

**NSPA Forum, Umeå, 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2013**

**Workshop memo**

## **Summary of the workshop conclusions**

### **NSPA Forum 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 in Umeå, Sweden**

Following the presentations made at the NSPA Forum in Umeå on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, the Forum participants were divided into four workshop groups, to discuss the NSPA network and its way forward. Discussion in each group was launched by a short presentation by a representative from each NSPA region (each of the “NSPA Brussels office region”), who gave an example of a regional innovation/smart specialization/development strategy.

The workshop group participants focused on three main topics:

1. What should be the common priorities and objectives for the NSPA, to deepen its cooperation?
2. Is there a need for a new NSPA study?
3. Which kind of processes should be used to work on future issues within the NSPA network and its regions?

A note-taker in each group wrote down a summary of the topics discussed during the workshop groups. Notes from all groups were rearranged into the below summary, grouping different discussion points under common headings, ensuring that the results of all workshop groups’ discussions will provide a basis for a continued dialogue and a shared vision within the NSPA network.

Note-takers in the four workshop groups where:

- Janika Luukinen, East & North Finland EU Office
- Marlene Deogan, Mid Sweden European Office
- Andreas Østhagen, North Norway European Office
- Martha Bahta, North Sweden European Office

Compilation of the notes into a summary was produced by:

- Mikael Janson, North Sweden European Office
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## 1. Common challenges

### **Demographic issues: the young leave the region to access higher education**

- Demographic change and the young leave the NSPA (there is already a vast amount of information available related to the NSPA demographics and future expected trends).
- Private as well as the public sector face challenges in finding skilled work force.
- Challenges related to delivering services, in particularly for the increasing number of the elderly population, and challenges related to providing support for families for them to stay in the region or to locate in the region.

### **Natural resource dependent economy prevents the development of a broader scale of entrepreneurship and businesses**

- Natural resource dependent economy prevents possibilities for growth in other sectors, as raw material industry pays high wages and fosters fly in-fly out working culture. Even if the industry is continuously growing, less people are employed and money is not re-invested in the region, as the owners are not from the region.
- Stepping up regional innovation potential and possibilities for micro companies to establish and grow in the shadow of the big industries, in particularly in service industries and tourism.

### **The (common) brand of the region not positively defined**

- Shifting the brand of the NSPA from the exploitation of raw materials to more attractive one
- The unresolved issue between similarities and differences between the NSPA regions remains a challenge, including differing views on various issues. Until a common view on whether to deepen the NSPA collaboration is reached, the effectiveness of EU lobbying is risked.

## 2. Common NSPA priorities

### **Support competitiveness in nature based economy**

- Supporting economic development focusing on nature based culture, tourism and research.
- Better integration with a focus on global, continuous and increased competitiveness in NSPA's strong raw materials industry clusters such as forestry and other natural resource based industries.
- More refinement and local processing of raw materials in the regions (not only the evident ones such as cosmetics made of northern natural resources).

### **Support for (small businesses) in new growth sectors to increase overall attractiveness of the NSPA**

- Besides focusing on core businesses it is necessary to identify new growth sectors, such as experience-based services. The knowledge of the core businesses, the use of Smart Specialisation and regional strengths linked to other than core industries and new global growth sectors.
- Identifying mechanisms supporting growth at root level by finding bottle necks that SMEs and micro companies are facing, not merely through technological investments supporting internationalization but also by increased knowledge on how to develop businesses together with customers.
- Culture could be used as a force for sustainable development, connecting tourism sector and other businesses in the service and creative sectors.
- Developing and investing in the attractive society, supporting old and new strategic clusters of innovation that make people stay and young people and families to locate in the NSPA. This could be done for example by investing in culture, tourism, IT-businesses and food industries. In trying to foster a change, it is important not to underestimate the historical mentality of the region, as an economy based on natural resources and large industries.

### **Distribute services to the whole region, including education/competence growth**

- Cities' links to their surrounding regions function as economic drivers, creating attractive regions, job opportunities, and providing services also to the remote areas.
- Delivering and increasing the level of services in the remote areas.
- Focus on competence growth and matching the needs of the industries and other stakeholders with the workforce, in particularly the young, and further focusing on attracting people to locate in the region.
- Focus on distance education of the young (not only on University level)

### **More cooperation on the ground within the NSPA and with the world around**

- Increased cross-border cooperation and maximum use of EU-funding for supporting cooperation initiatives.
- Further developing cooperation with Russia.

### 3. NSPA's future work

#### **Strategic cooperation for successful, continuous EU lobbying**

- Strategic work and NSPA related information should be made more visible in the EU in order for the NSPA not to be discarded in the planning of the post-2020 programming period.
- More cooperation is needed in order to develop long term policies, providing for more effective positioning towards the EU.
- Cooperating in EU-projects within the scope of NSPA's common objectives during the coming programming period.
- Expanding the visibility of the NSPA network (within the NSPA area on the ground and in cooperation with other areas in Europe)

#### **Cooperation for positioning the NSPA for obtaining relevant EU funding, also related to EU's crucial external relations**

- Creating a common view of NSPA issues to be communicated to the different programme secretariats and managing authorities, increasing their understanding and knowledge of the NSPA, in order to benefit from synergies of different funding instruments.
- Being more proactive and strategic in the Arctic discussions in order to feed NSPA's regional perspectives into the discussions and building a basis of support for the NSPA needs.
- Defining the potential of increasing cooperation with Russia for the region and for the EU as a whole and the reasoning why the NSPA should have a lead role in establishing and maintaining working relations with Russia.

#### **Create a vision and cooperation platform for a possible attractive region brand**

- Overall branding of the attractiveness of the NSPA (including the possibility to even change the name of the network to "Northern Smart/Sustainable/Sparsely Populated Areas), in order to further focus on the attractiveness of the region and what it can offer, not only simply continuing on the perception of the NSPA as a source of natural resources for Europe.
- Within the NSPA, working on a vision of an attractive region, not only based on raw materials, but also on knowledge, creative and leisure industries and on how to support investments for generating new development models and supporting businesses, creating a new profile of the NSPA.
- Mapping in what way different regions, based on their strengths, can complement each other, delivering added value to the development of all NSPA regions.
- Identifying a "story to tell" within the NSPA and towards the world, reflecting the story as opposed and compared to other regions, with a view to positive opportunities that might differ from other regions and to negative challenges to be overcome.
- Reaching an agreement on which issues the NSPA should address in the future and on which tasks it should focus, and what is role of the NSPA forums (merely a base for discussing common challenges or really acting as a platform helping to focus on activities for creating common opportunities).

#### 4. Views on a new NSPA study

##### **The added value of a new study compared to the previous study, enabling the NSPA to find new opportunities**

- A new study should not be merely an update of the previous study, but one alternative would be to use the conclusions of the previous study as a starting point for a new study, with the aim of further elaborating the topics previously identified.
- A new study would act as a tool for taking new steps and finding new opportunities for strengthening the NSPA collaboration
- A new study would support the development of a positive NSPA image.

##### **A tool for knowledge about the NSPA and future common development investments**

- A way to learn more about and understand NSPA better within the region, enabling NSPA to take the ownership of cooperation and raising awareness of the NSPA cooperation within the NSPA
- Bring different stakeholders together to identify common facts, further supporting them in exploring their commercialisation potential, in order to take lead in addressing global challenges.
- Giving possibilities for developing new models for the NSPA network, by not merely focusing on common challenges and opportunities, but also on how and in which fields to complement each other.

##### **Supporting NSPA's renewed relevance within the EU**

- A new study could provide for an opportunity to benchmark the NSPA vis-à-vis other European regions and facilitate smarter decisions on future investments.
- A new study would increase NSPA's overall visibility.
- Considering that the Smart Specialisation initiative within the EU provides all regions a platform for a dialogue with the Commission on regional development issues, a study could be a tool for the NSPA to keep "one step ahead".
- The European Commission expects the NSPA to take further steps in its integrated, common work. As a first such common strategic activity, a study could facilitate the process, establishing the basis for common future activities, supporting NSPA's regional growth strategies.
- EU relevant data plays a significant role in influencing EU decision making in favor of the region and if carried out by the OECD, the study would automatically have a "high quality stamp", as a substantial part of the EU policies are based on OECD studies.

## 5. Next steps for the NSPA network

### **Take steps towards a new report/study on the NSPA**

- Identifying relevant research questions and elaborating the focus for a new report/study, in particularly related to any aspects missed by the previous study, that should be addressed
- Presenting a clear idea and mapping needs for defining the right tool that suits its purpose for the NSPA, including the estimation of costs and benefits of such a study.

### **Define the scope and means of the NSPA network**

- Continuing the NSPA cooperation, by defining cooperation priorities, re-defining what the NSPA is and what is its role, for example related to: keep focusing on influencing EU decision making; providing for a "test bed" for Europe in different areas where NSPA are/can be in the forefront; knowledge sharing platform; discussion forum on common challenges (and how to deal with them in the regions) and/or a platform for common development opportunities within a common/aggregated NSPA Smart Specialisation model?

### **Promote and map possible NSPA project cooperation and arenas**

- Promoting cross-border cooperation between the NSPA regions and in new sectors based on EU priorities on EU financing.
- Mapping current initiatives and projects in a NSPA databank in order to fully exploit the existing information and knowledge sharing, in order to deepening collaboration without necessarily starting something new.
- Mapping common initiatives, platforms and operating projects (for example Arctic governance on land use, mining industry innovation platforms) and EU initiatives (for example the S<sub>3</sub>-platform) which can act as tools for NSPA meetings, strengthening the NSPA collaboration and visibility.
- Placing the NSPA on the European innovation map, using already existing platforms for collaboration/visibility.