

Barents cooperation and energy efficiency in focus at NSPA seminar at Open Days

The two seminars organised by the NSPA at Open days both had a good turnout and made way for many discussions and networking opportunities.



Barents-Russia Cooperation

In the morning the focus was on Barents-Russia regional cooperation and the moderator Mrs. Anna Lund, Executive Officer at the International Barents Secretariat <http://www.beac.st/> started the workshop by introducing the Barents area.

Regional development through “people to people cooperation”

Mr. Rune Rafaelsen, Director of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, explained how Barents cooperation is first and foremost a peace project and that it is an administrative area but there is still a lot of practical cooperation.

- Local actors can be much more creative than national ones, it is something we call public diplomacy. East-west cooperation is normal and part of everyday life in the Barents region.

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat are constantly looking for projects to finance and it can be culture, competence, indigenous people, businesses, environment, health or youth project. Mr Rafaelsen thinks that energy will be crucial for the future of Barents and points out that Norway feels that the industries of fishing and oil/gas should be able to operate side by side. He also recommended the site www.BarentsObserver.com for news from the Barents area.

Barents cooperation and the added value for European competitiveness

Mr. Kari Aalto, Chairman of the Barents Regional Committee thinks focus should be on the resources in the Barents region. Both the region as well as the whole Union should start looking at self-sufficiency in certain areas.

- We have a high level of education and technology, a lot of natural resources and the ability for refinement and added value production, but there is a great need for improvement of logistics.

Continuing on Barents being active in the EU, Mr Aalto pointed out that focus in the newly launched Baltic Sea Strategy is very much on the south part of the Baltic area when you are looking at it from a Barents perspective. He also noted that it is sometimes more difficult to take part in the larger projects, for example Interreg IV B, as a sparsely populated area where projects naturally will be smaller.

- It is important for our region to be an active and visible part in the EU, sometimes even by actually being included in maps!

Mr Aalto also discussed his learnings from working with Russia and said that as with much other cooperation the first step is to understand each other's cultures and ways of working. He is looking forward to continued cooperation with the European dimension as well.

Cross-border business in the Barents region

Mr. Andreas Lind, Managing Director at Norrbotten Chamber of Commerce talked about the importance of the Barents region for local businesses. He pointed out that this firstly means Sweden, Norway and Finland as there are several administrative hindrances when working with Russia.

Mr Lind gave a presentation about the Nordic Business Link project where businesses are encouraged to cooperate in the region and so far 243 companies in the region have taken part. He also mentioned that there are still obstacles between Sweden and Norway,

especially with customs clearance and the recent rules about pre-arrival and pre-departure clearance.

- With our climate it is sometimes very difficult to estimate exactly what time a truck will be able to cross the border, therefore the new rules are really creating problems and more hassle for us.

Mr Lind continued by giving his wish list for improved trade in the Barents area:

- Improved infrastructure
- More streamlined administration for trade
- Faster and more business oriented customs
- An increased self-confidence

- We need to do more than just take our natural resources and ship south, we need to refine them, add value and then ship them south!

The development of Murmansk seen from a regional perspective

Mr. Yevgeny Nikora of the Murmansk Regional Duma gave an overview about Murmansk and the investment projects taking place in the region. Mr Nikora highlighted the importance of this area as a transport node and explained that it is still a transit region as processing is not that developed yet. He also said that the fishing industry and oil/gas industries must be able to co-exist and grow.

Mr Nikora gave an overview of the 85 international projects his region is taking part in and talked about SME support and business incubators that are being run in partnership with Norway and Sweden amongst others.

When it comes to Barents cooperation Mr Nikora said that it obviously gives very positive results and that it is very practical. His view is that it is the understanding of each other's cultures, aims and requirements that creates a real habit of cooperation.

Mr Nikora also reminded the audience about the upcoming Murmansk International Economical Forum www.murmanskforum.ru

Discussion

In the discussions that followed the panel was asked for one focus point each that makes the Barents region a functional and active region, and the panelists agreed on:

- Making use of all the clever people in the region
- Understanding our history, we have a heritage of cooperation and it is natural for us to work together
- Economic cooperation needs to be developed east-west
- More and better job opportunities for young people

Growth and competitiveness through renewable energy resources

The topic of the afternoon session was growth and competitiveness through renewable energy resources and the workshop was moderated by Mrs. Tarja Cronberg, former Minister of Labour and former Chairman of the Green Party, Finland.

Biomass production for bioenergy, land use and climate change. Considerations for high latitudes

Professor Pertti Martikainen, University of Kuopio started with an introduction to bioenergy. This included an explanation as to how bioenergy works and an index table showing the annual balance of greenhouse gases of eco-systems with peat or mineral soil used for agriculture or forestry. Martikainen highlighted that it is not enough to know how much carbon that is harvested in biomass. It is essential to analyze the gas balance of the whole production chain, i.e. the life cycle.

Sustainable energy – biofuels and biorefinery concept

Prof. Doc. Riita Keiski, Vice-rector of the University of Oulu, opened by explaining that sustainability comprises both environmental sustainability and social sustainability. Keiski gave a presentation of the University of Oulu and the new University of Science with an interdisciplinary working approach complemented by an innovation centre of excellence. The spearhead sectors of Oulu University are resource efficiency, water, air and energy (biorefinery, biofuels, powerplant automation, energy efficiency). Keiski expressed the willingness of Oulu University to cooperate within the field of sustainable energy production. When presenting her expectations for the future of the region, Keiski mentioned a biorefinery by the year 2020 and that the majority of enterprises and industries in the region take awareness of the techniques.

Keiski mentioned ICT to be very important and energy-related issues to this is a priority for the University of Oulu.

When talking about mitigating the environmental impacts of energy generation, Keiski mentioned chemical utilization of CO₂, the target being to use secondary CO₂ as a raw material for valuable chemicals or products.

Utilization of geothermal energy in Iceland

Mr. Pall Brynjarsson, Mayor of Borgarnes and former member of Reykjavik Energy, presented different ways of using geothermal energy in Iceland thanks to Iceland's unique position on a ridge where the internal heat of the earth reaches surface. One example of many is how hot water from sources is connected to the district heating system and provides hot water to the municipal swimming pool.

Iceland's primary energy use consists of hydropower and geothermal energy, with a small use of oil and coal. Iceland has the world's largest geothermal district heating system and Iceland aims to be the first nation to use only renewable energy resources. Brynjarsson explained however that geothermal power has a large potential worldwide considering that the geographical conditions of Iceland also can be found elsewhere in the world.

At the Reykjavik Energy webpage there is an interactive explanation on how the production process works. <http://www.or.is/English/>

From local development and “spin-off” to Singapore

Mr. Lothar Maruhn, CEO Meløy Næringsutvikling AS, gave a presentation of Meløy Næringsutvikling that work with innovation and industrial projects. Maruhn presented his experiences on how the closure of industries in the region gave reason to search for new sources of employment through development of industrial infrastructure. One of Meløy Næringsutvikling's projects is the development of the production of solar cell wafers. One spin-off of the solar cell wafers project is the company SiPro that recycles silicon and vacuum metallic guides to the photovoltaic industry. In 2008, the Glomfjord Industry Park employed 800 persons in an area that, without this innovative industrial project, would face severe problems with unemployment.

Discussion

In the discussion that followed the participants of the panel were asked to identify the main obstacles for renewable energy resources in the world today. The obstacles mentioned were: the technical knowledge that is demanded to develop new renewable energy resources, the risk that focus is put on energy efficiency of already existing resources and that there is a lack of awareness of the potential of geothermal energy.