

Ex-post evaluation of the Ko- larctic ENI CBC 2014-2020 programme

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Oxford Research AB

Box 7578

10393 Stockholm

Besök: Norrlandsgatan 11

office@oxfordresearch.se

www.oxfordresearch.se

Client

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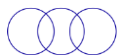
Team

Thomas Westerberg

Ylva Grauers Berggren

Roe Langaas

Sari Rannanpää (NordEval)



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Summary

The final report on the evaluation of the Kolarctic ENI CBC 2014-2020 programme, conducted by the Oxford Research team for the Managing authority for the programme, presents a comprehensive analysis of the programme's performance. The programme, part of the European Union's framework for cohesion policy through the European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation (ENI CBC), aimed to foster cooperation and development in the Arctic region, spanning Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia. Despite facing significant challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, particularly Russia's war against Ukraine which led to the suspension of cooperation with Russia, the evaluation provides insights into the programme's achievements, impacts, and sustainability.

Key Findings

Programme Objectives and Implementation: The programme successfully addressed its core objectives of promoting sustainable development and strengthening cross-border cooperation, despite unexpected challenges. Notably, it achieved this through funding joint projects in various thematic areas, enhancing the viability of the Arctic economy, nature, environment, and promoting fluent mobility of people, goods, and knowledge.

Challenges and Adaptations: The programme's implementation was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical shifts, notably the suspension of cooperation with Russia following its war of aggression against Ukraine. These events necessitated adaptations, including extending the programme implementation period and shifting to digital platforms for project activities.

Achievements and Impact: Evaluation findings underscore the programme's relevance and consistency with regional development goals, highlighting its success in fostering innovation, sustainability, cross-border collaboration, and environmental protection. Projects under the programme contributed to SME development, knowledge transfer, improved accessibility, and environmental sustainability, demonstrating tangible impacts in the Kolarctic region.

Sustainability and Legacy: The programme has left a visible legacy, promoting environmental sustainability, gender equality, and fostering continued cross-border cooperation. Its contributions to knowledge sharing, capacity building, and the development of innovative practices and tools are expected to have lasting effects in the region.

Recommendations

The evaluation offers targeted recommendations to ensure the programme's long-term impact and address identified challenges. These include enhancing support for continued cross-border cooperation, ensuring a more even distribution of lead partner responsibilities, highlighting concrete impacts, and developing qualitative monitoring systems. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for preparedness and flexibility to external events, increased knowledge about future financial tools, and a clearer societal perspective on gender equality.

Conclusion

The Kolarctic ENI CBC 2014-2020 programme has demonstrated significant achievements in promoting sustainable development and cross-border cooperation in the Arctic region, despite facing substantial external challenges. The evaluation highlights the programme's contributions to regional development goals, its adaptability, and the importance of continued efforts to leverage its successes for future cooperation and development initiatives. The recommendations provided aim to enhance the programme's legacy and ensure its impacts are sustained and expanded upon in the future.

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1. Introduction

The Kolarctic ENI CBC 2014-2020 is a programme for cooperation in the Arctic region. The programme is implemented and financed by the European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation (ENI CBC), which is part of the European Union's (EU) framework programme for cohesion policy. The programme has also provided co-financing from the four partner countries – Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia – to promote cooperation and development in the border areas between the programme's four partner countries. In addition to EU and national co-financing, there is also co-financing from stakeholders in the projects implemented within the programme.

The Kolarctic CBC core regions are Lapland (Finland), Norrbotten (Sweden), Troms, Finnmark, and Nordland (Norway). The adjoining regions are Oulu region (Finland) and Västerbotten (Sweden). Due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the participation of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk Regions, the Nenets Autonomous District (originally part of the core area), the Republics of Karelia and Komi, and the city of St. Petersburg (originally adjoining regions) were suspended, as of March 2022.

1.1 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

1.1.1 The purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide information for future development of the programme area, generate new financing instruments and (co-)financing mechanisms, and contribute to an elaboration of cooperation in the Barents Region. The main objective of the evaluation is to provide an overall independent assessment of the programme implementation, its effectiveness and impacts in the Kolarctic CBC programme area.

When evaluating the impact of the programme, the focus shall be on the EU and Norwegian part of the programme area, while the entire Kolarctic CBC programme area shall be considered when evaluating how the project selection, for example, has supported the programme objectives.

Throughout the report, project activities involving Russia are solely referring to activities that took place before the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

1.1.2 Evaluation criteria

This ex-post evaluation of the Kolarctic ENI CBC 2014-2020 programme is carried out to provide an overall independent assessment of the programme. The focus will

be on the **effectiveness** and **impacts** of the implementation of the programme. The evaluation shall therefore analyse the programme's:

- relevance,
- consistency,
- results,
- impacts,
- sustainability in relation to impacts,
- regional impacts,
- cross-border cooperation, and complementarity,
- the cross-border cooperation (programme impact on cooperation, COVID-19 impact, ENI cooperation goals), and
- broader circumstances (added value at EU level, COVID-19 impact, impact of the programme implementation disruption).

1.1.3 Evaluation questions

The evaluation included eight evaluation questions, which together with the evaluation criteria have been used as a framework for the evaluation:

- To what extent was the programme able to achieve its goals, considering the implementation disruption?
- Which goals were not reached? Were they not reached because of the programme disruption, or for other reasons?
- Territorial cooperation between the EU and Russia has ended for the time being. What are the durable benefits for the participating regions, resulting from the Programme?
- What is the impact of closing the CBC programme to the regions?
- Has the Programme left a visible legacy that can be used in future activities in the regions and interregional cooperation?
- What does the future of the regions look like in the changed circumstances?
- What kind of lessons are learnt for creation of new financing instruments and development of (co-)financing mechanisms?
- To what extent has the Programme been effective in meeting the horizontal principles defined in the Joint Operational Programme (cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, gender equality)?

1.1.4 Assessment of achievements and results are in focus for the evaluation.

The focus of the evaluation is on the assessment of achievements and results of the programme. The evaluation aims to find evidence of why, whether and/or how these results are linked to the implementation of the programme and seek to identify the factors driving or hindering progress.

1.2 Extraordinary events affecting the implementation of the programme

Due to the pandemic restrictions caused by COVID-19, the European Commission amended the Implementing Regulation in 2020. One of the alleviations was the extension of the programme implementation period with one year, up to the end of 2023. However, the Managing Authority has defined that all the activities in the Kolarctic projects must be finished by the end of June 2023. The Programme's Technical Assistance is available until the end of September 2024, and the Programme Final report shall be submitted to the European Commission primarily by February 15, 2025 (flexibility is available for this deadline). Further, since cross-border cooperation with Russia has been suspended and was not expected to be re-established within the timeframe of the programme, the Financing Agreements between the EU and its Member States and the Russian Federation have been suspended. The project partners in the Member States and Norway will complete ongoing project activities within the existing programme.

1.2.1 The need for the evaluation to consider events outside the control of the programme

The evaluation has considered the extraordinary circumstances (the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine) which have hindered the implementation of the programme. Thus, the programme can be viewed as having two phases of implementation: 1) the CBC phase, dictated by the Joint Operational Programme, and 2) the programme implementation disruption phase, which focuses on allowing the completion of the projects on the EU and Norway side, therefore minimizing the damage for the partners in these territories. Further, events that affected the implementation of the programme because of COVID-19 also needs to be taken into consideration.

1.3 Disposition

The next chapter summarises the assessment of the Kolarctic CBC programme. Chapter 3 presents the Kolarctic programme's objectives, budget, and partners. Chapter 4 describes the programme organisation and the strategical partners' view on the programme's implementation and result, while Chapter 5 give the partners' perception of the projects' implementation. Chapter 6 describes the programme's contribution to the programme's priority axis and thematic objectives and Chapter 7 the programme's specific-, common- and project indicators. Chapter 8 present the recommendations of the evaluation.

2. Assessment of the Kolarctic CBC programme

This chapter summarises the assessments based on the evaluation criteria. The assessment is based on the answers to the evaluation questions and the projects contribution to Kolarctic programme and the participating regions in terms of the programme objectives. The assessments are based on the content of chapters 4-6, where the empirical findings of the evaluation are reported in further detail.

2.1 Relevance and consistency

2.1.1 Relevance

What is the main contribution of the projects and overall programme to the development of Kolarctic CBC?

The programme highlights the importance of project quality in addressing regional challenges and opportunities. Key areas that the programme has contributed to are:

- cross-border collaboration,
- support for SME development,
- environmental sustainability,
- knowledge transfer and training,
- improved accessibility,
- improving infrastructure and
- promoting regional connections.

The evaluation assessment based on the relevance criteria is that the contribution from the programme has been relevant for the region of the Kolarctic programme. However, the project activities are highly focused on utilizing target groups and resources in the Kolarctic ENI CBC programme area to achieve relatively general results. This has been central, rather than concretely targeting the structural challenges in the programme region. There is a general lack of analytical reasoning within the programme, and project activities tends to not address the characteristic challenges of large parts of the participating regions. For example, narrow industry breadth, large net migration flows, small companies with the ability and/or ambition to grow larger, low value added in large parts of the programme region uneven innovation density within the Kolarctic region, and a gender-diversified industry structure. Instead, the programme shows a wide range of varied initiatives that certainly affect regional needs and strengthen regional opportunities. But since the focus of the projects is so multifaceted and isolated from each other, it is difficult to see how the

collected contribution from the programme will help to meet the greatest challenges in the programme area.

2.1.2 Consistency

Have there been any difficulties in achieving coherence between actors in project implementation in any respect?

There are many strategies within the programme region and many different working groups, not least within Barents cooperation. The Kolarctic programme's projects largely consider the ambitions of the regional strategies. However, it is mainly done as part of the requirement, rather than through analytically elaborated descriptions of how the projects contribute with added value. The coherence between the Kolarctic programme's efforts with other programmes in the region and various working groups' efforts for regional development should primarily be derived from the fact that the proposals for efforts expressed by the Kolarctic programme are broad and general. This is also a characteristic among most programmes and working groups' efforts in the Kolarctic CBC's region. The broad formulations in the Kolarctic programme and equally broad formulations in other documents of relevance in the programme area makes it self-evident for the Kolarctic programme to find coherence with other regional development efforts.

2.2 Impacts and sustainability of impacts

2.2.1 Impacts

To what extent was the programme able to achieve its goals, considering the implementation disruption?

When it comes to **thematic objectives** the Kolarctic programme has performed well regarding:

- innovation,
- sustainability,
- cross-border collaboration
- environmental protection.
- climate change measures,
- sustainability and
- improve transport and accessibility.

Regarding **specific outcome indicators** a common understanding of the programme is that the projects contribute well to indicators related to:

- gender participation,
- institutional cooperation and
- environmental focus.

For the **common output indicators**, the programme performs well regarding indicators measure:

- engagement of enterprises and
- environmental focus.

Which goals were not reached? Were they not reached because of the programme disruption, or for other reasons?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of cooperation with Russia from the programme are external factors that have affected the achievement of objectives for some projects within the remaining participating countries. Above all, these events concerned projects that required active Russian participation or that, for example, data was located on Russian servers. The internal challenges depended on diverse operational realities faced by projects. Most often caused by underscoring the complexity of implementing regional development and sustainability initiatives in the countries that are still participating in the programme in the Kolarctic region.

2.2.2 Sustainability of impacts

Has the programme left a visible legacy that can be used in future activities in the regions and interregional cooperation?

The programme has contributed to:

- A common interest among actors in the Kolarctic region with a focus on horizontal principles like environmental sustainability and gender equality.
- An increased share knowledge among actors in the region within a range of different thematic fields.
- Opportunities for continued exchange of academic expertise and practical experience between universities and businesses in the region in several fields
- Strengthened and developed cross-border cooperation between actors in several areas.
- Methods, tools, approaches, and data for implementation of activities among actors in the programme area.
- Developed and expanded cross-border cooperation between actors in several thematic areas.

The contribution from the projects is further developed in chapters 5 and 6.

2.2.3 Regional impacts,

What is the impact of closing the CBC programme in the regions?

Long distances between communities in the programme region and a sparse population structure limit the opportunities for collaboration relative to geographies with dense populations and proximity to each other. The sparsely populated Kolarctic region means that the actual costs of cooperation are higher than in the densely populated areas of the EU. The possibility of cost recovery for continued cooperation between actors in the Kolarctic programme area is significantly limited by the end of the programme period. The closure of the programme also means that the possibility of support for joint cross-border development initiatives in early stages, which promote exchange between academia and industry, is limited. It also limits the possibility of achieving co-planning between actors in the programme area, primarily in terms of infrastructure, but also in areas such as tourism and hospitality and skills development.

2.3 Cross-border cooperation

2.3.1 Cross-border cooperation and broader circumstances

What is the programme's impact on co-operation, COVID-19 impact, and ENI cooperation goals?

The Kolarctic programme has largely strengthened cross-border cooperation between actors in the region. Most of the partners in the projects considered that the projects targeted common issues that stretch over the national borders, as well as utilized specialists from the neighboring regions. The increased cross-border collaboration extends across several thematic areas. For example:

- infrastructure and transportation planning,
- knowledge sharing,
- research, and development of practices across various fields,
- environmental sustainability,
- industry
- tourism, and
- education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has largely affected the programme activities. Some activities have been cancelled, but in most cases the activities have continued in other ways. The largest negative effect from COVID-19 in total seems to be that several projects' activities were delayed. The most prominent adjustment has been the shift from physical meetings to digital meetings. On the negative side it has been hard to

establish new contacts or strengthen the old ones since digital forums compared to meeting each other in real life is not the same. Another problem that occurred in many cases is that linguistic shortcomings and technical shortcomings have affected the closure to each other and in-depth feeling negatively. On the positive side the digital meetings have made it easier to attend meetings due to the size of the programme geography.

Regarding ENI (European Neighbourhood Instrument) objectives – such as improving cross-border cooperation, supporting sustainable development in border regions, and promoting people-to-people contacts to build stronger social, cultural, and institutional ties – it is evident that the Kolarctic programme has contributed. It is worth noting that relative to previous programme periods, interventions during the programme period 2014-2020 have shown a shift from smaller "people-to-people" projects to larger research and innovation projects.

Territorial cooperation between the EU and Russia has ended for the time being. What are the durable benefits for the participating regions, resulting from the programme?

The suspension of cooperation with Russia within the Kolarctic programme is two-fold. Primarily, the discontinuation of the programme on the Russian side has meant that certain activities could not be realized. Above all, efforts in the environmental promotion work are considered to have been negatively affected. This is because before the suspension, Russia had great interest in participating in environmental strengthening cooperation. However, the suspension has contributed to the perception that cooperation between the remaining countries' actors has become easier. Several respondents indicate that the expected Russian requirements for implementation and, where applicable, the perceived harsh tone of dialogue in the potential cooperation have been considered difficult to manage for other remaining countries' partners. Although losing the expertise from Russian actors has contributed to shortcomings in the projects' ambitions, collaboration with the remaining countries' actors is considered to have been strengthened due to the suspension of cooperation with Russia.

What does the future of the regions look like in the changed circumstances?

The collective resources of knowledge and expertise have been significantly reduced in the Kolarctic CBC programme area with Russia's suspension. Primarily regarding environment-related issues, but also in several other thematic research areas. The possibility of joint infrastructure planning will be limited to smaller geographical areas. However, the discontinuation of the programme on the Russian side appears to have strengthened the cooperation between the remaining countries.

The remaining actors' ambitions to continue implementing the projects' activities under the new conditions of COVID-19 pandemic and after Russia's suspension show a good resilience for collaboration within the programme area. Several of the collaborations that characterize the projects have been based on collaboration between actors who have worked together for a long time. The need to jointly support each other with a bearing on development in the programme area or within activities in the regions within the programme area will continue and constitute a strength for the sustainable development of the Kolarctic region.

2.4 Complementarity

What kind of lessons are learnt for creation of new financing instruments and development of (co-)financing mechanisms?

The lessons learnt from the Kolarctic programme can inform the design and implementation of most cross-border cooperation programmes. The Kolarctic programme underlines the need for complex interplay between financial mechanisms, project objectives, and the broader goals of sustainable development and regional cooperation to ensure a long-term impact from programmes such as the Kolarctic CBC.

- **Partnership and Collaboration:** The importance of building strong partnerships across borders is crucial. The programme highlights the need for effective collaboration between various stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, businesses, and local communities. Partnerships are essential for pooling resources, expertise, and for the successful implementation of projects. There is, however, a need for the programme to make greater demands on the projects to earlier in the process and more clearly describe how collaboration will continue to be developed and financed after the projects have been completed. Also, how the results of the projects will be implemented in regular activities.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Developing financing instruments that are flexible and adaptable to the changing needs and conditions of the programme area. The Kolarctic CBC, like many cross-border cooperation programmes, operates in a dynamic environment. Financial instruments and co-financing mechanisms must therefore be designed to adjust to unforeseen challenges and opportunities.
- **Leveraging Funds:** One of the lessons learnt is the importance of ability to leverage additional funds from various sources. By creating financial instruments that can attract additional investment from public and private sectors, the impact of the initial funding can be significantly amplified. This involves

designing projects that are attractive to a broad range of investors and ensuring that projects deliver tangible and measurable benefits.

- **Innovation in Financing:** Encouraging innovation in financing mechanisms to support unique and pilot projects that can lead to sustainable development in the region. This might include the use of financial instruments such as grants, loans, equity investments, and guarantees in novel ways to support the objectives of the Kolarctic CBC programme.
- **Capacity Building:** Recognizing the need for capacity building among local stakeholders to effectively access and utilize the available financing. This includes training on how to develop strong project proposals, manage projects efficiently, and report on outcomes. Enhancing local capacity ensures that the benefits of the programme are maximized.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Ensuring that financing mechanisms operate with a high level of transparency and accountability. This is critical for maintaining trust among partners and stakeholders, so that the funds are also continuously used efficiently, and that the projects continue to deliver the intended outcomes.
- **Environmental and Social Considerations:** Integrating environmental and social considerations into the development of financing instruments. This is particularly relevant in the Kolarctic region, where environmental preservation and social cohesion are key objectives. Financing mechanisms should promote sustainability and be designed to mitigate any potential negative impacts.

To what extent has the programme been effective in meeting the horizontal principles defined in the Joint Operational Programme (cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, gender equality)?

Overall, the Kolarctic programme has contributed to cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality. In particular, the programme has strengthened **cooperation across the borders** of the programme region. This in turn has strengthened the conditions for implementing activities aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and gender equality. In this context, cross-border cooperation should therefore be seen as a principle, an objective, and a means of achieving development in the programme area.

Since a majority of the participating partners had previously cooperated with each other before the project, there may be a risk that the development has been carried out in the "old way" without new influences from additional partners. Although there

are no clear examples of this being the case, it may be worth considering for future initiatives of development work in the programme area. Something that may have affected the development work even though the partners often stayed the same is that most of the projects were planned in consultation with the target groups for the project's activities, which probably influenced the projects towards the most relevant direction.

The Kolarctic programme has contributed to **sustainable development** in several ways. Most of the projects in the programme have been directed towards concrete actions for sustainable development in the thematic areas on which the projects have focused.

Regarding **gender equality**, the programme has added that working groups, project management and communication activities have been designed to take gender equality into account. Clearly targeted concrete efforts to achieve gender equality are found among some projects, although they are few in comparison with projects focused on environmental sustainability.

3. Programme objectives, budget, and partners.

3.1 Programme objectives.

3.1.1 Thematic objectives and priority axis

The aim of the Kolarctic programme was to promote sustainable development and strengthen cross-border cooperation by funding joint projects in different thematic areas. The programme sought to create greater integration and cooperation between local and regional actors to solve common challenges and exploit the opportunities available in the area.

The overall objective of the Kolarctic CBC Programme is to promote a viable economy and the attractiveness of the region, where inhabitants and visitors can enjoy the arctic nature and where the natural resources are used in a sustainable way. The programme covers four Thematic Objectives (TO), which are based on the 10 TO:s created under the strategic objectives and proposed in the programming document 2014–2020 for ENI Cross Border Cooperation. The TO:s are translated into two priority axis: (1) Viability of arctic economy, nature, and environment and (2) Fluent mobility of people, goods, and knowledge. Furthermore, the programme should consistently relate to the principles: cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality respectively.

The **programme priority axis**, and **thematic objectives** are shown in Table 1:

Table 1 Kolarctic ENI CBC Priority axis and Thematic Objectives.

PRIORITY AXIS 1	PRIORITY AXIS 2
<p style="text-align: center;">Viability of arctic economy, nature and environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TO1 Business and SME development • TO6 Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation 	<p style="text-align: center;">Fluent mobility of people, goods and knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TO1 Business and SME development • TO6 Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation • TO7 Improvement of accessibility to the regions, development of sustainable and climate-proof transport and communication networks and systems • TO10 Promotion of border management and border security, mobility and migration management
<p><i>cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability and gender equality</i></p>	

3.1.2 Specific and common objectives indicators

The Kolarctic programme will also contribute to **specific objective indicators (SOI)** and **common objectives indicators (COI)** related to the EU's European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The SOI are measured with specific objectives indicators (SOI) for the Kolarctic programme. The common objectives indicators (COI) are indicators equal for all ENI programmes, but the Kolarctic programme has chosen the indicators that suit their needs. The **results** of the Kolarctic programme are related to programme's thematic objectives and measured with result indicators (RI) and were set up in peer-to-peer discussion with experts from the Kolarctic regions which assessed the selected RI. The RI, SOI and COI are all related to each other, so that the results of the projects contribute to the respective SOI, COI, and RI. Thus, the results of the projects are central to the overall outcome of the programme.

3.2 Programme budget and types of projects.

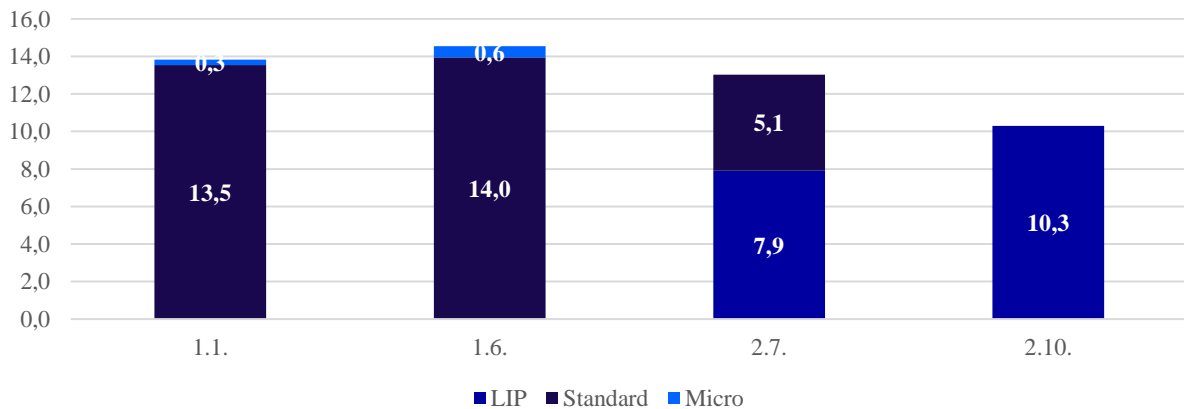
The total budget of the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 is 63,4 million euros, out of which 24,7 million was EU funding (ERDF and ENI), 14 million Norwegian equivalent and national co-financing, 12,4 million euros national co-financing from Finland and Sweden, and 12,4 million euros of national co-financing from Russia (until March 2022).¹

¹ In 2018, the amount of Finnish national state co-financing was increased by 2 889 000 euros, to ensure the funding for the LIP "Raja-Jooseppi". With the increase, the Programme's total budget raised up to 66,3 million euros, and Finnish state co-financing up to 15,2 M€. The amounts coming from other funding sources remained unchanged. After the last amendment made to the Joint Operational programme in December 2023, the amount of Finnish state co-financing is 14,0 M€, and the Programme's total budget is 65,1 M€. The amendments were made to adapt to the circumstances. By January 1st, 2024, the programme's expenditures just exceeded just over EUR 44 million euros.

The Kolarctic CBC funded three types of projects: large infrastructure projects (LIPs), standard projects, and micro projects. Over the course of the programme period, Kolarctic CBC launched three calls for proposals for standard projects and one for micro projects.

The programme funded a total of three large infrastructure projects (one under TO 2.10 and two under TO 2.7), 26 standard projects, and 19 micro projects (information available online only for 15 projects since five projects were terminated (KO5004 Gap and barrier analysis of Euro-Arctic coastal wetlands conservation, KO5042 Northern Farm, KO5043 Look North, KO5109 Engage & KO5127 GyroStop,)), for which the division is five under TO1.1 and ten under TO1.6. The allocation of the programme funding per Thematic objective and types of projects (Large infrastructure projects (LIP), standard project, and micro project) can be seen below in Figure 2.

Table 2 Allocated budget to projects under Thematic Objectives excluding terminated projects (€ million).



Source: Kolarctic ENI CBC programme website <https://kolarctic.info/our-projects/>

Out of the 43 funded projects, 17 had a Norwegian Lead Partner, 15 Finnish, 7 Russian, and 4 Swedish.

3.3 Programme partners

The 43 projects that the Kolarctic ENI CBC funded have a total of 238 project partners (136 organisations). On average, there are 5 partners per project with the mode being 3. The number of partners in a project varied between 3 and 13.

Of all the project partners, 35% were Russian, 32% Finnish, 23% Norwegian, and 11% Swedish. The Lead Partner is more often Norwegian (40%) or Finnish (35%) than Russian (16%) or Swedish (9%). When looking at the regional level, Nordland (10) and Finnmark (6) from Norway, Lapland (7) from Finland and Norrbotten (4) have the most project leads (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3. Partners in Kolarctic ENI CBC 2014-2020 projects by country.

	Lead Partner	Project Partner	Partners total
Finland	15	60	75
Norway	17	36	53
Russia	7	76	83
Sweden	4	23	27
Total	43	195	238

Table 4. Share of partners in Kolarctic ENI CBC 2014-2020 projects by country.

	Lead Partner Share	Project Partner Share	Share of partners
Finland	35 %	31 %	32 %
Norway	40 %	18 %	23 %
Russia	16 %	39 %	35 %
Sweden	9 %	12 %	11 %

Before the suspension of cooperation with Russia a total of 15 projects had participants from all the programme countries. 24 projects had participants from three programme countries (Finland, Russia, Norway: 20; Finland, Russia, Sweden: 4). Six projects were bilateral (Finland, Russia: 4; Norway-Russia: 1; Sweden, Russia: 1).

Higher education and research institutes represent the largest group of partners (50%) in Kolarctic projects. Regional public authorities (15%), enterprises or SMEs (14%) and national public authorities (11%) participate actively in the Kolarctic projects (Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5. Types of partners in Kolarctic ENI CBC projects.

	Lead Partner	Project Partner	Partners total
Association	2	9	11
Collective		3	3
Education/training centre and school	1	6	7
Enterprise / SME	4	29	33
Higher education and research	23	94	117
Local public authority	1	2	3
National public authority	3	23	26
Regional public authority	9	29	38
Total	43	195	238

The higher education and research institutions have acted as Lead Partners in more than half of the projects (53%), whereas the regional public authorities have led about a fifth of the projects (21%) and enterprises or SMEs about a tenth (9%).

The projects had 1-4 different types of partners. On average, the projects had two different types of partners. However, it is noteworthy that about a third of the projects (16) had only one type of partners. Fifteen of these projects had partners only from the higher education and research institutions and one was a collaboration between education/training centre and school partners.

Table 6. Share of partners in Kolarctic ENI CBC projects by partner type

	Share of Lead Partners	Share of Project Partners	Share of partners
Association	4 %	5 %	5 %
Collective	0 %	2 %	1 %
Education/training centre and school	2 %	3 %	3 %
Enterprise / SME	9 %	15 %	14 %
Higher education and research	56 %	48 %	50 %
Local public authority	2 %	1 %	1 %
National public authority	9 %	12 %	11 %
Regional public authority	18 %	15 %	15 %

There was also some variation in project partners by country. From all of the programme countries, the higher education and research institutes were the most numerous, followed by regional public authorities and enterprises and SMEs. Whereas associations and collectives took part in the previous projects from Russia, which was not so typical elsewhere. In addition, from the Finnish and Norwegian side, there were also local public authorities (municipalities) participating in the projects. Sweden had the fewest types of project partners out of all the participating countries.

Table 7. Number of partners in Kolarctic ENI CBC projects by partner type and country.

	Finland	Norway	Russia	Sweden	Total
Association	2		9		11
Collective			3		3
Education/training centre and school	2	3	1	1	7
Enterprise / SME	10	7	12	4	33
Higher education and research	34	29	39	15	117
Local public authority	1	2			3
National public authority	12	4	8	2	26
Regional public authority	14	8	11	5	38
Total	75	53	83	27	238

The share of different types of project partners varied slightly amongst the participating countries. In Sweden, the share of higher education and research institutions is above the average, whereas in Finland and previously Russia it is lower than the average. The share of regional public authorities as project partners is noticeably high in Finland and Sweden (Table 8).

Table 8. Share of partners in Kolarctic ENI CBC projects by partner type and country.

	Share of Finnish Partners	Share of Norwegian Partners	Share of previous Russian Partners	Share of Swedish partners
Association	3 %		11 %	
Collective			4 %	
Education/training centre and school	3 %	6 %	1 %	4 %
Enterprise / SME	13 %	13 %	14 %	15 %
Higher education and research	45 %	55 %	47 %	56 %
Local public authority	1 %	4 %		
National public authority	16 %	8 %	10 %	7 %
Regional public authority	19 %	15 %	13 %	19 %

4. Views of the programme organisation and strategic partners on the programme

The evaluation's interviews reveal a picture of the programme that the Kolarctic CBC programme have played a significant role in regional development, cross-border cooperation, and addressing environmental concerns. This despite facing challenges from geopolitical shifts and the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were a sample of representatives from the programme's Managing Authority and Monitoring Committee, representatives of the programme's branch offices in Sweden and Norway, and a representative of the Finnish Government Offices. The informants collectively highlight the achievements, challenges, and future directions for cross-border cooperation in the face of changing international relations and regional needs. Some examples presented below indicate the informants view on:

Relevance: Projects were aligned with the programme area's needs, although the connection between inputs and outputs was inconsistent, partly due to the pandemic and the suspension of cooperation with Russia. The programme highlighting the importance of project quality in addressing regional challenges and opportunities, with emphasis on initiatives like Bridge and Arctic skills for enhancing skilled workforce and vocational training. Projects like environmental initiatives in Pasvik National Park and transport projects between Finland and Russia were highlighted for their impact, though some projects faced challenges due to geopolitical tensions.

Consistency and Result: The programme faced challenges in meeting objectives, due to indicator issues and external disruptions, such as the pandemic. The impact of the programme's closure on regions, particularly Finnmark, and the challenges of finding new partners and adapting to new financing mechanisms. Despite challenges from COVID-19 and the suspension of cooperation with Russia, the programme achieved high goals, notably in areas such as the viability of the Arctic economy and fluent mobility. A shift from smaller "people-to-people" projects to larger research and innovation projects has been noted, impacting the involvement of border communities. Projects under various thematic objectives such as business development, environmental protection, and transport infrastructure show mixed impacts on business but significant environmental and infrastructural achievements.

Regional Impact: The programme facilitated cross-border dialogue and brought together various competencies and experiences, addressing common challenges. The programme also managed to highlight the significance of cooperation and strong partnerships developed through the programme.

Added Value: Cross-border cooperation facilitated by familiarity and administrative understanding among partners.

COVID-19 Impact: The pandemic particularly affected projects focused on employment, prompting a shift to digital meetings. Transition to digital interactions was facilitated by pre-existing relationships among participants, although cultural and linguistic barriers posed challenges. The pandemic initially reduced project activities but was managed effectively over time, with some projects like BRIDGE receiving recognition.

Impact of the Programme Implementation Disruption: The suspension of Russia's participation is seen as a significant setback, although it strengthened connections between Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The event significantly impacted the programme, especially in areas of long-standing cooperation like education and culture in Eastern Finnmark. The suspension of Russia significantly affected the programme, especially in terms of its original cross-border cooperation objectives.

Sustainability of Impacts: Contributions to future activities and interregional cooperation are mentioned, with a suggestion for the Managing Authority to streamline financial administration. The programme is seen as leaving a legacy for future activities and interregional cooperation, with a focus on horizontal principles like environmental sustainability and gender equality. The programme also initiates future activities in the region, with ongoing efforts to find alternative funding sources for continuing cooperation. Before the discontinuation of the programme on the Russian side, Russia's interest in environmental aspects and large infrastructure projects through the Kolarctic programme, highlights the mutual benefits and the programme's importance to Russia.

Cross-border Cooperation and Complementarity: The programme is credited with enhancing cross-border cooperation, which is deemed essential for future regional development. Enhanced through the programme, with future emphasis on maintaining and expanding these collaborations post-project.

5. Project partners' perception of the projects' implementation

In this chapter, the data retrieved from the distributed surveys is presented. The survey was sent out to respondents representing an organization who were part of a participating project in Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020. The purpose of the survey was to gather project partner's viewpoints on implementation and results of the project.

The programme has financed 48 projects. Due to the discontinuation of the programme on the Russian side, only 35 projects received the survey. 22 out of the 35 projects responded, and the general response rate was 40 percent.

The overall impression is that:

- The general satisfaction is high.
- Thematic objective 1 is the most used target for the Kolarctic projects.
- Thematic objective 6 has the highest percent respondents believing that their project contributed to this goal.

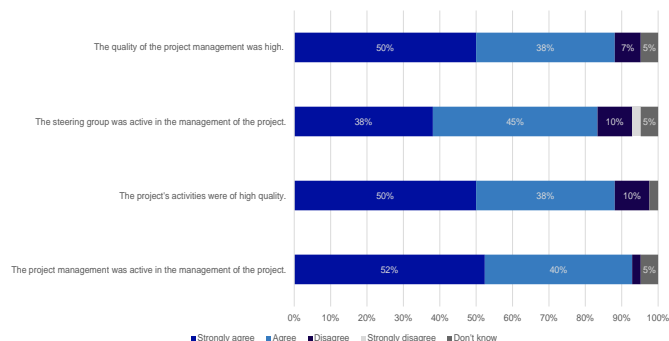
5.1 Project implementation

Our analysis shows that most of the respondents within the Kolarctic projects were happy with the implementation of the project.

Table 9 illustrates that about 90 percent of the respondents claimed that they strongly agree or agree with the statements:

- The quality of the project management was high.
- The steering group was active in the management of the project.
- The project's activities were of high quality.
- The project management was active in the management of the project.

Table 9. Project partners’ perception of the project implementation.



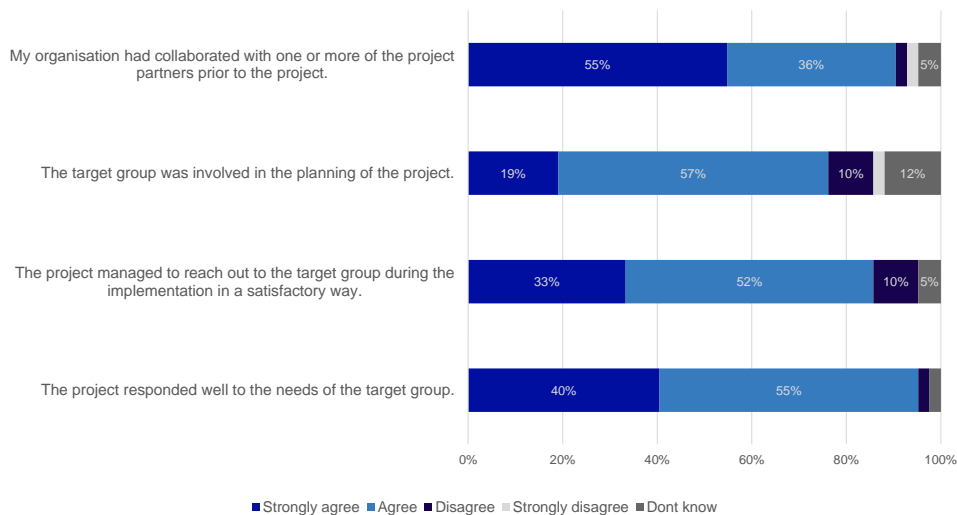
5.2 Organisation, partnerships, and target groups

The overall picture shows that 85-95 percent of the respondents strongly agree or agree that the project was addressing the target group’s needs and succeeded in reaching out to the target group. Most of the project partners were cooperative partners before the Kolarctic project (91%), which indicates the importance of established networks. A lower score is seen in the statement regarding the target group’s involvement in the projects, but a majority still strongly agrees or agrees that the target group were involved (76%). Figure 2 presents the project partners' views on collaboration within the projects and with the target groups based on the following statements:

- My organisation had collaborated with one or more of the project partners prior to the project.
- The target group was involved in the planning of the project.
- The project managed to reach out to the target group during the implementation in a satisfactory way.
- The project responded well to the needs of the target group.

Several of the respondents mention that the pandemic affected several of these areas, since it complicated international cooperation, physical meetings and visiting the target groups to promote the project.

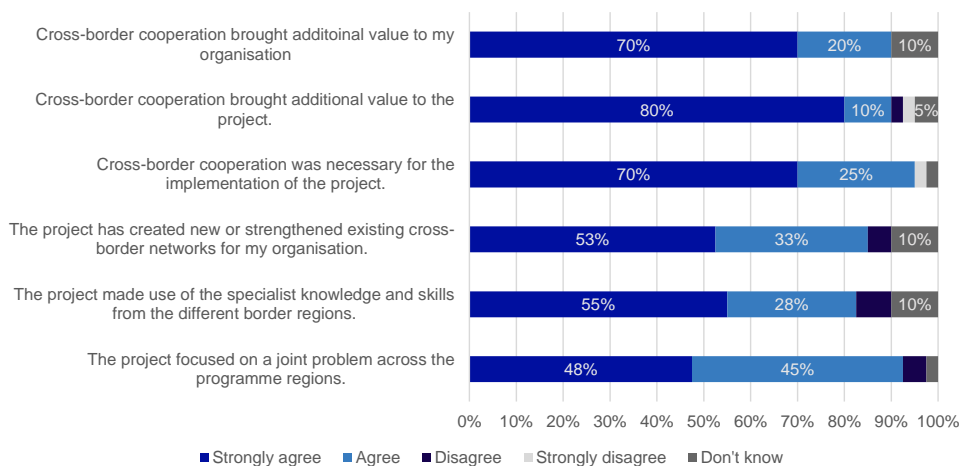
Table 10. Project partners' overall view of collaboration within the projects and with the target groups.



5.3 Cross-border cooperations

The respondents demonstrated an overwhelming positive response to cross-border cooperation. 90 percent of the respondents answered that the cross-border cooperation brought additional value to the project and the organization, while 86 percent claims that the project contributed to strengthened partnerships across the borders. The survey shows that a majority of the respondents (93%) think that the projects targeted common issues that stretch over the national borders, as well as utilized specialists from the neighboring regions (83%). 95 percent claimed that cross-border cooperation was necessary to carry out the project.

Table 11. Cross-border cooperation.



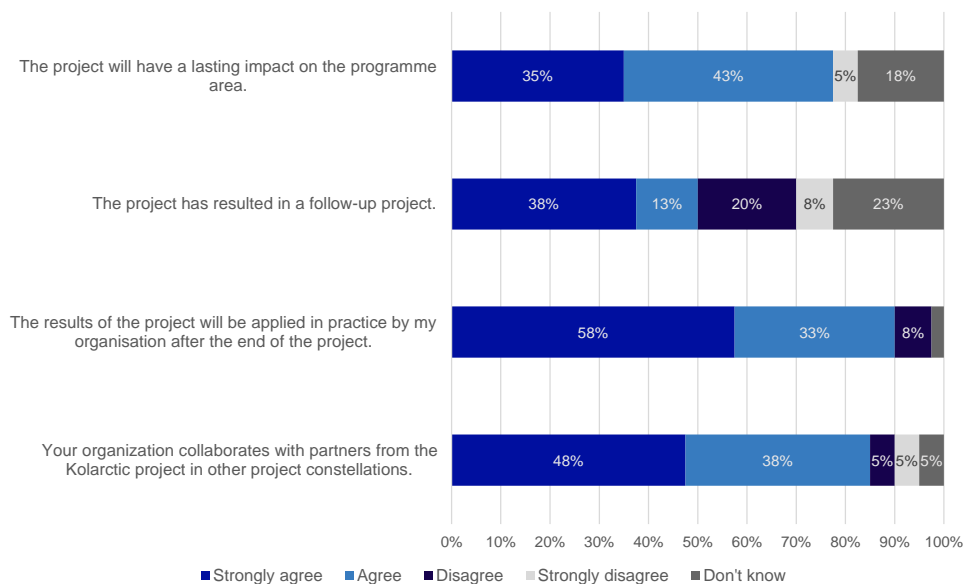
5.4 Thematic objectives

There is a general satisfaction with the extent of the projects' contribution to the thematic objectives. Although, the projects' contribution to the thematic objectives varies to some extent. Thematic Objective 6 and 10 show a very high project contribution. The number of projects which relates to goal varies, but Thematic Objective 7 and 1 are the only ones containing responses with the answer "To a low degree".

5.5 Sustainability and looking ahead

Regarding long term sustainability and future cooperations, the respondents have given an extremely positive response. A high percentage (91%) claim to use the results of the project in their practical work, and 78 percent claims that the project will have a lasting effect in the area. There is a spread of answers in terms of implementing a follow-up project, with about half of the respondents saying that the project will have a subsequent project. The overall response to the statements presented in Table 12 shows a positive outcome regarding how the results are used and the long-term effects of the Kolarctic projects.

Table 12. The projects' contribution to continued collaboration between actors and implementation of the projects' results in a long-term perspective.



6. The programme's contribution to the EU's priority axis and thematic objectives

To evaluate the contribution of the projects to the priority axis and thematic objectives, we have used the Promas projects that have final reports registered. Among these 43 projects, 7 projects originally had a lead partner in Russia.² A further four projects had only one partner in Russia in addition to the lead partners in Sweden, Norway, or Finland. Three of these four projects have also been excluded from the following part of the evaluation. The Raja-Jooseppi BCP project, a large infrastructure project (LIP), has only one Russian partner in addition to Finnish partners. However, we have chosen to study that project as well, even though it departs from the selection principle above. The reason is to be able to capture project activities in TO10 in the evaluation. Overall, the projects' contribution to Kolarctic CBC priority axis and thematic objectives is therefore based on analysis of final reports and interviews with project managers for 33 projects.

Among the Priority Axis 1 projects, 13 target Thematic Objective 1 and 13 target Thematic Objective 2. Six projects target Priority Axis 2, Thematic Objective 7 and one targets Priority Axis 2, Thematic Objective 10.

As presented in the following sections, in addition to contributing to the projects' stated thematic objective, the projects have also contributed to one or more additional thematic objectives, to varying degrees.

6.1 Priority axis 1

6.1.1 Thematic objectives

Thematic Objective 1: Business and SME development

13 of the selected projects in the Kolarctic programme aimed at Priority Axis 1 and Thematic Objective 1. Four of these have a Finnish actor as lead partner, eight a Norwegian and one a Swedish.

² The number of projects described in the project portfolio partners in section 3.2 and the number of projects analysed in the following chapter differ. The difference is due to the fact that in the following chapter only projects registered as approved and closed in Promas are considered.

From interviews with project managers and analysis of the projects' final reports, we find in summary that the 13 projects highlight a comprehensive approach to regional development. The projects' cover various sectors and emphasizes:

- innovation,
- sustainability,
- and cross-border collaboration

to benefit local businesses and the workforce in Kolarctic. Each project contributes to strengthening the Arctic regions' economy and SMEs through a mix of education, innovation, and sustainable resource use. The projects are complementary in that they cover different areas and approaches, but they share a common ground in that they all aim for a more sustainable and economically robust Arctic region.

Table 13. The projects contribution to thematic objective 1 within the priority axis 1.

Project name	Contribution to Thematic Objective 1
"Industrial Tourism: Developing New Destinations in the Arctic"	Improved business prospects in industrial tourism, providing new opportunities for SMEs in the region.
Agroforestry in Barents region	Enhanced commercial potential of agroforestry products, benefiting local farmers, landowners, and SMEs involved in agroforestry.
ArcticSkills	The project significantly enhanced vocational education and training, fostering cooperation between educational institutions and SMEs. This bolstered the vocational skillset beneficial for SME development.
BRIDGE - Barents Region Initiative for Developing Growth and Employability	Advanced cross-border business cooperation and development by fostering innovation and economic growth through partnerships between higher education institutions and SMEs.
Cross-border innovations in Arctic aquaculture	The project enhanced cross-border cooperation and knowledge transfer, particularly in sustainable fish farming practices, improving broodstock management, and developing new fish species for aquaculture.
Development of common approaches to involvement youth into science and technical sphere.	The project indirectly supported the development of technical and scientific skills among youth, enhancing future workforce capabilities for businesses and SMEs.
Facility Management of Residential Buildings in Barents region	Improved facility management practices were developed, potentially benefiting SMEs in the building management sector.
From Idea to Printing of Metal Products	The project enhanced knowledge and skills in 3D printing of metal parts, boosting economic 'fitness' and employment in the regional manufacturing industry, thus benefiting SMEs.
GREEN ICE CAMERA	Developed an interdisciplinary network of film and sustainability experts, supporting sustainable media production standards, which benefits businesses in the media industry.
Ice Operations	The project developed new knowledge and methods for ice operations, aiding industries like oil, gas, and maritime, thus benefiting relevant businesses and SMEs.

New Natural Kolarctic Products SME Assistance	Established a framework for SME assistance, focusing on natural products. The project enhanced business cooperation and opportunities in the region, especially for SMEs dealing with natural products.
Phenomena of Arctic Nature	The project supported sustainable nature-based tourism, enhancing cross-border cooperation and capacity building among tourism businesses.
Treasures from the Northern Nature	The project supported the development and commercialization of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), offering new business opportunities and jobs in the region.

Examples of concrete results from the projects, their long-term impact and their contribution to cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality regarding Thematic Objective 1.

The examples below are based on interviews with project managers with projects focussed on Thematic Objective 1 and their projects' concrete results, cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality. The summary of the results also highlights challenges that may have limited the performance of the projects in the context of COVID-19 and Russia's war against Ukraine.

The **Arctic Layered Intrusions as a Source of Critical Metals for Green Economy (ARLIN)** project focused on preliminary discussions and networking among researchers in the field of critical raw materials, important for green technologies. It successfully facilitated cross-border collaboration, involving partners from Finland, previously Russia, and Norway, enhancing knowledge sharing and research capabilities. The project led to the application and success of a larger Horizon Europe project. Despite challenges from COVID-19 and geopolitical issues, the project achieved its goals without significant impact on its outcomes. It also highlighted gender balance among researchers, ensuring equal representation in presentations and activities. The long-term impact included foundational knowledge for future technology and a strengthened international research network.

The **Industrial Tourism: Developing New Destinations in the Arctic (ITinA)** project aimed to explore and promote industrial tourism in the Arctic region. It focused on cross-border collaboration, particularly impacted by COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions, such as Russia's war against Ukraine. These events posed challenges to direct interactions and travel, affecting project implementation and the potential for establishing deeper regional connections. Despite these challenges, the project managed to conduct workshops and surveys, contributing to awareness and knowledge sharing on industrial tourism. Gender balance was maintained in the project team and activities. The long-term impact included heightened awareness and groundwork for future collaboration in industrial tourism, with sustainability considerations integrated into project surveys and activities.

The **Kolarctic Food Refining CBC project** aimed to enhance cross-border collaboration in the Arctic region, focusing on sustainable food production and

environmental practices. It aimed to promote gender equality within its activities and had to adapt to challenges posed by COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions, particularly Russia's war against Ukraine. These challenges affected travel and direct collaborations but also highlighted the importance of resilience and adaptability in project execution. The long-term impact of the project included stronger networks for sustainable food production and increased awareness of environmental practices in the region, setting a foundation for future initiatives despite external challenges.

The **Phenomena of Arctic Nature (PAN)** project focused on sustainable natural tourism in the Arctic, highlighted excellent cross-border collaboration and adaptation to COVID-19 by shifting to online activities and modifying project plans. It achieved significant results, including new infrastructure for nature observation, workshops, seminars, and pedagogical materials. Gender equality was considered, with a mix of project contacts and target groups. The project was impacted by COVID-19 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, leading to a shift to a bilateral project between Finland and Norway and affecting the final report's inclusivity of Russian data.

The **Salmonid Fish and Freshwater Pearl Mussel-Riverine Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity in the Green Belt of Fennoscandia (SALMUS)** project focused on researching and protecting the Freshwater pearl mussel and its habitats in the Arctic region, emphasizing cross-border collaboration and environmental sustainability. Despite challenges from Russian customs, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine, the project mapped new mussel habitats, determined the age of populations, and fostered cooperation among researchers. It faced difficulties with cross-border cooperation due to the pandemic and geopolitical issues. Despite this, the project succeeded in enhancing knowledge and methodologies for species protection, with a notable effort to educate the public through initiatives like a live webcam. The project's long-term impact includes valuable data for conservation and improved cross-border research methodologies in the counties remaining in the project.

The **ArcticSkills** project aimed to enhance vocational education and training across the Kolarctic region, promoting cross-border cooperation. The project maintained its objectives, focusing on increasing the attractiveness of vocational training and fostering people-to-people cooperation. This despite challenges from COVID-19, which required shifting competitions to remote formats, and the impact of the suspension of cooperation with Russia. The adaptation of activities demonstrates resilience and innovation in project implementation. Long-term impacts include improved vocational education appeal and sustained efforts for cross-border collaboration.

The **Development of common approaches to involvement youth into science and technical sphere (BeTech!)** project aimed at enhancing technological innovation

and entrepreneurship in the Arctic region, with a focus on cross-border collaboration. It sought to bridge the gap between technological advancements and market needs, fostering an environment that supports innovation and gender equality. The project faced challenges due to COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions, which impacted collaboration efforts and project implementation. Its long-term impact includes strengthening the regional innovation ecosystem and promoting sustainable technological solutions, with a continued focus on inclusive participation across genders.

The **Conserving our Atlantic salmon as a sustainable resource for people in the North (CoASal)** project aimed at understanding salmon migration across borders, facing challenges from new legislation and external factors like COVID-19 and the suspension of cooperation with Russia. Despite these, it made significant strides in salmon migration knowledge, crucial for setting management restrictions. The project's cross-border cooperation, particularly in sharing expertise and knowledge, was a key achievement, though limited by geopolitical challenges. Its long-term impact includes enhanced management practices for salmon fisheries and cross-border environmental cooperation.

The **Facility Management of Residential Buildings in Barents Region (FAMARB)** project focused on sustainable building management, emphasizing cross-border collaboration, originally particularly with Russia, to address common climate challenges. It aimed to develop courses for building owners and gather best practices. Despite challenges, including COVID-19 and the suspension of cooperation with Russia, it maintained its goal of strengthening cooperation between regional actors in Finland, Sweden and Norway. The long-term impact includes improved sustainable practices and knowledge sharing, with preliminary results achieved despite the geopolitical and pandemic-related difficulties.

The **Nitrogen compound removal process (NITRGONE)** project aimed for a zero-point analysis to set the stage for a larger-scale project, focusing on environmental research with ties to the SEESIMA project. Despite achieving results that continue to inform new research, the anticipated full-scale project did not materialize due to Russia's suspension. This project underscores the challenges and impacts of geopolitical tensions on cross-border collaboration and long-term research initiatives. The pandemic's context likely added further complexities, although specific impacts weren't detailed in the provided segment.

The **New Natural Kolarctic Product SME Assistance (NNKP-SME)** project targeted tourist operators and aimed to provide natural product producers with technical knowledge. It faced a significant setback when the project website disappeared without a backup. Originally planned as a full-scale project, it was downsized to a micro project due to funding constraints, affecting the project's design and execution. This situation highlights challenges in balancing academic research needs with industry and support actors' participation, influenced by funding structures. The project's

experiences reflect broader issues in project management and cross-border collaboration, including the impact of technical and financial limitations.

The **Supporting Environmental Economic and Social Impacts of Mining Activity (SEESIMA)** project focused on environmental and industrial collaboration in the Kolarctic region, particularly targeting the mining industry for energy savings and engaging with the public and young people. Despite bureaucratic challenges and the heavy administrative burden on private enterprises, it achieved significant outcomes. Outcomes such as financing a PhD student, producing scientific publications, and maintaining an active project website. The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's suspension posed challenges, especially for industry involvement and cross-border cooperation, but the project managed to deliver concrete results and contribute to regional development and cross-border trust.

The **From Idea to Printing of Metal Products (I2P)** project developed the i2am network across borders, increasing knowledge and collaboration in additive technology and 3D printing. Despite cultural differences and Russia's suspension affecting cooperation, the project produced tangible outcomes like “dimspikar” development for firefighting. It faced challenges with design and innovation expertise, limiting broader technology adoption among SMEs. COVID-19 led to digital project management, while the suspension of cooperation with Russia simplified some collaborations but increased workloads. The project's long-term impact includes sustained cross-border contacts and potential for continued additive manufacturing work, despite some companies not yet ready to adopt the technology.

The **Barents Initiative for Developing Growth and Employability (BRIDGE)** aimed to enhance youth employment and economic growth through a joint education platform between Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. It facilitated cross-border cooperation between Norway, Finland, and previously Russia, overcoming challenges from COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions. The project's long-term impact timelines, the project succeeded in enhancing cross-cultural learning and cooperation. The long-term impact also includes a digital platform for Finnish companies to seek student assistance, promoting cross-border collaboration. The project adapted to circumstances by continuing online, but company visits were not possible. It addressed environmental sustainability and gender equality indirectly through its operational model.

The **Cross-border innovation in Arctic aquaculture (ARCTAQUA)** project aimed at enhancing the fish farming industry in the Arctic, focusing on species like lumpfish, char, and whitefish. It achieved notable results, including developing protocols for farmed lumpfish management and identifying genetic markers to improve breeding programme for char and whitefish. Despite challenges, COVID-19 and Russia's suspension affecting some aspects of cross-border cooperation, the project

facilitated strong collaboration between Nordic countries, contributing to regional development and environmental sustainability. The project's outcomes offer long-term benefits for the aquaculture industry, including improved fish farming practices and potential economic growth.

The **Ice Operations (ICEOP)** project focused on ice conditions and potential industrial development in icy landscapes, involving partners from the business, academic, and research sectors across Norway, Sweden, Finland, and previously Russia. It successfully developed university programmes, particularly in Russia before their discontinuation of the programme, and facilitated research leading to a PhD and several scientific publications. The project faced challenges due to COVID-19, affecting field expeditions and collaboration, but adapted by focusing on alternative locations and cancelling some activities. Its long-term impact includes enhanced cross-border cooperation and contributions to regional development with ongoing use of research results, particularly in wind turbine collaboration.

Thematic objective 6: Environmental protection, climate change adaption and mitigation

13 of the projects in the Kolarctic programme aimed at Priority Axis 1 and Thematic Objective 6. Five of these have a Finnish actor as lead partner, six a Norwegian and one a Swedish.

From interviews with project managers and analysis of the final reports, it is evident that all projects under Thematic Objective 6 aim to contribute to environmental protection and climate change action, but they do so through different specific approaches, technologies, and environmental areas.

Table 14. The projects contribution to thematic objective 6 within the priority axis 1.

Name of the project	Thematic Objective 6
Arctic Layered Intrusions as a Source of Critical Metals for Green Economy	Contributed to more environmentally friendly mining practices and sustainable extraction of critical metals.
Capacity Building for Black Carbon mitigation efforts: a roadmap for cross-border activities	A significant focus was on developing approaches for mitigating black carbon emissions, directly contributing to environmental protection and climate change mitigation.
Conserving our Atlantic salmon as a sustainable resource for people in the North; fisheries and conservation in the context of growing threats and a changing environment	Focused on the conservation of Atlantic salmon, contributing to environmental protection and ecosystem sustainability.
Cross-border dialogue and Multi-Use Planning in the Pasvik and Grense Jakobselv catchments	Developed a joint Multi-Use Plan for environmental management, directly contributing to environmental sustainability.
Ecological Restoration of Arctic Rivers	Significant efforts were made in restoring Arctic rivers, enhancing their ecological status. This aligns closely with environmental protection and potentially aids in climate change adaptation.
EXcavator Pro in Ecological ResToration	Focused on ecological restoration of streams, wetlands, and erosion control, directly contributing to environmental protection and climate change mitigation.
Geo-Bio Hazards in the Arctic Region	Direct contributions were made in studying acid sulfate soils and their environmental impacts, aiding in environmental protection and climate resilience.
Green Arctic Building	Promoted environmentally friendly building materials and energy-efficient systems, thereby contributing to reduced greenhouse gas emissions and climate change mitigation.
Nitrogen compound removal processes	The project focused on reducing nitrogen compound emissions, directly contributing to environmental protection and addressing climate-related challenges.
Remediation strategies for ultra-low sulfur fuel oil in winter conditions	Direct contributions were made in developing strategies for ULSFO spill remediation, which is crucial for protecting the marine environment in cold climates.
Salmonid Fish and Freshwater Pearl Mussel– Riverine Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity in the Green Belt of Fennoscandia	Significant focus on conserving salmonid fish and freshwater pearl mussel populations, directly contributing to biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.
Smart Arctic National Parks: Digitization of Waste and Water Management (WWM) Systems in National Parks and Nature Reserves Cross-Border.	Significantly contributed to environmental protection through the implementation of smart WWM systems in parks, improving ecological sustainability.
Supporting Environmental Economic and Social Impacts of Mining Activity	Focused on reducing environmental impacts of mining, contributing to sustainability and climate change mitigation.

Examples of concrete results from the projects, their long-term impact and their contribution to cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality regarding Thematic Objective 6.

The examples below are based on interviews with project managers from projects working towards Thematic Objective 6 and their projects' concrete results, cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality. The summary of the results also highlights challenges that may have limited the performance of the projects in the context of COVID-19 and Russia's war against Ukraine.

The **Green Arctic Building (GrAB)** project aimed to address the climatic challenges of energy-securing buildings in the Kolarctic region, focusing on using local materials and reducing energy consumption. Despite not conducting a follow-up on its impact on sustainable building knowledge among its target groups, the project significantly contributed to academic knowledge through a substantial number of published scientific articles. It also developed an educational module shared across participating universities, enhancing future generations' knowledge in sustainable building practices. The project faced challenges due to COVID-19 and the discontinuation of the programme on the Russian side, which affected planned activities and cross-border cooperation. Russia's suspension was particularly impactful as Russia was involved in constructing test buildings and collecting data. The pandemic delayed the construction of these test buildings, although it did not decisively affect the project's outcome. Long-term impacts include the continued use of the educational module and the strength of the network among project partners, excluding Russian parties. The project aligns with the Kolarctic CBC programme's objectives of environmental sustainability and gender equality and has led to further project applications and potential Horizon Europe funding opportunities. Cross-border cooperation has facilitated knowledge exchange and presented common challenges from different perspectives, although concrete benefits for target groups outside of knowledge sharing have been harder to quantify.

The **Disruptive Information Technologies for Barents Euro-Arctic Region (DIT4BEARs)** project focused on enhancing digital innovation in the Barents region, aiming for long-term impacts such as improved digital connectivity and innovation capacity across borders. It contributed to environmental sustainability through digital solutions that reduce the need for physical travel, thereby lowering carbon footprints. Gender equality was addressed by ensuring inclusive participation and access to digital tools and training for all genders. COVID-19 and Russia's war against Ukraine impacted the project by necessitating adaptations to digital work environments and collaborations, which, while challenging, also demonstrated the project's resilience and the importance of digital innovation in facing such crises.

The **Excavator Pro in Ecological ResToration (EXPERT)** project aimed to improve environmental restoration in waterways by developing educational materials for machinery operators. Key results included educational films to aid in training, facilitating a steep learning curve for new operators. The project fostered cross-border cooperation, particularly between Sweden, Finland, and Norway, enhancing knowledge exchange. COVID-19 caused delays by postponing the project to enable physical workshops. The suspension of cooperation with Russia, initially part of the application phase, limited some planned activities. Long-term impacts include the continued use of educational materials and strengthened networks contributing to environmental sustainability. The project also aimed to align with Kolarctic CBC programme goals, including gender equality, by ensuring inclusive participation across activities.

The **Wood Industry 4.0 (MER)** project focused on the wood industry's value chain, aiming to improve system understanding and technology application. It created a software prototype used by SMEs and LTU, enhancing technology understanding. Despite challenges from COVID-19 and the suspension of cooperation with Russian partners due to geopolitical tensions, the project tried to maintain cooperation digitally. However, the challenges were too severe. The final report included none of the expected results or outcomes, which made the Managing Authority to take the decision on terminating the project and recovering the payments made to the project.

The **Agroforestry in Barents region (AgroFore)** and **Treasures from the Northern Nature (TreNat)** projects contributed to cross-border collaboration, sustainable environment, and gender equality. They focused on diversified farming systems integrating trees and livestock in the Barents region and disseminated results on agroforestry, respectively. They faced challenges such as delayed project activities due to COVID-19, which forced a shift to remote operations, and Russia's suspension, which ended cooperation with Russian institutions. Long-term impacts include the promotion of forest multi-use, development of carbon sinks, and support of biodiversity. While not explicitly an equality project, they benefitted women involved in berry picking and processing. The projects aligned well with Kolarctic's goals, advancing understanding of agroforestry and its practical application.

The **Capacity Building for Black Carbon mitigation efforts: a roadmap for cross-border activities (CB4BC)** project, focused on mitigating black carbon emissions in the Arctic, was largely successful despite challenges. It initiated a road map to guide decision-makers and established productive cooperation between partners. COVID-19 necessitated shifting to remote work, impacting travel and direct contacts, particularly with Russia. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine disrupted final stages and Russian collaboration. Long-term, the project fostered cross-border collaboration, with sustained partnerships and future project potential, but it did not

produce a separate equality plan. The Finnish and Norwegian partners remained engaged due to financial incentives and the opportunity to export expertise.

The **Smart Arctic National Parks'** project which is a micro project experienced a shift in dynamics due to COVID-19 and the discontinuation of the programme on the Russian side. COVID-19 affected travel to Russia, but piloting on the Russian side was successful. However, there were challenges in cross-border benefits, with actions primarily in Russia and no reciprocity. The project had to navigate changes in partnership and the added value of cross-border exchange. Despite these challenges, the project managed to transfer know-how to Russia but struggled with sustainability without financial support. Finnish involvement was minimal, with the university not retaining know-how and the project's outputs not being widely disseminated. The project highlights the need for a clustering project to consolidate and share similar project results more effectively.

6.1.2 Summary of empirical findings regarding priority axis 1, and its thematic objectives

In summary, all projects contribute to the ambition within **Priority Axis 1: Viability of arctic economy, nature and environment and Thematic Objective 1 to strengthen business' and SME's development** in the programme area. All projects do also contribute to the aim within Priority Axis 1 when it comes to improve the *viability of the arctic economy, nature and environment*.

However, the projects do so in different ways and with different direct and indirect impacts on the region. From the final reports and interviews with project leaders the evaluation finds that the main similarities among the projects are:

- **Support for SME development:** All projects aim to improve opportunities for SMEs by providing training, developing new products, or improving production and management.
- **Focus on sustainability:** Projects share a common focus on sustainability, either through eco-tourism, agroforestry, or eco-innovation processes.
- **Knowledge transfer and training:** Most projects include elements of knowledge transfer and training, whether through formal training or the transfer of expertise in specific areas.

Among the projects there are also some main differences:

- **Sectoral focus:** Some projects are focused on specific sectors such as industrial tourism, agroforestry, or aquaculture, while others are more focused on overall skills development or environmental management.
- **Direct vs. Indirect impacts:** Projects such as "ArcticSkills" and "From Idea to Printing of Metal Products" have a direct impact on labour market skills

levels, while others, such as "Ice Operations", have more indirect impacts by developing methods that can benefit industries and companies.

- **Level of innovation:** While projects like "Cross-border innovations in Arctic aquaculture" and "From Idea to Printing of Metal Products" focus on technological innovation and the development of new methods, others aim to improve existing processes or manage natural resources more sustainably.

Regarding concrete results and long-term impacts from the projects, contribution to sustainable environment and gender equality given the situation with COVID-19 and the suspension of Russia the empirical findings show that all projects shared a commitment to cross-border collaboration, sustainable practices, and gender equality. They also faced common challenges due to COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions, requiring adaptability and resilience.

On the other hand, the focus and impact of the projects varied, from environmental sustainability (e.g., SALMUS project on freshwater pearl mussel habitats) to industrial tourism (ITinA project) and technological innovation (BeTech project). The extent to which COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions impacted the projects also varied, with some projects like the ARLIN project achieving their goals without significant impact, while others, like the NNKP-SME project, faced more substantial setbacks.

The **pandemic** posed significant challenges to direct interactions, travel, and project implementation. Projects adapted by shifting to online activities, modifying plans, and demonstrating resilience. For example, the ArcticSkills project shifted competitions to remote formats, and the PAN project adapted its activities to online platforms.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent discontinuation of the programme on the Russian side in several programmes affected cross-border collaborations and project implementations. Projects had to adapt by focusing on partnerships with other countries or modifying their goals. For instance, the PAN project shifted to a bilateral project between Finland and Norway.

Despite the challenges, the projects contributed with **foundational work for future initiatives**, enhanced cross-border networks, and contributed to regional development and sustainability. The continued focus on sustainability, gender equality, and innovative adaptations to external challenges underscores the resilience and potential for continued collaboration and progress in the Arctic region and beyond.

Regarding projects working towards the **Priority Axis 1: Viability of arctic economy, nature and environment** and the **Thematic Objective 6: Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation**. The main similarities which characterise the projects are:

- **Environmental protection:** All projects contribute to the protection of the environment, whether it is reducing emissions, preserving biodiversity, or promoting sustainable practices.
- **Climate change measures:** Each project includes elements aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change, such as reducing emissions and improving climate adaptation.
- **Sustainability:** Projects aim to strengthen the sustainability of different ecosystems and industries, from aquaculture to mining.

The main differences which the data in summary highlights are:

- **Specific Environmental Focus Areas:** Some projects like "Arctic Layered Intrusions" focus on mining and metal extraction, while others like "Conserving our Atlantic salmon" concentrate on the conservation of aquatic species.
- **Technology Development and Methodology:** The projects differ in their technical solutions and methods to achieve their environmental objectives, for example 'Green Arctic Building' uses energy efficient building materials while 'EXcavator Pro in Ecological Restoration' focuses on ecological restoration of aquatic environments.
- **Targeting Specific Groups or Sections:** While some projects directly target the improvement of skills and practices within specific professions or communities, such as "ArcticSkills" or "Smart Arctic National Parks", others aim to impact broader environmental areas such as "Ecological Restoration of Arctic Rivers".

Even if the projects shared common goals related to sustainability, cross-border collaboration, and gender equality, they each faced unique challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions. The resilience shown through adaptations and the continued pursuit of their objectives underscores the importance of these initiatives in addressing regional and global challenges. The long-term impacts, particularly in fostering environmental sustainability, enhancing digital innovation, and promoting gender equality, though varied, contribute significantly to the overarching goals of the Kolarctic CBC programme. The pandemic and geopolitical issues have highlighted the need for flexibility, resilience, and the importance of digital platforms in sustaining project objectives under challenging circumstances.

The main similarities which characterise the projects are:

- **Cross-border Collaboration:** All projects emphasized the importance of cross-border cooperation, facilitating knowledge exchange and addressing common challenges from different perspectives. This collaboration was central to achieving their objectives, albeit affected by geopolitical tensions and the pandemic.

- **Sustainability:** Each project contributed to environmental sustainability, albeit through different means—ranging from energy-efficient building practices and digital innovation to reduce travel, to educational materials for environmental restoration and initiatives to mitigate black carbon emissions.
- **Impact of COVID-19 and Geopolitical Tensions:** The pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine universally impacted these projects, necessitating adaptations to digital platforms, delaying activities, and in some cases, severing collaborations with Russian entities.

While the main differences between the projects are:

- **Project Focus and Outcomes:** The projects varied significantly in their primary objectives and outcomes—from sustainable building practices and digital innovation to environmental restoration, efficiency in the wood industry's value chain, agroforestry, and black carbon emission reduction.
- **Gender Equality:** While all projects aimed to align with gender equality goals, their approaches and success in this regard varied. Some projects explicitly ensured inclusive participation, while others faced challenges in achieving gender balance or did not produce a separate equality plan.
- **Long-term Impacts:** The projected long-term impacts differ, with some projects enhancing academic knowledge and future generations' understanding, improving digital connectivity, fostering environmental restoration, and supporting diversified farming systems. The extent to which these impacts will be realized varies based on project-specific challenges and successes.

6.2 Priority axis 2

6.2.1 Thematic objectives

Six of the selected projects in the Kolarctic programme are aimed at Priority Axis 2 and Thematic Objective 7. Two of these have a Finnish actor as lead partner, three a Norwegian and one a Swedish. The project targeting thematic objective 10 under Priority Axis 2 had only one Russian project partner in addition to the Finnish lead partner. As described in the introduction to the chapter, we have nevertheless chosen to include this project in the analysis.

From interviews with project managers and analysis of the projects' final reports, we can in short conclude that the six projects work together to improve transport and accessibility in the Kolarctic region. Although, they do so through a range of different approaches, from physical infrastructure development to applying innovative information technologies.

Table 15. The projects contribution to Thematic Objective 7 within the Priority Axis 2.

Project name	Thematic objective 7
Arctic Railway Infrastructure in Kolarctic II	The improved railway infrastructure significantly enhanced connectivity and accessibility within the Kolarctic region, facilitating smoother transport of goods and people.
Barents On Time	Improved cross-border bus services enhanced regional accessibility, promoting tourism and cooperation.
Barents Region Transport and Logistics	Significantly improved transport corridors, enhancing regional connectivity and accessibility.
Disruptive Information Technologies for Barents Euro-Arctic Region	The project aimed to enhance the accessibility of the Barents Euro-Arctic region through DIT, improving transport and communication systems indirectly.
Northern Axis - Barents Link	Improved transport infrastructure, enhancing regional accessibility and connectivity.
Reconstruction of the road Kaamanen-Kirkenes	The reconstructed road significantly improved connectivity between Finland and Norway, boosting accessibility in the Barents region.

Examples of concrete results from the projects, their long-term impact and their contribution to cross-border cooperation, environmental sustainability, and gender equality regarding Thematic Objective 7: Improvement of accessibility to the regions, development of sustainable and climate-proof transport and communication networks and systems.

The **Northern Axis – Barents Link (NABL)** project aimed to improve East-West connections in the Barents region and had a focus on studying bottlenecks in these connections. Despite the challenges of a change in project management and the shift to remote operations due to COVID-19, the project managed to produce valuable reports and increase knowledge about the transportation bottlenecks. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine led to complications, notably ending cooperation with Russian partners. Long-term impacts include enhanced cross-border collaboration and contributions to sustainable transport planning. The project also saw significant female involvement, contributing positively to gender equality in its processes. The environmental effects were considered in the surveys, indicating a commitment to sustainability. The project's findings have been used for further development, including the SafeWind micro-project and the continuation with the New North project.

The **Arctic Railway Infrastructure in Kolarctic (ARINKA II)** project aimed to make railway operations in the High North more robust against climate challenges and to increase the capacity for ore transport. It facilitated cross-border cooperation between Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and indirectly with Russia. The project

delivered state-of-the-art solutions for railway operation challenges, including a best practice compilation and a literature review on railway monitoring. COVID-19 impacted the project by preventing travel and the final seminar. The Russian war against Ukraine led to a halt in cooperation with Russian partners and affected follow-up activities. The expected long-term impacts include enhanced cross-border cooperation and contributions to sustainable transport. Gender equality and environmental sustainability were embedded in the project's activities. The continuation of academic partnerships indicates sustained cross-border collaboration between the Nordic partners, despite geopolitical challenges.

The **Barents On Time (BoT)** project aimed to enhance cross-border transportation efficiency. Key outcomes include a central website for regional travel information and an emergency response plan distributed at border stations. The project adapted to COVID-19 by moving to remote operations, but interactions with Russian partners were challenged due to technical preferences and later geopolitical tensions. The project's continuity is ensured at least until 2025, fostering ongoing cross-border collaboration among the countries that are still participating in the programme. The project addressed environmental sustainability and gender equality in line with Kolarctic CBC programme objectives. Despite the geopolitical situation, the website remains active, maintaining regional travel support.

The **Reconstruction of the road Kaamanen-Kirkenes (ROKK)** project focused on improving the Kaamanen-Kirkenes road, a key East-West corridor between Norway and Finland. The project enhanced safety by removing dangerous curves and widening the road. Although, the pandemic, geopolitical tensions along with Russia's suspension caused some delays. The delays have been mostly due to procurement processes, which had to be implemented several times since prices of works had got higher since the project preparation phase. The prices of the offers did not fit to the project budget, and the project had to rearrange the tender. The project's achievements include better road safety and winter maintenance, ongoing cooperation between Norway and Finland, and improved regional connectivity. It's also noted that the upgraded road has gained importance from a defence perspective. Despite challenges, the project has led to further collaborations, including discussions on a new border bridge and continued improvements on the Norwegian side. Gender equality and environmental sustainability were considered throughout the project's lifecycle.

Thematic objective 10: Promotion of border management and border security, mobility and migration management

The **Raja-Jooseppi BCP project** was listed in the Kolarctic programme document as one of the large infrastructure projects (LIP), which could be awarded directly without a call for proposals. These LIPs were identified as crucial investments for east-west connections and cross-border logistic corridors for improving the

accessibility and development of the programme area. The Raja-Jooseppi BCP project was considered as a priority because the border crossing infrastructure did not meet the standards and requirements set by the Finnish authorities for safe and smooth customer service and border control. Furthermore, the old border crossing building had mold damage, and it was thus closed due to the health risks it posed. The border crossing procedures were conducted in temporary barracks. Other development needs in the Raja-Jooseppi BCP were related to traffic safety and improvement of border security.

The project included the building of the new customs and border control building, creating new traffic management arrangements including lane check area with roof structure, lane check facilities (booths) and facilities and facilities for further measures (second line) as well as all border control technology for border checks, border surveillance and customs control. Furthermore, a fixed outdoor spectrometric radiation portal monitor was installed, which serves as secondary inspection tool for heavy traffic. The project started in March 2019, and it was prolonged three times. The construction work for the new border crossing station building were completed in 2020, and the radiation detection and monitoring system equipment was installed in the same year. The civil construction works were finished in 2021 and landscaping works in 2022. The traffic management equipment and the border security installations were made in 2021. The delays in the project were caused by the problems of delivery and installation of customs equipment (automatic number plate recognition), which was finalized in the first part of 2023.

6.2.2 Summary of empirical findings regarding priority axis 2, and its thematic objectives

The projects highlighted focus on improving regional accessibility and connectivity in the Kolarctic region, each through different means. Railway infrastructure and reconstructed roads directly improved physical transport for goods and people between regions, in particular Finland and Norway. Cross-border bus services and transport corridors also improved accessibility, with added benefits for tourism and cooperation. In contrast, the DIT4BEARS project indirectly enhanced accessibility by improving digital infrastructure, which supports transport and communication systems. The similarity across these projects lies in their shared goal of enhancing connectivity within the Barents region, while the differences lie in their methods—some through physical infrastructure and others through digital innovation.

In summary, the projects contribute to **Priority Axis 2** focus on Fluent mobility of people, goods and knowledge and **Thematic Objective 7**: Improving accessibility to the regions, developing sustainable and climate-proof transport and communication networks and systems and **Thematic Objective 10**. The projects do so in some

common ways, but also in some different ways. The main similarities among the projects are:

- **Improved Accessibility:** All projects contribute to increasing accessibility and improving transport opportunities in the Kolarctic region.
- **Improving Infrastructure:** Projects include elements of building or improving physical infrastructure such as railways and roads.
- **Promoting Regional Connections:** Each project contributes to strengthening regional connections and facilitating cross-border mobility, supporting trade and cooperation.

While the differences between the project are characterised by:

- **Means of transport:** Some projects such as "Arctic Railway Infrastructure in Kolarctic II" and "Reconstruction of the road Kaamanen-Kirkenes" focus on specific means of transport (rail and road), others such as "Barents On Time" address improvements in public transport via bus.
- **Direct vs. Indirect Effects:** "Disruptive Information Technologies for Barents Euro-Arctic Region" differs by indirectly improving transport and communication systems via digital technologies, compared to the other projects that have a more direct impact on infrastructure.
- **Specific Geographical Focus:** Some projects, such as "Reconstruction of the road Kaamanen-Kirkenes", have a clear geographical focus that improves connections between specific places or countries, while most others have a more general geographical focus.

Regarding concrete results and long-term impacts from the projects, it is evident that there has been a contribution to sustainable environment and gender equality. Given the situation with COVID-19 and the suspension of cooperation with Russia, the projects managed to collectively contribute to a more connected, sustainable, and equitable Barents region. All the projects demonstrate resilience in the face of operational and geopolitical challenges. Their continued emphasis on cross-border cooperation, despite such challenges, underscores the importance of regional collaboration for achieving long-term sustainability and equality goals. Similarities between the projects are:

- All projects focused on enhancing cross-border cooperation and connectivity, with efforts to adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions.
- Environmental sustainability and gender equality were common themes, reflecting an integrated approach to social and ecological concerns.

- The projects faced and overcame challenges related to remote operations and geopolitical tensions, particularly Russia's war against Ukraine, affecting cooperation with Russian partners.

The differences noted in the data are:

- Some projects were more directly impacted by the shift to remote operations and the cessation of cooperation with Russian partners due to geopolitical tensions but to varying extents.
- Some projects had a strong emphasis on research and development of best practices, while others focused more on practical infrastructure improvements and operational efficiency.
- The impact on cross-border cooperation varied. Some projects highlighted sustained collaboration despite geopolitical challenges, other projects emphasized specific improvements in terms of for example infrastructure and transportation planning.

7. Specific-, common output- and result indicators

The Kolarctic programme contribute to specific objective indicators (SOI) and common objectives indicators (COI) related to the EU's European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The SOI are measured with specific objectives indicators (SOI) for the Kolarctic programme. The common objectives indicators (COI) are indicators equal for all ENI programmes, but the Kolarctic programme has chosen the indicators that suit their needs. The results of the Kolarctic programme are related to the programme's thematic objectives and measured with result indicators (RI). The results of the projects are central to the overall performance of the programme given that the projects' contributions to the SIs and COIs affect the RIs of the programme as a whole.

The Kolarctic programme consist of many projects, highlighting their achievements against set targets in specific and common output indicators. The projects range in focus from agroforestry and aquaculture to technical and environmental initiatives across the programme area. In summary the project outlines successes in areas like:

- cross-border cooperation,
- gender participation,
- SME engagement, and environmental actions,

Alongside challenges such as:

- engaging young entrepreneurs but also
- meeting certain targeted thematic outcomes stated in the projects.

The projects' results demonstrate the Kolarctic programme's overall comprehensive effort towards improving Arctic operations, safety, efficiency, and environmental compatibility through various cross-border collaborations and innovations.

The projects of the Kolarctic programme have on an aggregated level contributed to the RIs given that the projects have to a high degree delivered towards the set of SIs and COIs and that there is a logical link between the SIs, COIs and RIs. However, the contribution of projects to certain SIs and COIs varies and, in some cases, it has been difficult to clearly identify how projects have contributed to the programme's RIs.

7.1 Specific output indicators

Projects under priority axis 1 Viability of the Arctic economy, nature and environment including projects under TO1. Enterprise and SME development, TO6. Environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation, TO7. Improvement of accessibility to the regions, development of sustainable and climate – proof transport and communication networks and systems and TO10. Promotion of border management and border security, mobility, and migration management overall steer towards several SOIs.

The SOIs targeted by the projects are:

- SOI 1 Number of participating institutions/organizations cooperating across borders for viability of Arctic economy, nature and environment.
- SOI 2 Number of participating young entrepreneurs/SMEs cooperating across borders for business cooperation and development.
- SOI 1.1 and SOI 1.2 Number of males, number of females (working in the project / CBC cooperation).
- SOI 3 Number of participants in cross-border activities implemented by projects, enhancing the culture and/or traditional livelihoods of indigenous people.
- SOI 4 Population benefiting from cross-border activities in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions.
- SOI 5 Number of participating institutions/organizations cooperating across borders.
- SOI 5.1 and SOI 5.2 Number of males, number of females (working in the project / CBC cooperation).
- SOI 6: Population covered by developed transport and communication networks as the direct consequence of the Programme support, number of persons.
- SOI 7 Number of participants in cross-border activities implemented by projects improving the border management and border security, mobility, and migration management.

The projects' final reports illustrate a broad spectrum of achievements and challenges across projects within the Kolarctic region. Although there is a common thread of success in gender inclusivity and institutional cooperation, the engagement with young entrepreneurs and the achievement of specific thematic objectives varies. These differences highlight the diverse focus areas and operational challenges faced by projects, underscoring the complexity of implementing regional development and sustainability initiatives in the Arctic.

The projects' final reports indicate that many projects **successfully** met or exceeded their targets in terms of institutional cooperation, gender participation (males and females involved), and engagement with enterprises. At the same time several projects **struggled** to meet targets related to engaging young entrepreneurs/SMEs.

Similarities among most projects are:

- **Gender Participation:** A common achievement across many projects was exceeding targets for male and female participation, indicating a strong focus on gender inclusivity.
- **Institutional Cooperation:** Most projects reported successful cross-border cooperation between institutions and organizations, highlighting a shared goal of fostering collaborative networks.
- **Environmental Focus:** Projects aimed at environmental sustainability and monitoring often met or came close to meeting their targets, reflecting a collective emphasis on ecological concerns in the Arctic region.

While the most common differences between the projects' 'fulfilment of the SOI:s can be derived from:

- **Engagement with Young Entrepreneurs/SMEs:** There was a notable variance in success levels where some projects did not meet their targets for engaging young entrepreneurs/SMEs.
- **Thematic Goals:** The fulfilment of thematic goals varied significantly between projects, with some focusing on technological innovation and others on environmental sustainability or industrial growth. This reflects the diverse objectives that projects aimed to achieve within the Arctic region.
- **Project-Specific Challenges:** Each project faced unique challenges, such as operational difficulties, which affected the achievement of certain indicators. For instance, practical tests in oil spill response and safer Arctic cruise ship tourism.

7.2 Common output indicators

The review of COIs across projects highlights a collective effort towards enhancing enterprise engagement and environmental sustainability within the Kolarctic region. While there are notable successes, the variation in achieving these common output indicators underscores the diverse challenges and operational realities faced by the projects. The shared focus on engaging enterprises and addressing environmental issues, alongside the differences in target fulfilment, illustrates the dynamic landscape of Arctic cooperation and development projects.

The COIs targeted by the projects are:

- COI 2 Number of enterprises substantially and actively involved in projects as final beneficiaries.
- COI 16 Surface area (km²) covered by improved shared environmental monitoring capacity or joint monitoring actions.
- COI 17 Number of persons actively participating in environmental actions and awareness raising activities.
- COI 27 Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads, km.
- COI 29 Number of additional ICT based tools developed supporting cross-border cooperation.
- COI 35 Number of border crossing points with increased throughput capacity.
- COI 36 Increased throughput capacity of private cars on land border crossing points.
- COI 38 Increased throughput capacity of persons on land border crossing points.

Similarities across the projects are:

- **Engagement of Enterprises:** A common achievement across several projects was the successful involvement of enterprises, which is crucial for the practical application of research and innovations developed through the projects.
- **Environmental Focus:** Projects that included environmental monitoring and awareness as part of their objectives showed a shared commitment to sustainability, even though the extent of success varied.

While the differences are characterised by:

- **Extent of Success in Meeting Environmental Targets:** There was significant variability in how well projects met their environmental objectives. Some projects excelled in improving environmental actions and awareness, while others struggled to achieve their set targets.
- **Operational Challenges:** Projects faced diverse challenges that affected their ability to meet COI targets. These challenges ranged from logistical difficulties to engaging specific beneficiary groups, such as SMEs, reflecting the complex nature of implementing cross-border and interdisciplinary initiatives.

Result indicators

Defined RIs measure the broader societal impact of priorities and correspond with the expected results of the programme. They span beyond the direct beneficiaries of the support and cover a wider group of society. Defined result indicators to a certain extent are affected by the outputs of the programme, but in general, they are also affected by other external factors that lay beyond the activities of the programme. There is a causal link between the SOIs, COIs and the RIs, meaning that changes in the SOIs and/or COIs exert effect on the corresponding RIs.

The RIs targeted by the programme are:

- RI1 Expert panel statement on the cooperation between economic and environment fields within common interest.
- RI2 Number of young people employed in the programme area.
- RI3 Electricity production in GWh of facilities using renewable energy and energy efficient solutions.
- RI4 Number of synchronized interregional practices on the example of oil spill response system.
- RI5 Expert panel statement on the East West Transport Corridor and communication services.
- RI6 Estimation of tourism flows in the programme area.
- RI7 Estimated travel time on the reconstructed or upgraded roads.
- RI8 Qualitative survey regarding quality of ICT services/infrastructure, conducted among a sample of population in the programme area.
- RI9 Annual number of private cars crossing the border as a ration to number of customs personnel directly employed at the border crossing points.

The summaries from the project's final reports highlight that the projects have made significant contributions towards environmental sustainability, economic-environmental cooperation, infrastructure improvement, and cross-border cooperation. These initiatives have focused on promoting sustainable development, enhancing vocational education, supporting SMEs, improving living conditions, and fostering environmental governance. There is a clear emphasis on technological advancements to improve management practices, indirectly supporting broader objectives in economic, environmental, and infrastructural development.

However, the projects' final reports lack detailed information on the direct impacts of these projects in certain specific areas related to the RIs, notably renewable energy production, tourism flow estimation, specific transport corridor assessments, and employment outcomes for young people. While the efforts towards environmental restoration, infrastructure development, and enhancing border crossing efficiency

are evident, the lack of detailed contributions in the specified RIs show a gap in direct outcomes or documentation thereof.

In the following, we summarise the projects' contributions to RIs from the projects' final reports.

Expert Panel Statements and Cooperation Between Economic and Environment Fields

Several projects showed significant efforts in integrating economic and environmental considerations, particularly through the development and testing of agroforestry concepts, which aim to enhance forest versatility and biodiversity, thereby supporting environmental sustainability. Most of the projects in the programme targeting RI1, the most influential of the projects are:

- The **Arctic Layered Intrusions as a Source of Critical Metals for Green Economy** project aimed to refine ore-genetic models for layered intrusions hosting critical metals, important for the green economy. This involved collaboration across borders to enhance efficiency in exploration and mining, thus contributing to environmental sustainability and economic viability.
- The project on **Capacity Building for Black Carbon Mitigation** focused on developing a roadmap for cross-border activities to mitigate black carbon emissions, enhancing cooperation and communication among stakeholders across borders, thus addressing both economic development and environmental sustainability.
- The project **Facility Management of Residential Buildings in the Barents Region** aimed to enhance the efficiency of residential building management, focusing on energy performance, and living conditions in northern climates, which indirectly contributes to economic and environmental cooperation by optimizing building operations for better sustainability.
- The **EXcavator Pro in Ecological Restoration** project aimed at creating a restoration network for the Barents region, focusing on educational materials for environmental restoration, thereby directly addressing environmental sustainability and cross-border cooperation.
- The **From Idea to Printing of Metal Products** project aimed to develop comprehensive knowledge on 3D-printing of metal parts to enhance the economic 'fitness' of the regional manufacturing industry. This endeavor was seen as a key factor for economic development and environmental sustainability, promoting employment and attractiveness of the region, particularly for the younger generation.
- The **Industrial Tourism: Developing New Destinations in the Arctic** project developed an understanding of the potential for industrial tourism, fostering cooperation and exchange of ideas for business development within

the Barents region, which indirectly supports economic and environmental collaboration.

- The **Cross-border dialogue and Multi-Use Planning in the Pasvik and Grense Jakobselv catchments** project focused on sustaining and improving the environmental state in its catchment areas, fostering cross-border cooperation for environmental governance. It produced a new joint Multi-Use Plan for Pasvik and Grense Jakobselv, including a programme of Measures (PoM) for 2021-2030.
- The **New Natural Kolarctic Products SME Assistance** project aimed to support SMEs by improving access to development, testing, and analysis services, and addressing regulatory requirements across the Kolarctic countries.
- The **Ecological Restoration of Arctic Rivers** project focused on restoring altered watercourses in the Arctic, improving ecological status and enhancing river habitats. It demonstrates a significant cross-border effort involving multiple countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway, and initially Russia) aimed at environmental sustainability.
- The **Remediation strategies for ultra-low sulfur fuel oil in winter conditions** project aimed at developing efficient and environmentally sound strategies for dealing with oil spills in Arctic conditions, showing a concerted effort across borders to address environmental sustainability in the context of economic activities.
- The **Smart Arctic National Parks** project targeted the digitisation of waste and water management in Arctic parks, showcasing a collaboration between environmental conservation and economic activities by implementing Smart/IoT solutions for better park management.
- The **Wood Industry 4.0** project aimed to innovate the wood industry through digital solutions like blockchain for timber tracking, demonstrating a synergy between environmental sustainability and economic advancements in the timber supply chain. The project faced too many challenges, delivered no results and it was terminated by the Managing Authority.

Number of Young People Employed in the Programme Area

Specific data on employment outcomes for young people resulting directly from the projects was not detailed in the final reports. However, the initiatives likely contributed to enhancing employability through educational and research activities. While specific figures for young people's employment directly resulting from these projects were not detailed, there were indirect contributions through the focus on vocational skills competitions in for example the ArcticSkills project, which aimed to improve vocational education outcomes and thereby potentially increase employability.

Electricity production in GWh of facilities using renewable energy and energy efficient solutions This area did not see direct contributions from the projects outlined. The focus was rather on sustainable practices in agroforestry and infrastructure improvements, without specific mentions of renewable energy production enhancements.

Synchronised Interregional Practices on Oil Spill Response System

There was no specific mention of contributions to synchronised interregional practices regarding an oil spill response system within the provided for most of the final reports. However, the "Remediation strategies for ultra-low sulfur fuel oil in winter conditions" project focus on developing oil spill remediation strategies under Arctic conditions indicates a synchronised approach to environmental protection and spill response, enhancing interregional practices in this critical field.

Expert Panel Statement on the East West Transport Corridor and Communication Services

The final reports show different contributions towards RI5. For example:

- **The ArcticSkills** project aimed to address some aspects of cross-border cooperation and could potentially impact transportation and communication service improvements indirectly.
- The **Barents On Time** project contributed to improving cross-border public transport, which could indirectly enhance the East West Transport Corridor and communication services by facilitating more efficient and convenient cross-border transport and establishing a solid platform for cooperation.
- **The Disruptive Information Technologies for Barents Euro-Arctic Region** project aimed to improve the quality of regional services in transport and communication systems. Although specific to the East West Transport Corridor, it contributed to enhancing transport and communication infrastructures, which could indirectly impact the corridor's efficiency. While direct contributions to the East West Transport Corridor and communication services were not explicitly mentioned.
- The **Facility Management of Residential Buildings in the Barents Region** project focused on optimising building operations and improving living conditions, which could indirectly enhance infrastructure and communication services in the broader context of urban management and development. While not directly addressing the East West Transport Corridor, the project contributed to regional development, which could indirectly support improvements in transport and communication infrastructure through enhanced regional cooperation and development of new industries.
- **The Raja-Jooseppi BCP development and reconstruction; traffic arrangements, buildings, and technology** project enhanced cross-border mobility and safety through the development of an up-to-date border crossing

point. This could indirectly support the East West Transport Corridor by improving border crossing efficiency and infrastructure.

- **The Reconstruction of the road Kaamanen-Kirkenes** project as well as the Raja-Jooseppi BCP development and reconstruction; traffic arrangements, buildings and technology project contribute to the development of the East West Transport Corridor by improving road safety, reliability, and border crossing efficiency, which indirectly supports communication services through enhanced mobility and connectivity. to the East West Transport Corridor, its focus on enhancing the timber supply chain's efficiency could indirectly benefit transport and communication infrastructures.

Estimation of Tourism Flows in the Programme Area

Direct contributions or estimations regarding tourism flows were not detailed in the final reports. The **Industrial Tourism: Developing New Destinations in the Arctic** project focused on the other hand enhancing tourism, which potentially influences tourism flows by creating new attractions and destinations within the programme area.

Estimated Travel Time on Reconstructed or Upgraded Roads

The projects did not provide specific details on the estimated travel times on reconstructed or upgraded roads within the programme area. However, a number of projects focused on actions that are likely to have an impact on travel times.

- The **Barents On Time** project focused on public transport improvements rather than directly on road infrastructure, so there were no contributions to estimated travel times on reconstructed or upgraded roads. The Barents On Time project developed ICT tools, such as a website with information about cross-border public transport, and conducted consumer research among passengers and bus operators. This contributes to understanding and potentially improving the quality of ICT services/infrastructure in the programme area which may affect the time to travel in general.
- The **Raja-Jooseppi BCP project development and reconstruction; traffic arrangements, buildings and technology** project involved the construction and upgrade of border crossing facilities, indirectly affecting travel times by enhancing efficiency at the border crossing.
- The **Reconstruction of the road Kaamanen-Kirkenes** project specifically aimed at upgrading road infrastructure, likely reducing travel times and improving safety for road users, though specific estimates were not provided.

Qualitative Survey Regarding Quality of ICT Services/Infrastructure

There were efforts towards improving cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange, particularly in the field of railway infrastructure, which may indirectly contribute to enhancing ICT services and infrastructure, yet no direct qualitative survey findings were found in the final reports. Some examples are:

- As stated above the **Barents On Time** project developed ICT tools, such as a website with information about cross-border public transport, and conducted consumer research among passengers and bus operators. This contributes to understanding and potentially improving the quality of ICT services/infrastructure in the programme area.
- The **Disruptive Information Technologies for Barents Euro-Arctic Region** project developed ICT tools supporting cross-border cooperation. This project aimed at enhancing ICT infrastructure and services through the development of innovative technology solutions, indirectly contributing to the improvement of ICT services and infrastructure in the programme area.
- Contributions towards ICT services or infrastructure improvements were mentioned in the context of the **Raja-Jooseppi BCP development and reconstruction** project, which included the development of ICT-based tools supporting cross-border cooperation.
- The **Raja-Jooseppi BCP development and reconstruction; traffic arrangements, buildings and technology** project included the development of ICT-based tools supporting cross-border cooperation, which can be seen as an indirect contribution to the improvement of ICT services/infrastructure.
- The **Smart Arctic National Parks** project's implementation of Smart/IoT solutions for waste and water management indirectly contributes to improving ICT services/infrastructure within the parks, offering a precedent for technology-driven environmental management.

Annual Number of Private Cars Crossing the Border

The projects did not specifically address the annual number of private cars crossing the border in relation to the number of customs personnel employed at border crossing points. While specific data on the annual number of private cars crossing the border in relation to customs personnel was not provided, the **Raja-Jooseppi BCP development and reconstruction** project aimed to increase the throughput capacity at border crossing points, which could indirectly influence this ratio by enhancing border processing efficiency.

8. Recommendation from the evaluation of Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020

Usually when a programme is evaluated, recommendations are made to the programme organisations regarding how the organisation can improve its work in the next programme period. Since the Kolarctic CBC programme has ended, there is no need for such recommendations. Considering the evaluation's conclusions on the programme's assessments in chapter 2 (based on the empirical data presented in other chapters) we would instead like to make recommendations on what actors should consider continuing developing in order to promote development in the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 region. Our recommendations are also relevant for cross-border programmes in general, who operates in the post-2022 period.

8.1 Ensure support for continued cross-border and expanded cooperation

The evaluation confirms that the contribution to a strengthened and deepened cross-border cooperation has been a key contribution of the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020, which has added value to the development of Kolarctic region.

To continue developing the initiatives that the actors in the programme area have produced in cooperation within the Kolarctic region 2014-2020, it is important that continued funding support is available. Opportunities for the actors to continue cooperation, are largely provided within Interreg Aurora. It is important to inform and encourage cooperation partners from Kolarctic 2014-2020 to actively turn to Interreg Aurora. Doing so will help to realise new projects and continue to deepen the project results that previous projects within Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 have made possible.

For future initiatives, in interregional programmes in particular, the evaluation would recommend the need to further broaden the partnerships to include new actors. This against the background of not getting stuck in old ruts, which is can easily become the case when the same actors have been cooperating for a long time. Another way to ensure innovative ideas for the project partnerships is to ensure, as with a majority of the projects in Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020, that the target group for the projects is already included in the dialogue on the design and content of the projects at the planning stage.

8.2 Ensure a more even distribution of countries' responsibilities as lead partners in the programmes

Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 shows an uneven distribution between the project owners across the participating countries, where Sweden has had significantly fewer lead partners than Finland, but especially in comparison to Norway.

The evaluation finds no obvious reasons why the distribution of lead partners between countries varies. The absence of a border between Sweden and Russia may be a tentative explanation. Differences in budget allocation within the programme between countries may be another. We recommend that the managing authority for cross-border programmes continue to strengthen the analysis of cases where project ownership varies to the extent that has been the case in Kolarctic 2014-2020. To continuously analyse what impact this may have on the effectiveness of the programme and implement measures to redress the imbalance, if a risk of ineffective implementation is identified.

The evaluation wishes to emphasise that although the imbalance between the countries' distribution of lead partners in Kolarctic 2014-2020 has been skewed, there is no significant evidence that this imbalance has affected the effectiveness of the programme.

8.3 Highlight the concrete impact of the actions on the key challenges and opportunities in the region

The evaluation assesses that the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 contributed to relevant actions for the Kolarctic region. However, we believe that the focus of a continued development work based on structural needs identified in the programme area should be strengthened. There is reason to steer the regional development work more clearly towards these needs. This in order to make visible how the results of future initiatives are intended to contribute to meeting the challenges and strengthening the opportunities that exist in the Kolarctic region. For this purpose, a clearer analysis, and a more concrete demand from financiers of initiatives regarding the focus of the initiatives is required.

8.4 Need to be more concrete in what programmed actions should achieve

To enable greater consistency between interventions in the Kolarctic region, the various programmes and strategies need to be clearer and more specific about what they

are targeting. Both the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 as well as regional strategies, programmes and working groups where coordination with the Kolarctic programme is possible, describe their need for initiatives very broadly. To highlight links and synergies between different financial instruments and strategies, the governing documents for sustainable development in the region need to concretise their ambitions even more than what is done currently. This applies not only to the Kolarctic programme and the addressed region, but is a recommendation that is applicable to large parts of the cooperation within the EU.

8.5 Develop a qualitative monitoring system

Indicators in the programme are numerous and are set at different levels. Although regional adaptation has taken place for the SOIs, the indicator system is difficult to relate to and use for continuous management of the programme's activities. For cross-border programmes as well as regional programmes, a follow-up system based on qualitative follow-up, rather than today's quantitative follow-up, should be considered.

8.6 Allow for preparedness and flexibility for external events that may affect programme implementation

The Kolarctic programme has contributed to the thematic objectives of the programme. However, external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine have affected the implementation of the programme. The evaluation notes, however, that the programme's projects could still be implemented to a high degree. This was done even with delays and some cancelled activities, which for some projects affected the possible achievement of objectives. Our assessment is, however, that the flexibility shown by the programme organisation has been crucial in mitigating the negative effects of the external events on the programme. We recommend that managing authorities for programme initiatives such as Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 should be open to and prepared for adjustments in project implementation because of external events that affect the initial implementation plan and implementation rate of the projects.

8.7 Need for increased knowledge about future financial tools

Forms of funding to continue building strong cross-border regional networks are essential to maintain the current level of cross-border cooperation in the Kolarctic region, and to develop it further. This requires marketing the available financial tools

within the EU to the region's actors. Also, creating information efforts towards those responsible for financial instruments about the territorial conditions in which actors in the Kolarctic region operate.

8.8 Need to put gender equality in a clearer societal perspective

Overall, the Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 has contributed well towards the horizontal principles of the CBC programmes. However, the evaluation notes that the goal of promoting gender equality should have been addressed to a larger extent, than just ensuring equal partnerships, participation in workshops and communication activities. Our recommendation to cross-border cooperation programmes going forward is to strengthen the requirements for what the projects want to achieve with their gender equality work from a societal perspective.

OXFORD RESEARCH

Denmark
Oxford Research A/S
Falkoner Allé 20
2000 Frederiksberg of-
fice@oxfordresearch.dk

Norway
Oxford Research AS
Østre Strandgate 1
4610 Kristiansand
post@oxford.no

Sweden
Oxford Research AB Norr-
landsgatan 11
111 43 Stockholm of-
fice@oxfordresearch.se

Finland
Oxford Research Oy Fred-
rikinkatu 61a, 6krs. 00100
Helsinki office@oxfor-
dresearch.fi

Baltics/Riga
Oxford Research Baltics SIA
Kr.Valdemara 23-37, k.2
LV-1010, Riga
info@oxfordresearch.lv

Belgium/Brussels
Oxford Research c/o ENSR
5. Rue Archimède
Box 4, 1000 Brussels of-
fice@oxfordresearch.eu