



Europaforum Northern Sweden's position on

European cross-border co-operation in Northern Sweden

- Working document -

The reform of the European Cohesion Policy includes also the Interreg programmes. Cross-border co-operation and Interreg programmes have greatly contributed to Community added-value by stimulating exchanges and contacts between European regions and citizens. They have strengthened local and regional support for that which the EU ultimately stands for, namely the integration of people, culture, knowledge and experience. Europaforum Northern Sweden therefore considers that these initiatives must continue, and welcomes that in its proposal the Commission increases scope for European co-operation within the framework of the future Cohesion Policy.

Against the background of Northern Sweden's experience of Interreg programmes, this document presents a contribution to the debate on future cross-border co-operation in Europe.

Experiences of Interreg programmes in Northern Sweden

1. The east-west cross-border Interreg programmes have enabled and strengthened the historical co-operation that has taken place between Northern Sweden and its neighbouring regions in Norway, Finland and North western Russia. This has contributed to intensification of activities and co-operation in the Barents Region, in Arctic Scandinavia, in the Kvarken Region and Mittnorden. National and regional boundaries have often meant administrative obstacles, which have however been overcome, leading to increased commitment from local and regional interests. In a region characterised by long distances, Interreg co-operation has played a major role in developing infrastructure.
2. The transnational programmes, the Baltic Programme and the Northern Periphery programme have broadened Baltic co-operation, and developed new co-operation projects with Norway, Scotland and Iceland. Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that one of the strengths of the programmes is that they can be adapted to regional conditions, at the same time providing a stimulus for new co-operation.

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3. For Northern Sweden's part, the interregional C programmes have contributed to opening the door to Europe. This is partly a new form of co-operation upon which Northern Sweden is embarking and it is expected to contribute to new influences for regional development, and new interfaces with regions beyond the immediate area.

Kommentar [AO1]: Förtydliga detta – kommersiella nätverk

4. The Saami, the indigenous population of Europe, today live in an area stretching across four countries. Within the framework of Interreg programmes, the Saami in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia have gained an opportunity to jointly develop and strengthen the Saami culture and identity. This has also contributed to strengthening the position of the Saami at national and European level.

Geography of the Interreg programmes

5. Europaforum Northern Sweden wishes to underline the importance of cross-border co-operation and the need for Territorial cooperation programmes to equalize differences between regions and to support the development of free movement in Europe. Northern Sweden emphasises that a continuation is required of cross-border co-operation both at the internal and external borders of the EU.

6. Europaforum Northern Sweden supports maritime borders to be given the same status as land borders, provided they are based on traditional established regional or local co-operation. Within the Interreg III A programme for Kvarken – Mittskandia, a maritime border has been accepted as equal to a land border. Co-operation within Kvarken-Mittskandia functions well and experience gained there speaks for the programme to be retained. The same conditions should therefore be provided for Södra Norrland, which also has long-standing co-operation with Finland.

Objectives of Territorial Cooperation programmes

The three Interreg strands, cross-border (A), transnational (B), and interregional (C) co-operation, should be maintained also in the future, since they fulfil different functions and benefit different aspects of EU common regional development policy.

7. The cross-border Interreg programmes (A programmes) should continue to be given high priority since they have the greatest proximity to, and involve most people in, projects and activities. Europaforum Northern Sweden, in this context, wishes especially to underscore the specific conditions prevailing in northernmost Europe, where extreme sparseness of population and long distances justify border regions covering a large geographic area. This is prerequisite to enable programmes achieving critical mass as regards people, companies, universities and colleges, as well as public sector services.
8. The transnational programmes are expected to gain importance and become of major significance to extended regional thinking in Northern Europe. The concentration of the Interreg III B programmes on the formation of institutions and on planning has previously made it difficult to involve business in these programmes. To encourage the participation of the business community, the B programmes should be opened to initiatives of the type today provided for in the C programmes. This would allow for business co-operation aimed for example to create larger markets for companies in a nearby geographical area such as the Baltic Sea area. Increased focus on networking input, trade development programmes, and business development, as well as collaboration in the fields of culture and youth should be made possible.

9. Europaforum Northern Sweden supports development of transnational programmes towards larger strategic infrastructure investments. These programmes should be decentralised and established in the same way as current Interreg programmes to enable regional interests and the business sector to participate in and influence the aims of programme work.
10. The interregional programmes are seen by Northern Sweden to be innovative and bringing fresh ideas. They constitute an important instrument in enabling strategic co-operation between European players at local and regional levels in implementing the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies. However, initiatives in the C programmes are relatively speaking too small compared to the large number of players required to participate. This limits the scope and aims of the actions in principle to networks and the exchanges of experience. Europaforum Northern Sweden supports the possibility of establishing interregional co-operation within the framework of regional programmes, but at the same time underlines that it is not sufficient and stresses that an instrument corresponding to Interreg III C should be retained.
11. The Barents Region should be the subject of special provision within the framework of Territorial cooperation. Barents co-operation today involves the national and regional levels in the four states of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. This could serve as a platform for the development of a Northern Dimension within the framework of Territorial cooperation programmes and the New Neighbourhood Instrument.
12. The Mittnorden Region, which comprises areas in Norway, Sweden and Finland, is based on co-operation dating back more than 25 years in many sectors and focusing on sustainable development, and should be the subject of special provision within Territorial cooperation in order to realise the development potential of the area.

Management and administration

13. Experiences of the management and administration of the Interreg III A programmes in Northern Sweden are very good. The nearness to the secretariat and decision-making processes has been of crucial importance to the implementation of the programmes. To avoid increased administration and bureaucracy in large programmes, Europaforum Northern Sweden supports the creation of more sub-programmes.
14. The possibility within the framework of the C programmes to set up framework programmes, through for example Regional Framework Operations, is seen as a good model contributing to decentralisation and focusing, and has brought administration closer to the individual project partners. By developing the model, one can create local support and flexibility within common, uniform rules.
15. The design of the Interreg programmes with one fund for all types of action is preferable to the conventional regional Objective programmes. It facilitates administration, increases flexibility in the initiatives and gives scope for greater freedom in regional priorities.
16. One important condition for the success of the Nordkalott Programme and the Kvarken-Mittskandia Programme is that they have their origins and political platform in well-established local political bodies like the **North Calotte Council and**

the Kvarken Council. The active participation of these bodies in the programme management has contributed to positive collaboration between authorities and political bodies. Against the background of these experiences, Northern Sweden would welcome more Territorial cooperation programmes based on established co-operation platforms such as the Barents Council and Mittnorden co-operation.

Kommentar [AO2]: Mitt Skandia / Mitt Norden ?

17. The size of projects within the Interreg programmes should to a greater degree be based on identified needs. Also, administration should be adapted to the size of the programmes and projects to allow strategic choices based on regional conditions to steer the focus.

Legal aspects

18. European co-operation today lacks an overall legal framework for cross-border co-operation. A framework for all the Member States would greatly facilitate the continued operation of existing co-operation projects and above all would facilitate the emergence of new projects. Within an adequate legal framework, decisions on co-operation would be moved to the player level and European integration could be considerably developed. A legal framework to bridge differences in institutional structures would also be needed at the external borders of the EU. Different societal structures often pose obstacles to such co-operation, something that should be addressed in the design and implementation of the Commission's new neighbourhood initiative. Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes the Commission initiative for a completely new legal instrument for cross-border co-operation, but awaits the coming concretisation of its design.
19. Europaforum Northern Sweden sees the need for a common set of regulations for management and administration of Interreg programmes. While flexible systems are desirable, a common view and uniformity are required in regulations. The drafting process must be shortened, and the administrative procedure simplified, since it is perceived as too complicated at present. Harmonisation of the secretariat structures and procedures for administering the programmes would facilitate matters for individual project owners in their contacts with the different secretariats and contribute to a more effective and clear-cut organisation.

The neighbourhood initiative – New Neighbourhood Instrument

20. The Interreg and Tacis programmes constitute the main sources of funding for the EU policy for Northern Europe – the Northern Dimension. Northern Sweden welcomes the New Neighbourhood Initiative and sees considerable possibilities within its framework to develop ongoing co-operation with Northwestern Russia. It is hoped that the difficulties in co-ordinating Interreg and Tacis funding, which have also hindered full utilisation of the Interreg programmes, will be overcome within the framework of a new instrument. Synchronised regulations regarding application periods, priorities within the programmes, deadlines etc., will further facilitate projects. A clearer focus on regional needs, as well as increased commitment from Russian representatives at regional level, are prerequisite to successful implementation of the programmes.