

Territorial Cooperation within the Northern Periphery... and the Arctic

12 March 2013 / By Silvia Curbelo Betancort



North charr project, Landösjön lake, Sweden. Source: North Periphery Programme

Today we will have a ride through the far North of Europe, led by Mr. Ole Damsgaard, Head of the Northern Periphery Programme (NPP) Secretariat. The vast area covered by this programme is characterised by its harsh climate conditions, sparse population, rural expanse and remoteness. As climate change gradually modifies the morphology of the area, particularly of the Arctic region, this programme looks with more and more attention the north end of the globe.

The overarching ambition of the NPP is to build upon the common development potential of the Northern regions of Europe through transnational cooperation, offering them a platform to face their common challenges.

As a starter before the round of questions and answers, Mr. Damsgaard displays the picture of a group of fishermen in a beautiful lake of Sweden. It represents, in his own words, the “added value”. In this Arctic charr farm of Landösjön, a sport fishing club buys and releases charr from the farm into the lake, and sells permits for ice fishing. Apparently the business, the outcome of an NPP project, is doing well. It makes up to 100.000 Euros per year and people come from all over Europe in spite of the freezing temperatures, which can reach -30°C.

- **You are approaching the end of the NP 2012-2013, what have been the main achievements and challenges of the programme during this period?**

It is a little too early to give an overview of the outcome because about half of the funded projects have not finished yet, but we are working on it. We will present them in a more detailed way at the Closing Conference in Inverness, Scotland, in September. But I can tell you about individual results. The project has been targeted, in the sense that all projects should deliver new products and services. This is a bit different when compared with previous programming periods.

An example is the Arctic Charr, based on someone's idea that hydropower stations could be used for raising this specific fish, not only for exporting it, but also for selling fishing tours, as it is very attractive for fisherman to explore these lakes. This is an example in which a number of new jobs are created by implementing this idea.

As an example of services, we have a project dealing with telemedicine. There are considerable distances between individual citizens and the medical personnel at hospitals. Therefore, a kind of remote treatment is important, as well as different services that enable citizens to help themselves through special ICT. For instance, it would allow them to control blood pressure, handle diabetes and gain access to specific training programmes.

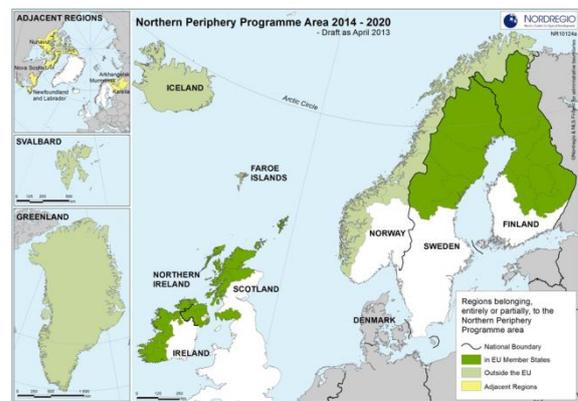
- **What are the main differences of the NPP in the programming period 2006-2013 and the prospective NPP 2014-2020?**

There are a number of differences. First of all the EU Commission has underlined a number of differences from the previous programmes and the upcoming ones. We should place a higher focus on results and the actions should be more targeted than in previous programmes. One of the new programme's priorities will be innovation and development of SMEs. What is also important, referring to results, is that the Commission wants results in relation to the entire programme area and not only results in relation to individual projects.

This is a huge challenge; in fact, because our programme area is huge and the funding is quite limited. The expectation is that this programme should impact the whole programme area and this is, in my point of view, very ambitious.

The Arctic is becoming a bit more visible in the new programme. The area covered by the programme is the same than in the previous one, but the emphasis on the Arctic is higher and therefore the name has been changed from the North Periphery to the North Periphery and Arctic.

In terms of budget, it will probably increase between 20% and 30%. However, the final decision has not been taken yet.



Map source: Northern Periphery Programme

- **What is the explanation for this emphasis on the Arctic?**

The Arctic dimension was considered before, but you can say that the international political scenario has changed during the last ten years and the interest on the Arctic has grown considerably. The EU has applied for being an observer in the Arctic Council, China has also applied, alongside a number of other countries. The Arctic Council consists of the countries that are covering parts of the Arctic. That is an indicator of the huge international interest on what goes on in the Arctic regions.

The traditional interest in the Arctic was related to scientific and security issues, but today it has been broadened to cover economic interests, due to its richness in natural resources. These resources are becoming accessible due to the climate change and the declining ice.

Transport is another field that has contributed to this increased interest. Due to climate change, it is expected that it will be possible to open up maritime routes through the Arctic Sea, from Asia to Europe and the United States. This would reduce the distances for the transport of commodities from the East to the West.

As Europe is interested in the Arctic, there has been pressure from the European Commission for the Arctic to be included in the name of the programme, as a means to underline that the EU contributes to this region.

- **What are the characteristics of the Arctic dimension?**

In fact there has been a long discussion with different stakeholders in the last year. There has been a specific preparatory project, besides the ordinary programming process in which a huge number of stakeholders within the Arctic regions and the surrounding areas had been in dialogue, trying to identify what is this specific Arctic interest. You can say that a major interest is that Arctic stakeholders and project partners are involved in different kinds of projects, increasing the interaction between the Arctic and the rest of the world. There are not specific themes and priorities for the Arctic, as the most important Arctic challenges are already addressed within the themes and priorities of the overall programme.

The most important thing is that the Arctic is better integrated with the surrounding world and Arctic stakeholders are becoming an active part of the globalization process.

- **Who are the Arctic stakeholders?**

The people living in the Arctic. There are also international stakeholders, like the Arctic Council and the scientific community. But, first of all, the main stakeholders are the people living there.

It is important to note that the Arctic is not empty. One of its characteristics is its extremely low population density when considered in its entirety. However, there are people living there and there are even big cities within the Arctic area. The main concern for the programme is that these people living there could become, to a higher extent, an active part of the globalization process, utilizing their competences and other potentials for competition with the rest of the world.

The potentials of the Arctic are considerable, for its natural resources, the knowledge and competences of the population and other facts. The difference between more densely populated regions within Europe and the Arctic is that the interaction within the Arctic region and between the Arctic and the rest of the world is lower compared to more urbanized areas.

- **You mainly refer to the social scope, but the programme also covers the economic and environmental potentials. How is the upcoming NPP going to tackle them, without one being at the expense of the other?**

You are asking whether it is possible to exploit the natural resources in the Arctic without social and environmental impacts, and that is strictly speaking not possible. But of course you can always discuss how big an impact you are willing to accept. There is an example in Greenland. The Greenlandic society is highly dependent on the economic support from Denmark. The Greenlandic ambition is to become totally independent economically, but they need to have a more sustainable economy.

Because there are so many natural resources in Greenland, mining would be a future way of supporting the economy. However, an expert report recently concluded that if they have to replace the money they get from the Danish state they need to open 24 mega projects - 24 new mines. And for the time being there are new licenses for only two and it is unsure when these will be implemented.

Having 24 mega projects within a society of 60.000 inhabitants would be a disaster if it takes place on a short term perspective. Of course it is possible to find acceptable ways to exploit resources; however the economic potential is modest if seen in a short term perspective, as it would definitively be a social and environmental disaster. Besides, there might not be enough international investors for that at the current moment. So, eventually, it is a balance between what is possible in terms of investment and what is acceptable in terms of impact.

- **The Arctic does not solely belong to Europe. Will the future NPP launch projects in cooperation with Canada, the USA or Russia?**

Russia and Canada have expressed their interest to join the new NPP so there will be cooperation with them within the programme. It will be on a project-by-project basis and they will have the opportunity to join the Monitoring Committee as observers.

Russia particularly has expressed a high interest in that. but seen in relation to other programmes such as the process initiated by the Norwegian and Scottish government with the aim to establish better coordination between different initiatives. A coordination group which consists of programmes that are working within the Arctic, supporting specific actions there, could be the format of the future. This coordination body could for instance meet a couple of times a year to share experience and develop some commons initiative. Something is underway there.

- **Any inspirational statement as a closure?**

Yes. The Northern Periphery has always been on the outskirts of Europe in many ways, as its name reflects. However, the Arctic developments in this area of Europe are becoming more and more important. Probably, in the future, the Northern Periphery will not be a periphery as such, but a more central part of Europe because of better access and more economic

activities. That is a very exciting development that will be taking place during the next decades. That is great and very interesting as a background for the new programme!

Thank you!

Biography of Mr. Ole Damsgaard



Ole Damsgaard is head of the Northern Periphery Programme Secretariat since early 2013. Previously, Ole was the director of Nordregio, a Scandinavian research institute dealing with regional policy and spatial planning.

Before the years at Nordregio he was the director of the Danish town Planning Institute and has many years of experience as spatial planner at different levels.

In terms of education Ole is a human geographer from University of Copenhagen.