



What next for EU Arctic Policy ?

A joint view to a stakeholder consultation from Arctic Mayors of cities Oulu (FI), Luleå (SWE) and Tromsø (NO).

Arctic cities Oulu (FI), Luleå (SWE) and Tromsø (NO), form a network of major cities in the European Arctic sharing common economic, logistical environmental and social interests. These three Arctic cities are all centers for growth and employment of their respective regions of Northern Ostrobothnia, Norrbotten and Troms, belonging to the NSPA network, as well as of the Arctic region as a whole.

The total number of inhabitants in cities of Oulu, Luleå and Tromsø is 340 000 people which represent about 8,5 % of the total number of 2,8 million inhabitants in the European Arctic. All three cities are university cities having in total about 50 000 university students and even world-leading research, technology and innovation capacities.

Arctic cities Oulu, Luleå and Tromsø appreciate the EU level interest in Arctic issues and is pleased to note the European Union emphasizes the need for dialogue between the Member States, Indigenous Peoples and other stakeholders. Oulu, Luleå and Tromsø are all involved in the NSPA network and endorses their view on the EU Arctic policy.

Arctic cities of Oulu, Luleå and Tromsø endorse the recommendations of the Growth from the North –report, which was a co-production of an expert group set up by the Prime Ministers of Norway, Sweden and Finland, published in the Arctic Frontiers –event in Tromsø in January 2015. We trust that the European Union take into account recent policy documents and expert reports produced within the Arctic region when formulating the EU Arctic Policy. As Arctic Mayors we share the vision of the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr Steven Harper, who stated about the Arctic as an asset – You can use or you can loose it.

In addition, however, economically powerful major cities of the European Arctic, which provide an intense, productive ecosystem in which entrepreneurs and small and large businesses thrive, delivering growth and jobs for Arctic inhabitants, should be considered as one of the key stakeholders and included in the discussions concerning the EU Arctic Policy and respective financing instruments. Arctic cities serve as public administration, trade, transport, and health centers for large regions. As stated in the Arctic Human Development Report 2014 (AHDR-II), urbanization in the Arctic is accelerating, propelled both by local and global forces. Social development and economic diversification and recovery will be led by urban centers also in the European Arctic.

The main challenges for the European Arctic

As Arctic Mayors we would like to European Union to pay careful attention to following future challenges when formulating the EU Arctic Policy:

Improving internal and external connectivity and logistics:

The economic development in the European Arctic requires good transport solutions across national borders. The economic well-being of the Arctic depends on good transport infrastructure, but transport issues are also vital when it comes to social aspects. People need to be able to move to the Arctic and within the Arctic. National transport plans, strategic studies and bilateral studies have identified a need for a more integrated approach to the transport system across borders in the Barents region (for example Joint Barents Transport Plan, Northern Dimension Partnership for Transport and Logistics, Growth from the North -report). The region needs better East –West connections by air, by road and rail and a long term transport plan. The plan should be clearly connected to TEN –T core network plans, cover all modes of transport and focus on border-crossing transport corridors between Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. It should also take into consideration the connection to the Arctic Sea by rail. Also efficient maritime transport is of vital importance to the Arctic industries.

As Arctic cities of Oulu, Luleå and Tromsø with our respective regions we have also implemented our own initiative in the field of connectivity by launching the Arctic Airlink in January 2015 connecting Northern university cities in Finland, Sweden and Norway five times per week. Until now the travelling time by car between Oulu and Tromsø has been about 9,5 hours, which is as long as it takes to fly to the Far East. The Arctic Airlink - flight takes only 40 minutes from Oulu to Luleå and 80 minutes from Luleå to Tromsø. The new route is an opportunity for tourism and it will enhance co-operation on economic life, research institutes and the Universities in three countries. All three regions in three countries are committed to financing the route until the end of the summer 2019. The aim is that after a five year period the route has been able to create a sustainable business model.

Understanding and meeting the needs of Arctic Youth

Oulu, Luleå and Tromsø share a great asset, a young population. For example in Oulu, average age is 37 years. The future of the Arctic is dependent on its youth. Arctic cities play an important role in terms of offering young people of the Arctic attractive educational and work opportunities as well as means for good quality life to keep them within the region as future builders. To cite the report entitled Growth from the North, without sustainable development and flourishing communities where individuals and families are happy to live, Northern Europe and the Arctic area will end up a hollow shell of little significance to the people or the development outside the area.

Economic diversification, opportunities for jobs and growth, increased labour mobility

Without investment and new growing businesses in various sectors there will be no jobs, no houses being built, no ground for Arctic communities to flourish. If we truly want to see the European Arctic as part of future success stories in the Europe as a whole, then investments in sustainable growth, diversified economy and business development, a higher-degree of labor mobility and sustainable communities are needed. Cross- border co-operation and co-operation between Arctic cities is a powerful tool to enhance business development and entrepreneurship, build capacities, learn from each other and develop new products, services and innovations. It is however crucial to balance economic activities, investments and growth potential with environmental and climate concerns with goal to minimize negative effects and impact. Arctic university cities have great capacities to develop greener, smarter solutions that would not benefit only the European Arctic itself but would also bring added value for European competitiveness and growth.

Harmonization of regulatory framework

Border obstacles between the Nordic countries have hindered regional economic development in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland, for example in terms of the mobility of qualified labor and the simplicity of running a business across borders. Reducing border obstacles and harmonization of regulatory framework is of great importance to economic growth in the European Arctic.

Importance of the Arctic to the globe and local voices

Many experts say, that the world will move to north in coming decades. Changing importance of the Arctic to the globe- economically, environmentally and politically, means that there is and will be different ambitions, also from non- Arctic states, that may have an impact on Arctic futures. As Arctic Mayors representing a significant number of people living in the European Arctic we would like to highlight the importance of hearing and respecting local voices in policy and decision making on the Arctic futures in all levels of governance.

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Matti Pennanen

Mayor
City of Oulu
Finland



Yvonne Stålnacke

Mayor
City of Luleå
Sweden



Jens-Johan Hjort

Mayor
City of Tromsø
Norway