

## Summary report:

Bridge-Building in a Divided High North:  
Perceived socio-political outcomes of the  
intraregional and 'people-to-people'  
initiative, the Barents Cooperation



British Academy Small Research Grant SRG1819\190148

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## Front matter:

**Title:** Bridge-Building in a Divided High North: Perceived socio-political outcomes of the intraregional and “people-to-people” initiative, the Barents Cooperation

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### Abstract:

In light of recently escalating tensions between Russia and Western Europe, this project examines successes and challenges of a long-running bridge-building initiative in the Arctic, the Barents Cooperation. The intraregional initiative was established in the wake of the Cold War with the aim of facilitating both political and social interaction between Russia and Nordic European states; today, the Barents region is a unique example of interconnected decision-making across local, regional, national, and international levels. And with an emphasis on so-called “people-to-people” exchanges, it is an example of how political relations are also social relations. The project focuses specifically on North Norwegian involvement, asking how local and regional policymakers and organisers directly involved with the Barents Cooperation perceive its socio-political effects in the region. In so doing, the project aims to assess not only past successes and challenges but also potentially transferable lessons for the present. Based on 13 interviews with key actors involved in the Cooperation, it is clear that successes include the building of friendships, knowledge, contact, and ‘normalising relations’. In contrast, remaining challenges include wider participation across the region and generations, communicating the Cooperation elsewhere, and specifically fostering business cooperation. The transferable lessons identified by respondents are: the need to invest time, energy, and funding; that it is a generational project; and that the key to success is identifying common ground and shared interests – in spite of other potential differences.

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## Preface and acknowledgements

This report summarises the key findings from a project funded by The British Academy's Small Research Grants, "Bridge-Building in a Divided High North: Perceived socio-political outcomes of the intraregional and "people-to-people" initiative, the Barents Cooperation" (SRG1819\190148).

The project was led by me, Dr Ingrid A. Medby (Oxford Brookes University), from 2019 to 2021.

I would like to thank everyone who generously shared their experiences, time, and insights with me over the course of the research project. I am also very grateful for the warm welcome I received in Kirkenes in February 2020! Not only did I return to the UK with plenty of new knowledge, but also with a sense of a community and many new acquaintances and friends.

As a small research grant, my hope is to continue work on (and in) the Barents region and collaborations with "Barentserne" – and hopefully the post-pandemic future will allow us to meet again off Zoom!

Durham, United Kingdom, April 2021.

Ingrid A. Medby

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## Project summary:

The project was funded by The British Academy's Small Research Grants (SRG1819\190148), starting mid-2019 and running until mid-2021.

In light of recently escalating tensions between Russia and Western Europe, the project examined successes and challenges of a long-running bridge-building initiative in the Arctic, the Barents Cooperation. This is an intra-regional initiative that was established in the wake of the Cold War (1993) with the aim of facilitating both political and social interaction between Russia and Nordic European states; today, the Barents region is a unique example of interconnected decision-making across local, regional, national, and international levels through councils, issue-specific groups, and funded activities. And with an emphasis on so-called "people-to-people" exchanges, it is an example of how political relations are also social relations – emphasising the importance of cross-border contact across all societal sectors.

The project aimed to identify what are considered some of the key outcomes of the long-running Barents Cooperation, in order to assess what can be learnt for the present geopolitical context; and in particular, it aimed to identify successes, challenges, and potentially transferable lessons in a time of heightened tension between Russia and Western Europe. Focusing on local and regional decision-makers and organisers directly involved with the initiative in North Norway, it asked 13 key actors in the Cooperation about perceptions of the results of cross-border engagement in the Arctic Barents region. In other words, the project sought to (1) gain a thorough understanding of successes and challenges of the Barents Cooperation's strategies for intra-regional and international peace; and (2) to explore the effects of "people-to-people" projects, in particular focusing on how personal/professional experiences and encounters may potentially affect and be affected by socio-political relations.

The data showed that key successes include the building of understanding, friendships, increased contact, and knowledge across the borders. This, in turn, likely provides positive effects that extend beyond the specific funded activities of the Cooperation, such as later political involvement and shared practices. In contrast, the main challenges include wider involvement, generating support and interest, specifically business cooperation, and bureaucratic hurdles. Transferable lessons and recommendations for other regions, collaborations, and international relations include the fostering of pragmatic, frequent, and low-level interactions, which in turn facilitate also more difficult conversations.

However, importantly, this is a long-term investment of both time and financial support, and it requires regional ownership and participation over state-led control.

## Background:

Recent years have seen increasing international interest in the Arctic region as a result of rapid environmental and geopolitical change. Although the intergovernmental Arctic Council may be the most high-profile political organisation in the region, Arctic governance arrangements are in practice made up of complex overlapping and interlocking forums for engagement (1). A rich body of scholarly work has been generated on the international relations of the region, but the regional and local decision-making levels have so far attracted less attention, representing an identified gap in Arctic research (2,3).

Among these political forums and cooperation initiatives is the Barents Cooperation, established in Kirkenes, Norway, in 1993 – in the wake of the Cold War and across what had been the Iron Curtain (4,5). It has been described by the Norwegian Government as having facilitated cooperation with Russia and “helped to normalise relations and build confidence across former dividing lines in the north after the dissolution of the Soviet Union” (6). As tensions between Russia and Western European states are once again increasing, including a re-armament of the Barents region, it is timely to again shift focus back to the regional level in order to assess how to avoid the re-emergence of “former dividing lines”.

As a sub-region of the circumpolar Arctic, the Barents region is made up of 14 counties and regional entities across four states: Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The Barents Regional Council includes the three Indigenous peoples of the region: the Sámi, the Nenets, and the Vepsian peoples (7). In addition to this intraregional cooperation, intergovernmental cooperation takes place in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. As the Norwegian county of Finnmark held Chairmanship of the former at the start of the project (until October 2019), and Norway held Chairmanship of the latter throughout (2019-2021), there was a particularly timely opportunity to examine the operation of the multilateral cooperation in this context – from the local to the regional and international – focusing on Norway as a case study.

Commitment to the Barents Cooperation was re-affirmed in the Kirkenes Declaration of 2013 (8); among the highlighted achievements to be further strengthened were “people-to-people” initiatives, which includes e.g. youth programmes, culture and language exchanges, sports tournaments, and arts projects. Considered in conjunction with the multi-level political interaction that takes place between local, regional, national, and Indigenous representatives, the Barents Cooperation presents a unique initiative for peace in a previously divided North (9). However, previous studies engaging with the Cooperation have done so in a different political climate than today; despite the successes identified at

grassroots and regional levels, there is at present a concern that Russian-NATO tensions may spill over to Arctic cooperation (10). There is a risk of cooling governmental relations potentially impacting neighbouring areas in the North, thereby reawakening Cold War-era concerns. It is therefore timely to re-examine the Barents Cooperation initiative in the present political moment: both as affected by and potentially counteracting increasing international hostilities.

## Aims:

This project sought to identify key outcomes of the long-running Barents Cooperation, in order to assess potentially transferable lessons for the present geopolitical context. Focusing on local and regional decision-makers and organisers directly involved with the initiative in North Norway, the study asked 13 key actors what their perceptions of cross-border engagement have meant for the Arctic Barents region. Conceptually, the project also sought to contribute to academic work on “peopling” geopolitics and political practice (11–13) and multi-level and intraregional governance (14); and it built on my previous research on identity and statecraft in the Arctic, which demonstrated the importance of perceptions of community among policy-makers (15).

In short, the aim of the project was to **assess the socio-political outcomes** of a long-running intraregional and “people-to-people” initiative established in the High North in the wake of the Cold War, the Barents Cooperation. By focusing on Norwegian involvement in the Cooperation, and in particular multilateral engagement at local and regional levels, it did so in order **to identify successes, challenges, and potentially transferable lessons** in a time of heightened tension between Russia and Western Europe.

The objectives can be summarised as the following:

- (i) To gain an understanding of successes and challenges of the Barents Cooperation’s strategies for intraregional and international peace.
- (ii) To explore the effects of “people-to-people” projects, in particular focusing on how personal/professional experiences and encounters may potentially affect and be affected by socio-political relations.
- (iii) To subsequently share the project’s findings to participants and relevant stakeholders, with the aim of facilitating a strengthening of Arctic and Barents relations in a time of geopolitical change.



## Research design:

In order to achieve the above objectives, the project focused specifically on the Norwegian context of the Barents Cooperation. In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, directing attention there is of particular relevance due to recent geopolitical developments in the Russian-Norwegian relationship: the latter being an active NATO member state, both currently staging large-scale military exercises in the Arctic region, and sharing a long and recently negotiated oceanic border.

The research process took place in **three stages**, corresponding to the above objectives:

First, policy analyses and literature reviews were conducted, alongside the organising and preparation necessary for subsequent fieldwork. The specific focus was on discourses of cooperation and conflict and how these are presented in relation to the Arctic Barents region. The practical preparations included formal approval from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), risk assessments, and logistical planning. The formal ethical approval process ensured appropriate procedure, including the production of consent-forms, anonymisation procedures for subsequent data-sharing, participant information, and GDPR/privacy notices.

Second, primary data collection took place during a research trip to Kirkenes, North Norway, in February 2020. The method employed there was semi-structured interviews (16–18) with those most directly involved with the everyday running of the Barents Cooperation and its various activities, i.e., primarily The International and The Norwegian Barents Secretariats, both in Kirkenes; and in The Barents-Euro Arctic Council and The Barents Regional Council. The interviews centred on respondents' perceptions of the Cooperation's successes and failures over the years, its current and future challenges, and their own experiences with it as simultaneously representatives and inhabitants of the region (please see Appendix A for the interview topic guide) (19,20). In total 15 interviews were conducted, 13 of which were included in the final dataset; the additional two provided helpful background from adjacent actors. Participants were recruited primarily via contact with The Norwegian Barents Secretariat, and secondarily via The International Barents Secretariat, using a snowball sampling strategy whereby participants were invited to suggest further contacts. The interviews were confidential, but an overview of relevant metadata on respondent demographics is provided in the dataset. Respondents' experience and involvement with the Cooperation differed from newly appointed

to many years, but they were all either currently or previously affiliated with either of the Secretariats<sup>1</sup> or the two aforementioned Councils. While the majority of the interviews were conducted during February 2020 in Kirkenes, one was conducted prior to this in Tromsø and two subsequently over Skype/phone. And with the exception of two, interviews were conducted in Norwegian (22). All quotes presented below and elsewhere have been translated by the researcher for the purposes of each presentation/publication.

Third, following the above data collection, all interview recordings were transcribed (23), coded in NVivo 12, and analysed in accordance with the above research objectives. The codes were based on initial research questions from the interview guide, alongside the objectives; these were later consolidated and updated in light of emerging themes of interest. The process of analysis also involved standardising data format, documentation of metadata, and anonymisation in order to make the dataset freely accessible during and beyond the project in order to facilitate sharing and external review (24). Following analysis, the final stage of the project has involved the publication and presentation of findings in relevant outlets – including this summary report.

Finally, it is worth noting that as a small grant project, it was also envisioned a way in which to gauge future research needs and opportunities. As such, whereas this specific project's funding ends in 2021 – after a challenging period of the global covid-19 pandemic – it is hopefully not the “end” of the above research questions and paths. Some suggestions for avenues of enquiry worth pursuing are offered below, under Conclusions, recognising the limitations of a small-scale project.

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<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the Barents Cooperation is not limited to activities that fall under the auspices of the Secretariats, but that is the focus of this specific study. Further research could include the perspectives of those involved in the Councils and/or funded activities (21).

## Findings:

Based on the 13 interviews included in the dataset, the project's research aims and objectives were met. These are presented below under the broad sub-headings of successes and challenges, each of which include reflections on the Barents Cooperation's past, present, and future; and finally, these inform potentially transferable lessons.

## Successes:

All of the respondents spoke of the Barents Cooperation in positive terms across past, present, and future visions. In particular, the strengthening and maintenance of peace was highlighted by most; not necessarily in terms of "high-level" international relations but more so at the grassroots level. Terms used to describe this included both "civil [*folkelig*] diplomacy" and "people-to-people [*folk-til-folk*] diplomacy". These peacebuilding activities included facilitating increased contact across the Russian-Nordic borders since the establishment of the Cooperation in 1993, which in turn was seen by respondents to foster understanding, knowledge, and strengthen socio-cultural ties. And importantly, it has allowed stereotypes to be broken down – and even friendships made. As one interviewee described what they perceived to be the main success: "on an entirely personal level, it is the friendships [...] They [youth participants] add each other on social media and post selfies together. It is *there*, that is where you see that it is *real* and not just constructed" (Interview 5, 2020). Another concrete example that was frequently brought up was the "local border traffic permit", allowing those living in the Barents region to freely visit a 30km-area across the border(s) (25); again providing a way in which to normalise contact and movement across former dividing-lines. "What we believe in, that is that is a peacekeeping initiative, because you are not as likely to go to war or go against your friends. If you are used to being, to have a relationship and have grown up with each other and that, then maybe you have a different starting point if controversies arise" (Interview 4, 2020).

The above societal interaction is also the idea behind "people-to-people" initiatives: As one respondent summarised it, "it is important to talk to the neighbour on the other side of the fence, right!" (Interview 10, 2020). The successes of this approach were articulated as finding common ground, meeting and cooperating on shared concerns as well as interests. The latter include allowing people (often youth) to meet through hobbies and sports, which in turn benefit their own performance and development. Concrete examples mentioned included e.g. boxing, jazz, and swimming. Some of the respondents

working at the Secretariats reflected on how it had affected them personally as well, including their own changed perceptions of their “neighbours”.

In addition to shared personal interests, shared challenges of life in the North was another topic that the Barents Cooperation was seen to be successful on according to many respondents. Many reflected on the fact that in spite of cultural differences, everyday life has similar characteristics: long and dark winters, snow-based activities, and geographical distance from the capital(s). In the words of one participant, it was often through these challenges that the uniqueness of the Cooperation shone through “it’s a distant area, and there are big distances, even between neighbours there are hundreds of kilometres to cover and... it’s just, you need to have this kind of attitude to – that there is still a way. But people come, how do I say, halfway if you want to meet. I think they are more able or more open for the dialogue than elsewhere” (Interview 11, 2020). This, again, offers opportunities for people to meet, converse, and collaborate despite of other differences. In recent years, the focus has increasingly been on environmental questions. From the organisational side, the Barents Secretariats also focus on “sustainable development”; a theme that extends also to wider Arctic relations, and may also be one from which there are lessons to be learnt from Barents.

Overall stability and understanding have thus been successes, but on the question of whether there is such a thing as a “Barents identity”, most interviewees replied that these particular successes were often limited to people who are most actively involved. In other words, the strongest benefits are felt by those with a drive and passion to push the initiative forward, e.g., by applying for grants and running activities. Nevertheless, at least in Kirkenes – where the two involved Secretariats are housed in the “Barents House” – the label “Barents” hold meaning in many people’s everyday lives.

## Challenges:

While it is no surprise that active involvement in the Barents Cooperation – whether professionally or via funded activities – lead to stronger positive effects and even potentially a shared identity, a key highlighted was wider participation. Many of those applying for funding remain active, but it is a challenge to recruit new activity leaders and participants, and thus ensure the continuation of the already long-running initiative. In short, many spoke of a need to broaden the basis of people involved – both within the immediate border regions around Kirkenes and in the wider Barents region, and across generations to engage more youth.

It is also clear that the “Arctic” label has gained prominence over the years, and that “Barents” may resonate less with people outside of Kirkenes and Eastern Finnmark. One interviewee reflected on the relation between the two regional markers: “There is [currently] great focus on the Arctic, but perhaps you don’t have the same knowledge about the Barents region. People live here” (Interview 10, 2020). This resonated with many others’ comments too about Barents as simultaneously under-communicated on the international stage and the most populated and urbanised region within the circumpolar north. The region was always top-down constructed as an initiative from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spearheaded by Thorvald Stoltenberg, even if it was linked to past practices of e.g. the Pomor trade; and as such, some noted that it is “a sort of artificial construct, which is created, so to speak” (Interview 13, 2020).

The relationship with state governments was also a topic of discussion, and here potential challenges included ensuring stable funding and interest in years to come. While there is no indication that support for the Cooperation is waning, it is clear that it is very much reliant on the higher-level state. This also means that there may be a concern that changing state relations can negatively affect the Barents Cooperation: Many reflected on the impacts of the 2014 Crimea conflict and subsequent economic sanctions, but opinions differed on their specific significance for the Barents Cooperation. In broad international terms, relations have become more tense, also in the Barents region, but many of the interviewees still considered it a success that the Cooperation continues with little change. Indeed, the Barents Cooperation has often been highlighted by both Russian and Norwegian state leaders as a success story in the midst of other, more difficult issues: “Even if it can, of course, be dismissed by critics as symbolic. But symbolic politics should never be underestimated” (Interview 6, 2020).

When asked specifically about challenges, many interviewees pointed to business and trade collaborations. Since the start of the Barents Cooperation in the early 90s, there was a hope that the countries would become more economically connected, yet this has not transpired. It has proven difficult for non-Russian actors to gain a foothold on the Russian side for a number of both political and logistical reasons, despite initial networking meetings organised by the Secretariats; and the economic sanctions have not made this any easier. A few high-profile cases in the media have also contributed to likely hesitancy on Norwegian companies’ part. These are not sectors that the Secretariats would offer any funding to per se as “people-to-people” activities, but can primarily organise places and opportunities to meet and to share practices.

Finally, a challenge that was raised by many interviewees was priority of resources/time and potentially cumbersome bureaucratic hurdles. For example, limited funding and a wide portfolio of topics could translate to long meetings with few concrete outcomes. One interviewee explained: “the meetings themselves have such a formal format etc., that I think it almost in itself kills, sort of, the initiative you perhaps brought with you to a meeting. Because it becomes so stiff, becomes so formal” (Interview 13, 2020). Some also thought the Cooperation was considered by other Nordic states as a “Norwegian thing”, which again could be a challenge for interest and active involvement. Or indeed, even just a “Kirkenes thing”, whereby potential participants from Troms and Nordland counties might feel less invested in the initiative. As above, widening the participation and interest in the Cooperation – and communicating the region – remain key priorities.

### Transferable lessons:

When asked specifically about transferable lessons from the Cooperation beyond the Barents region, many interviewees initially highlighted the uniqueness of the border-region, explaining that there are aspects that are likely *not* transferable: There are few regions in the world where two states have been separated (here by the “Iron Curtain”) for generations, and then joined with very different socio-economic and political systems. The uniqueness of the Barents environment was also mentioned, i.e. the features of the Arctic but with a relatively temperate climate (in contrast to the North American and further Eastern Russian Arctic).

However, while the Barents Cooperation cannot be transplanted wholesale elsewhere, most went on to highlight how the above successes and challenges can be learnt from for the purposes of international relations elsewhere. As above, this included facilitating low-level meeting arenas and increasing contact in order to break down stereotypes. And, most importantly, it included meeting around shared issues and interests – whether they be hobbies or local challenges. As many explained it, the key thing is cooperating where it is possible, even if other topics remain difficult. And it may also mean leaving other topics for times of “milder [political] weather”. By building trust through increased understanding and contact, also more difficult issues can eventually be raised.

Another key insight is the long-term perspective necessary for this kind of initiative. As mentioned, the Barents Cooperation was launched by the Norwegian government, and only secondarily have local inhabitants come to adopt the label in a limited way; the transfer in the opposite direction, whereby local relations may improve state politics, is less clear (or at least less easy to measure). Again, state

leaders and ministers often highlight the Barents Cooperation as a positive story, but when asked about the actual influence on political relations, the answer was often that it was less direct: For example, youth might meet through sports or hobbies, or regional councils, and decades later might bring those experiences with them to potential political offices. There were mention of such examples, where “picking up the phone” had become easier due to this kind of contact; yet, it is clear that this is not a *straightforward* way to improve international relations in a time of increasing tensions. Instead, it is a long-term investment by people, organisations, and groups, which require the willingness and wish to enact positive change. In short, as one respondent replied to the question of transferable lessons: “I would say: a good spirit of friendship, and a good spirit of willingness – and a lot of goodwill” (Interview 11, 2020).

## Conclusion and recommendations:

As the above findings have shown, the long-running Barents Cooperation is generally seen as a successful initiative that has had real effects in the immediate border regions. This project focused on experiences and perceptions on the Norwegian side, mainly among people involved with the everyday running of the Cooperation at the International and Norwegian Barents Secretariats and/or with the Barents Euro-Arctic and Barents Regional Councils. The study included the insights of 13 interviewees, who shared their perspectives on successes, challenges, and potentially transferable lessons from the Barents Cooperation.

In short, successes include the building of understanding, friendships, increased contact, and knowledge across the borders. This, in turn, likely provides positive effects that extend beyond the specific funded activities of the Cooperation, such as later political involvement and shared practices. In contrast, the main challenges include wider involvement, generating support and interest, specifically business cooperation, and bureaucratic hurdles.

Based on these experiences, transferable lessons and recommendations for other regions, collaborations, and international relations include the fostering of pragmatic, frequent, and low-level interactions, which in turn facilitate also more difficult conversations. Importantly, this is a long-term investment of both time and financial support, and it requires regional ownership over state-led control. The topic of “geopolitics” was notably absent from most conversations and interviews, with a clear emphasis by respondents on civil society and local activities. These are also important avenues for political agency and participation, and a way in which to have a wide range of voices heard, but pragmatically circumscribe potentially detrimental conflicts.

Building on the above, further research is still needed on experiences of those involved in Barents-funded activities (but see ref. ,21) and those involved in higher-level inter-state politics. In particular, the role of the Barents Cooperation within wider Arctic inter-state relations is worth exploring, not least in light of the perceived lack of knowledge and awareness of the former beyond the region itself. It is clear that there is much to be learnt from the initiative, and this is limited to neither northern nor border regions; in a time of heightened international interest in the High North (26), the voices from Barents too should be heard.



## Other outputs:

### Dataset:

Medby IA. Dataset: 'Bridge-Building in a Divided High North: Perceived socio-political outcomes of the intraregional and "people-to-people" initiative, the Barents Cooperation'. Oxford Brookes University; 2020. Available from: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/3ea92d1c-a407-43dc-a373-d7edf2eac326/1/>

The dataset (transcripts) of 13 interviews is stored as text-files and accessible in Oxford Brookes University's institutional repository RADAR (<https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar>) in accordance with Oxford Brookes University's Research Data Management (RDM) Policy. Accordingly, data in the institutional repository will be kept for a minimum of ten years or ten years after the last request for access. Metadata, naming, and documentation practices follow standardised conventions and are stored in non-proprietary file formats (RTF and CSV), which means that they may be used by external parties. Documentation includes relevant details on methodology, interview questions, analytical/procedural information, and any other relevant information that may arise during the interviewing process. The dataset is under Creative Commons licence CC-BY-NC.

### Peer-reviewed article:

Medby IA. A 'Peopled' Account of Political Agency in the Arctic: Professional practice and people-to-people participation. *The Geographical Journal*. Special Issue on 'The Changing Politics of the Arctic' (Eds. Depledge D. and Kennedy-Pipe C.). *forthcoming*.

The above manuscript has been submitted to the editors at the time of this report's writing.

### Commentary:

Medby IA. People, politics, and participation: What can we learn from the Barents region? [Internet]. High North News. 20 Jan 2021. Available from: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/people-politics-and-participation-what-can-we-learn-barents-region>

## Presentations:

The project and its findings have been discussed both formally and informally in a range of contexts, but the below are the most relevant to date:

Medby IA. Performing Arctic Politics: Professional practice and people-to-people agency. State and Society Research Group, Research Centre of Global Politics Economics and Society, Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom [online, via Zoom]; 20 Oct 2020.

Medby IA. Panel discussion: 'Anthropocene Geopolitics and the Arctic'. Workshop on Great Power Competition in the Anthropocene Arctic, Institute of Advanced Studies, Loughborough University, United Kingdom [online, via Zoom]; 8 Dec 2020.

Medby IA. Panel discussion: 'Transborder café: Still Building Neighbourhood'. Barents Spektakel, Kirkenes, Norway [online, via Zoom]; 18 Feb 2021.

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## Appendix A: Interview guide

Please note that the below was used as a *guide*, i.e., a list of broad topics to explore in semi-structured conversation rather than a list to follow; and it was developed prior to the research trip. Further topics were often included in these inter-personal discussions as well, depending on both interviewer and interviewee initiative; and with the exception of two, interviews were conducted in Norwegian.

### Topics for interviews:

- 1) Region-building:
  - a) We hear a lot about the “Arctic” today; before that “The High North” was more common. Do you think “Barents” is a name/region that is still relevant?
    - a. How would you define/describe “Barents”? (and its relation to the wider Arctic?).
  - b) Is there such a thing as a “Barents identity”? If so, what role has the Cooperation had in this; if not, why do you think this has not materialised?
- 2) The Cooperation:
  - c) How influential do you think the Barents Cooperation has been since its establishment in 1994?
    - a. Main successes? Shortcomings, disappointments?
    - b. Challenges:
      - i. past, present, and future?
    - c. How would you like to see it develop?
  - d) Could you say a little bit more about specifically the “people-to-people” idea that seems to lie at the heart of the Cooperation?
    - a. What do you think the significance of these kinds of ‘encounters’ is – socially and /or politically?
- 3) Peacebuilding:
  - e) Considering specifically the Barents Cooperation’s aim to facilitate ‘bridge-building’, do you think it has been effective? Does this relate only to the Barents region, or wider international affairs?
- 4) Transferable lessons:
  - f) Do you have any thoughts on potentially transferable lessons from the Barents Cooperation – whether they can be applied elsewhere too (e.g., current geopolitical relations between UK and Russia)? E.g., do you think the geographical context makes the project unique?
  - g) What role do you think shared or different languages play in this kind of cooperation? E.g., has this caused any misunderstandings or communicative challenges?