale projects. The definition may include some principles, such as whether the small-scale projects are to be applied under all selected SOs or under specific ones only, shall they have specific financial allocation and implementing times, the timing of calls, partnership requirements etc. The small-scale projects with total budgets not exceeding 200,000 EUR are bound to use SCOs.

In the discussion, the PC reflected on the approach to support small-scale projects. It was widely agreed that small-scale projects are beneficial for each selected SOs, and at this point no financial allocation or time limit should be set for them. Many projects and activity types were recognised to be suitable for small-scale projects (e.g. pre-studies, exchanges, bridging calls, capitalisation, people to people, testing ideas). It was also acknowledged that small-scale projects could benefit type of beneficiaries which would otherwise have difficulties in accessing the programme, due to their limited capacity or limited prior knowledge of cross-border programmes.

### Resolution:

The PC discussed on different guiding principles for the support to small-scale projects. It was decided that the section in the programme document on support to small-scale projects will be reviewed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of the programme document, which is to be introduced in the next meeting.

## 9. Overview on the programming coordination within the Arctic Cooperation and other networks

Riikka Oittinen gave an overview on coordination measures. The Arctic Programmes have discussed and shared information on the selected SOs and the SCO approaches for the 2021-2027 period. The three Finnish-Russian programmes have had continuous exchange on the programming steps. The Northern Cluster network will have the branding of the new programmes next on the agenda.



Resolution:

The information was noted by the PC.

**10. Any other business**

Further discussion points were not raised.

**11. Next meeting**

The next PC meeting will be held online on Thursday 23. September, starting at 10.00 FI/RU time and 9.00 SE/NO time.

**12. Closing of the meeting**

The chair closed the meeting at 15.15 (Finnish time).



Lisbeth Nylund  
Chair of the meeting  
Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation  
Norway



Maiju Jolma-Taylor  
Secretary of the meeting  
Kolarctic CBC 2014–2020 MA

**List of Annexes:**

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|----------------|--|
| <b>Annex 1</b> | Programming timeline updated June 2021 (Riikka Oittinen)                             |
| <b>Annex 2</b> | Priorities presented in the Partner Consultation (Maiju Jolma-Taylor and TF members) |
| <b>Annex 3</b> | SEA process presentations (Anthesis Envenco Ab and Kola Science Center)              |
| <b>Annex 4</b> | ISO1 extended Task Force options (Maiju Jolma-Taylor)                                |
| <b>Annex 5</b> | Presentation on SCOs (Katri Niska-Honkonen)  |
| <b>Annex 6</b> | Small projects presentation (TESIM)  |