# Resources and barriers in tourism development: cross-border cooperation, regionalization and destination building at the Finnish-Swedish border

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In the process of nation-building border regions have been integrated with the national centres and cross-border connections have decreased, leaving these regions in a rather peripheral and marginal position. Such state-centric, differential development has been challenged in many border regions, particularly in the area of the European Union, and there has been a shift towards cross-border partnership and cooperation, manifested in common tourism development strategies and the building of cross-border destinations. This paper examines the regional and institutional framework for cross-border cooperation, networking and tourism development at the Finnish-Swedish border, which is one of the internal borders of the European Union. The conclusion of the paper is that the relational distance created by the border and the dependence of cross-border tourism development on programme funding causes hindrances, particularly when viewed from the perspective of sustainable development of the tourism industry in this northern region.

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## Introduction

Cross-border cooperation in border regions is one of the most popular subjects in border research (see van Houtum 2000). Increased discussion of national borders and their significance has followed upon the remarkable geopolitical changes that have taken place in last two decades. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the opening of the Iron Curtain and European integration and enlargement have posed new questions regarding the significance and extent of state governance and regulation. As national borders are lines of transit between political, economic and often socio-cultural entities, i.e. nation-states, it has become almost a cliché to speak of border regions as 'laboratories' where one can examine how global and supranational processes transform these structures.

Despite the wide interest in the problems of state borders in political geography, international relations, sociology, anthropology and many other disciplines, state borders have not gained much attention in the literature of tourism. The theoretical and conceptual foundation for such research relies much on the works of Timothy (1999, 2001; see also Timothy & Teye 2004), who has been studying the relationship between tourism and borders from various perspectives, including cross-border cooperation and planning in border regions.

The meaning of state borders for tourism, tourism development and cooperation in border regions has gained more attention in recent years, however, and several articles have been published on this subject (Leimgruber 1998; Hartman 2006; Ioannides et al. 2006; Prokkola 2007). This research mirrors the fact that the increasing border permeability and increased frequency of interregional cooperation in the area of the European Union (EU), are manifesting themselves more and more obviously in the form of common tourism

development strategies and in the building of cross-border tourism destinations. By this means *touristic production of space* is linked with the European spatial planning and regional development policies and contributes to the process of giving meaning and identity to such new cross-border regions (cf. Chang 2001; see also Jensen & Richardson 2004; Paasi 2008).

At the same time, cross-border collaboration in tourism provides a means of coping with global shifts and changes in regional cross-border dynamics, as well as preparing the way for more sustainable tourism development. The achievement of sustainable tourism involves sustainable exploitation of local resources and the maintenance of an enduring tourism industry (see Inskeep 1994; Hall 2000). To achieve sustainability – particularly in an open border environment – tourism developers have to recognize both external and internal catalysts for tourism in a destination, which in the context of border regions means that when planning tourism there has to be an awareness of the circumstances and environment in the neighbouring country (Timothy 2001: 149). In the European Commission's programmes and rhetoric, too, the sustainability of the tourism industry is inextricably bound to territorial cohesion, cross-border cooperation and networking which are understood as the basis for economically and socially – and thus environmentally – sustainable development in the EU region (COM 2006; Committee of Regions 2006).

The purpose of this paper is firstly to scrutinize the regional, political and institutional foundations of cross-border cooperation and tourism development in the context of the Finnish-Swedish border, where the constant increase in border permeability, particularly since the two countries joined the EU in 1995, in addition to the new politico-administrative instruments, has increased the number of cross-border cooperational organizations and the intensity of networking. Secondly, cross-border cooperation and tourism development are examined in the context of four regional organizations. These regional organizations have been selected as examples, for besides cooperation and networking efforts in tourism, they have identified their administrative district as a tourist destination. Moreover, cross-border tourism development in this rural northern region is critically discussed in terms of economically and socially sustainable development. The examination is based on materials produced by the four regional cross-border organ-

izations, including project documents, reports, tourism homepages and brochures. The material is scrutinized against the theoretical background on cross-border cooperation and regionalization. Particular attention is paid to cross-border development in the EU context.

# Cross-border cooperation, regionalization and tourism development

## The changing border discourse – from barriers to resources

The relationship between national borders and tourism development is complex, for borders manifest themselves in tourism and influence it in many ways. Border institutions are built up and maintained by state governance in order to control and regulate movement and transport between states. A physical border can form a barrier to tourism flows, or it can be crossed almost unnoticed. Border permeability, the barrier effects caused by the border such as regulations for the movement of people and goods, will directly influence tourism flows and the development and distribution of tourism infrastructures in a border region. Border permeability, political situations and socio-cultural cohesion also affect to the potential emergence of cross-border partnership and development (Timothy 1999, 2001).

Timothy (1999: 185–185; see also Ioannides et al. 2006) applied the border typology of Martinez (1994) to the examination of levels of cross-border partnership. His model identifies five types of border region with respect to cross-border partnership. First, alienated border regions are differentiated and often politically distributed regions where daily interaction and cross-border partnership do not exist at all. Second, coexistent border regions often have neutral relations which enable some sort of interaction, but both representatives are inward-looking in their problem-solving and development strategies. Third, border regions where cross-border relations are characterized by cooperative partnership, composed of initiatives to solve common problems in legislative cooperation. Fourth, border regions characterized by collaborative cross-border partnership maintained by stable and institutionalized cooperation. Fifth, integrated border regions, where all border restrictions have been removed and the regions are func-

tionally merged, which will be manifested in an equal distribution of interregional partnership and networking across the border.

Since border permeability and the level of cross-border partnership mirror political divisions and state regulation, the shift in border discourse should be examined in the context of wider political and economic changes which the state regulation policies have encountered (Prokkola 2008). In the process of nation-building, border regions have been integrated with the national centres and cross-border connections have decreased. Infrastructures and industries have developed from a state-centric perspective, so that the differentiating influence of state borders can be seen even in border regions that have historically been culturally and ethnically coherent (Rumley & Minghi 1991). The understanding and implementation of state borders as barriers – in terms of both mobility and development – has left border regions in a rather peripheral and marginal position. Similarly, tourism development in border regions has been state-centric, characterized by hierarchically organized centralized state institutions, including the regional and local administrative districts.

During recent decades there has been a shift from national policy and regulation towards a more scattered and complex global economic and political environment. State borders are not only contested by global economic institutions and flows of capital, but also by the discourse of regionalism (Anderson 1996; Keating 1998). It has been argued that regions are contesting states as the principal political anchors of power, and that the functioning of the present politico-economic system is characterized by cross-border networks and partnerships in which national institutions compete for resources and capital on an equal footing with other political and non-political institutions and organizations. Alongside the national space of regionalism there are multiple new 'spaces of regionalism' such as city regions, cross-border regions and other trans-national regions, which not only become manifested in the implementation of new politico-economic activities, but also in cross-border identifications (Jones & MacLeod 2004; Paasi 2008). Regions are in a way understood as more natural and advantageous economic entities than states in terms of competitiveness, governance, sustainability and identity (Lagendijk 2005).

In Asia and Europe *regional tourism* in which the region – as opposed to nation-state – has be-come a focus of tourism development, clustering and destination building (Chang 2001: 1598; Wachowiak 2006). Cross-border cooperation in tourism is understood as a means of increasing regional competitiveness and sustainability, of strengthening regional identity and promoting the emergence of *functional* and *imaginary* region. A functional tourism region is created for it serves wider purposes in tourism development, for example, the clustering of tourist attractions, the creation of tourism routes and transportation and knowledge sharing (Chang 2001; see also Perkmann & Sum 2002). The concept of the imaginary region refers to the social construction of a tourism region or destination, often ordered by politicians or a region's developers (Chang 2001: 1600). Such new regional (cross-border) tourism spaces are not opposite to national, but nation-states often actively encourage the creation of new regional spaces because they support the national economy and assists sub-national entities in overtaking a larger share of EU resources (Deas & Lord 2006: 1863).

Transnational cooperation, multi-scalar governance and regionalism point to the changing role of the state and international borders. The foundation for political and economic activities across national boundaries is no longer established and regulated exclusively by nation-states and bilateral agreements between states, but there are simultaneously many other sub-national and supra-national organizations, private enterprises and other transactions that are involved (Jessop 2002). Cross-border cooperation is manifested in linkages between tourism organizations and the authorities, in dispersed politico-economic practices, in relations between public and private organizations and actors and in global-local interconnectedness and networking (Jamal & Getz 1995: 191). Such partnership and cooperation between neighbouring border regions in various economic and socio-cultural branches may be seen as indicating that many previously alienated or coexistent border regions are becoming more interdependent or even integrated. As border permeability increases, the development of state-centric tourism can be supplemented or even replaced by transnational cooperation and tourism development. In this new politico-economic situation in which regional cross-border organizations and partnerships are emerging, state borders no longer merely represent barriers to development, but instead they have become *resources* (O'Dowd 2003).

## Cross-border programmes and sustainable tourism development

*Former peripheral borderlands find themselves suddenly prospering from valuable tourism revenues and managers and politicians subsequently face questions on weather a border region could be considered as destination itself, how to market it as a competitive destination unit, and what to consider in managing it in a sustainable way* (Wachowiak 2006: 2).

The easing of political divisions, the removal of border restrictions and the EU's integration policy and economic support for cross-border cooperation have put regional tourism developers, politicians and other representatives in border regions into a new situation, as the citation from Wachowiak points out. Tourism development has become an intermediary of supra-national spatial policies and politics – the processes of 'the making of European space' – that is the implementation of the EU's new institutional structures and processes to regional and local scales (Jensen & Richardson 2004). In EU rhetoric and policy it is emphasized that the creation of functional tourism regions across national borders contributes to the integration process and to economically and socially sustainable development. Tourism is an economic activity which can reinforce territorial cohesion: *Sustainable tourism has great potential to support or even drive the convergence process among regions, through competitiveness and territorial co-operation (Committee of Regions 2006: 100).*

According to the statement of the Committee of Regions (2006: 100–101), particular attention should be paid to the sustainability of the industry, in which five goals have been identified: *firstly* the promotion of environmental protection and sustainable development in general, *secondly* the redefinition of the place of tourism industry in regional economy through the establishment of specific strategic objectives, *thirdly* the improvement of cooperation between regions and states on a territorial basis, which can be achieved by contributing to increase the cohesion between the regions within the EU, *fourthly* to improve collaboration and partnership between actors involved in tourism development and industry at all levels of governance, in which particular attention is paid to the dissemination of partnership among public and private actors, and *fifthly* to support initiatives which contribute to the operational implementa-

tion of sustainable tourism through adequate funding.

It has been argued that in order to protect environmental and economic benefits tourism must be developed and managed within a 'hierarchy of controls', ranging from the local to the regional, to the national, and even to the international level (Woodley 1999: 298). Similarly, in the Committee of Regions (2006) proposal it is emphasized that cross-border cooperation and multi-level partnership contribute to the sustainability of the tourism industry and of environmental protection. It suggests that the best practise for the achievement of sustainability in tourism is to see the linkages that exist with the wider economic and socio-cultural processes in regions. The promotion of public-private partnership is a means of extending social responsibility, that is extending the norms created by the EU to the workings of the private tourism sector. The possibility of obtaining financial support should be combined with the acceptance of common standards, which are understood as the prerequisites of sustainable development.

Cross-border regionalisation and cooperation can contribute to tourism development, but equally well the tourism industry can further cross-border knowledge and identification, without which regional integration cannot emerge (Prokkola 2007). One mediator of regional tourism development across national borders is the development of cross-border cooperation programmes (INTERREG) and initiatives directed at different branches of industry and cultural activities. The objective of this programme policy is to "develop cross-border social and economic centres" and to establish "genuine cross-border zones of economic activity" (European Commission 2003: 5). The first INTERREG I programme was set up in 1989 (1989–1993) and it has been followed by two further programme periods, 1994–1999 and 2000–2006. Special interregional cross-border initiatives have been directed to the promotion and steering of the sustainability of the tourism industry and territorial cohesion across borders (in the Union's internal border regions). Special targets in the latter cross-border cooperation programme, INTERREG III (2000–2006), were sustainable development in tourism and leisure (Committee of Regions 2006: 103). The programme and initiatives are financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), but national funding is also required. In addition, to gain finance from the programme, initiatives must involve actors from at least two coun-

tries (European Commission's Inforegio 2004; Faby 2006). The INTERREG projects have had a considerable impact on the fact, that European internal border regions have been gradually transforming as international tourism destinations both physically and symbolically, and some have turned into arenas for co-operative tourism development and place-making (see Leimgruber 1998; Ioannides et al. 2006; Wachowiak 2006; Prokkola 2007).

## The Finnish-Swedish border: cooperation and the building of cross-border destinations

### The geography of northern Finland and Sweden

The Finnish-Swedish border municipalities comprise a geographically extensive, rural and sparsely populated area. Because of the geographical and environmental circumstances in the Finnish and Swedish Tornio River Valley, central villages, population and services in the border municipalities are closer to those of their neighbour across the border than to the closest municipality centre within their own country. Their geographical distance from both national and global centres is long, although air traffic, and particularly the high density of technological means of communication such as the Internet, compensate for this geographical distance (see Ala-Rämi 2007). The best way to travel in terms of accessibility is a still a private car, because public transport is infrequent and scattered relative to that in central urban regions. One of the advantages in the region is the existence of focal travel routes to tourist destinations in the north, most notably the E8 highway (Council of Lapland 2003: 21–22).

These northern rural municipalities have faced enormous structural challenges in recent decades because of the migration of young and working-age people to the southern Finland and Sweden, which also means that the potential for extensive industrial development is low in most branches as compared with central areas. Tourism is therefore understood as one of the future industries for this rural and peripheral region (Lundmark 2006; Saarinen 2006). The development of the tourist industry in Finnish Lapland is nevertheless closely linked to the success of other industries and regional development in general (Saarinen 2004, 2006). Tourism development in the border munic-

ipalities, however, differs from that in the successful (skiing) destinations in the Finnish Lapland (with the exception of the tourist centre of *Ylläs* in the municipality of Kolari) in that they are "practically outside the great tourist flows" (Council of Lapland 2003: 16). In Swedish Lapland the mining industry in Kiruna which has brought employment and strengthened regional development, together with the politically disputed geographical location, have perhaps "delayed" tourism development in the border region, but the potential of tourism for assisting regional development has been acknowledged more recently (Prokkola 2008).

The northern environment and the seasonal and very special borderland culture characterise the Finnish-Swedish border region as a tourist destination. In terms of natural assets and winter activities the region cannot compete with the mountain areas of the Finnish and Swedish Lapland, and therefore the tourism strategy of the Tornio Valley region has put its emphasis on eco-tourism, specific events, cultural tourism, cross-border shopping (particularly in Tornio-Haparanda) and the development of tourism services for special groups such as the disabled (Council of Lapland 2003: 22; Matkailustrategia 2006). Attractions in the Tornio Valley region named in the promotional material issued for Swedish Lapland are the special religion, the borderland culture and the languages used (Swedish Lapland 2008). The region is multilingual, as alongside Finnish and Swedish there is a dialect known as *Meänkieli* which is spoken on both sides of the border and forms a basis for cross-border interaction. In addition, Sami is spoken in the northernmost part of the river valley.

### Political and organizational foundations for cross-border cooperation

Although border permeability, interaction and the degree of collaboration have varied with the prevailing political and historical circumstances, movement and transportation across the Finnish-Swedish border has been relatively unrestricted with the exception of the periods of the First and Second World Wars (1914–19 and 1939–1945). Politically troubled periods and powerful national integration policies have also introduced some mental divisions and hindrances to cross-border relations at times. In Sweden a powerful cultural and linguistic assimilation policy was directed at the Finnish speaking population in the Tornio Val-

ley region. Moreover, it was considered as a threat that Finnish nationalists expressed wishes to relocate the border along the Kalix River so that it would follow the linguistic border. The Finnish nationalist movement evoked a counter-reaction against Finland among the Tornio Valley inhabitants in Sweden (Klockare 1982; Elenius 2001). Moreover, during the Cold War period the national divide was strengthened since Finland was counted as an eastern country whereas Sweden belonged to the West, so that the border represented the line between east and west.

Hence, despite the relative openness of the border which has enabled interact to take place among the local populations, state integration policies directed at this peripheral border region have led to differentiation between the Finnish and Swedish regions. Because of the dominant role of the Nordic welfare state in both countries, professional networks and contacts in particular have become highly state-centric. Existing public and private networks in the tourism industry are to a great extent state-centric (see Council of Lapland 2007). On the other hand, the common culture, cross-border marriages and migration – mainly from Finland to Sweden – have helped to maintain unofficial social networks which have furthered the common borderland culture and formed a basis for cooperation (Lundén & Zalamans 2001; Paasi & Prokkola 2008).

Networking and partnership in tourism has been going on for more than a century, having begun with the establishment of national travel associations in Finland and Sweden. National organizations also form the basis for development in the peripheral Finnish-Swedish border region, but in addition there has been a parallel development of regional cross-border organizations from the 1960s onwards (Prokkola 2008). At the regional level, institutional cooperation in tourism across the border has been developing under the Council for the North Calotte Region (covering the northern parts of Norway, Finland and Sweden), in the wider setting of the Nordic Ministry (Aalbu 1999). The tourism sector has formed one branch of this development, and a cooperative tourism programme was established by the Nordic Ministry for the first time in 1978 (Pihlström 1983). At the local level, cross-border cooperation between municipalities on both sides was established in an agreement signed between the Nordic countries in 1979, and this has served as a means of meeting local needs and minimising the problems caused by the border.

Together with some Western European border regions, the Tornio Valley has been ranked as one of the most advantageous border regions in Europe in terms of cross-border cooperation, due to the many historical and cultural connections between the two sides (Westman & Ronkainen 2007). Attitudes towards cross-border collaboration are positive and motivation for collaboration can be found from the fact that both regions are facing problems that are common to most northern peripheral regions, such as a decline in population density and increased unemployment. Cooperation is understood as providing synergetic advantages. The municipalities in northern peripheral regions are facing problems in sustaining basic infrastructure and services because the shift in regional policy has brought with it new demands for economic efficiency and competitiveness in local government. On the other hand, the border had been permanent for two hundred years, which means that the local institutions and public and private tourism networks and organizations have for the most part developed along national lines.

On the other hand, the frequency and organization of collaboration networks across the border has increased along with the gradual removal of border restrictions. Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995, and this has introduced new strategies and possibilities for cooperation in what has now become an internal border region. Cross-border cooperation is particularly supported by the union's interregional cooperation programmes (INTERREG), which are aimed at lowering institutional and cultural hindrances to local cross-border interaction and developing inter-regional networks. In consequence, the increased border permeability that has ensued upon membership of the EU, together with new politico-administrative instruments providing financial backing for cross-border projects, has increased the number of cross-border cooperation organizations and intensified networking in this northern border region (Paasi & Prokkola 2008). In the recent open border context there are various overlapping cross-border tourism partnerships and cooperation initiatives, since recent cooperation has been implemented through multi-level partnerships between municipalities, organizations and private enterprises, as is consistent with the goals set up by the Committee of Regions (2006). Then earlier common understanding of the border as a barrier to development and interaction has now been complemented or contested
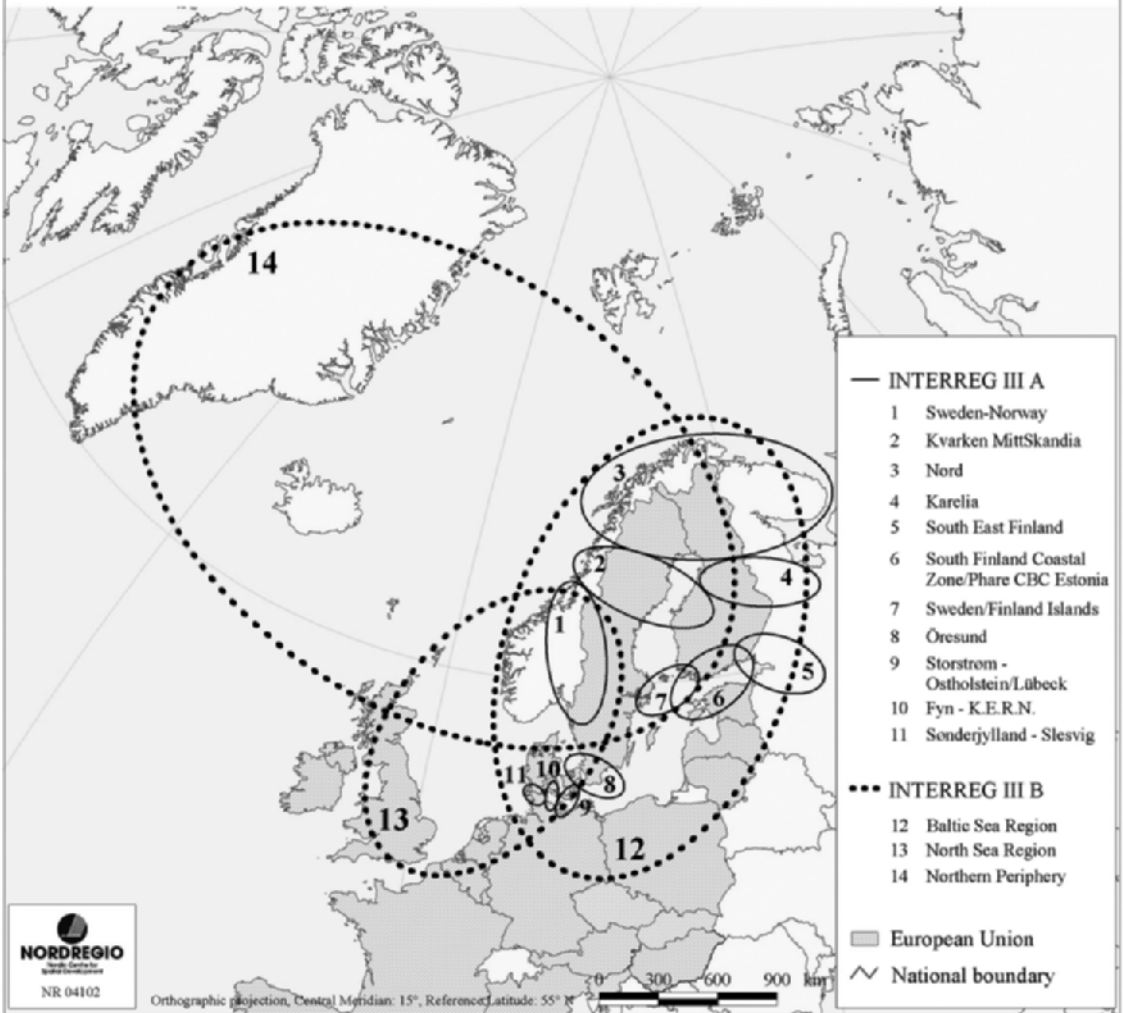
# NORDIC INTERREG III A/B PROGRAMME AREAS



Fig. 1. Map of cross-border regions in the Nordic countries determined by INTERREG programme areas. Many of these cross-border regions have their roots in Nordic cooperation. Source: Nordregio 2008, published with permission.

with the notion of the border as a *resource* (cf. O'Dowd 2003).

The Nordic INTERREG III programme areas are geographically divergent, in that some straddle over larger sea frontiers and others such as the IN-TERREG Nord area have contiguous land borders (Fig. 1). In the most recent programme period the Finnish and Swedish border municipalities and other public organizations, associations and entre-preneurs received funding for cross-border initia-tives from the North Calotte sub-programme of INTERREG III A, within which there was a separate project grouping to support the development of tourism and leisure activities in the border region,

Table 1. Cross-border organizations and the building of tourist destinations in the context of the Finnish-Swedish border.

| Organization/ region | Governance/ decision making | Substantive focus | INTERREG programme/ e.g. projects | Objectives | Destination |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Council of Tornio Valley/ Tornio River Valley | Council/ Municipality representatives | Promoting cooperation between border municipalities, entrepreneurs and organizations and in civil society in the region and internationally. | North Calotte sub-programme, INTERREG A/ Cultural Tourism Network (1997), Northern Lights Highway (2003) | Supporting tourism entrepreneurship. Building networks and contacts among local associations and museums. The development of the Tornio Valley as a tourist destination. | Study tours Tornio Valley |
| Arctic Circle Network AB/ Middle Tornio Valley region | Public corporation | Promoting industrial life and tourism development in Ylitornio and Övertorneå. | North Calotte sub-programme, INTERREG A/ Kulle (2002–2003), Quality to packet and packet to Internet (2002–2004) | The creation of networks among tourism entrepreneurs. Joint marketing strategies and commercialization of the region as tourist destination. Joint tourism information centre. | The Land of the Arctic Circle |
| Provincia Bothniensis/ Town of Tornio and Haparanda | Public organization/ Working committee | Promoting and coordinating cooperation between the Tornio and Haparanda 'twin' towns. | North Calotte sub-programme, INTERREG A/ Mediapolis (2002–2004), On the Boundary (2004–2006) | Common tourism strategy and joint tourism information centre. The commercialization of the cross-border town as tourist destination. | Haparanda-Tornio |
| Bothnian Arc/ Coastal zone beside the Gulf of Bothnia | Association/ Public and private representatives | Promoting cooperation and networking between Finland and Sweden. The creation of a strong and competitive region. | Baltic Sea Region, INTERREG B/ Tourism and Environment (1998–2001), The Bothnian Arc – Arctic Coastal Tourism Region (2002–2005) | Promoting sustainable tourism development. The commercialization of the region as a tourist destination. | Bothnian Arc |

the Culture and Experience Tourism sub-programme. Altogether around twenty tourism and leisure projects gained funding in the programme period 2000–2006 (see Interreg IIIA Nord 2008). In the INTERREG II B programme, which covered geographically wider areas than INTERREG III A, the municipalities involved belonged to the Baltic Sea Region and the Northern periphery programme areas. This newly developed cross-border interaction, supported and partially funded by the EU and private entrepreneurs, is more strictly organised and requires more intensive cross-border interaction between actors on multiple levels than the previous Nordic North Calotte collaboration – which, of course, paved the way for a cross-border working culture (see Christiansen & Joenniemi 1999; Prokkola 2007; Paasi & Prokkola 2008).

## Tourism development and destination building: a review of four cases

Several overlapping cross-border organizations can be identified in the Finnish-Swedish border region, of which I will examine four: the Council of the Tornio Valley, Provincia Bothniensis, the Bothnian Arc and Arctic Circle Network AB. The foundation for these organizations is based on the perceived need for the municipalities to strengthen collaboration across the border and remove the hindrances caused by it (Table 1). The organizations have implemented and co-ordinated cross-border cooperation in tourism, including the specification and commercialization of cross-border destinations (Fig. 2).

### The Council of Tornio Valley

The Council of the Tornio Valley was founded in 1987 as a cooperative organization uniting six border municipalities in Finland, Tornio, Ylitornio, Pello, Kolari, Muonio and Enontekiö, and four in Sweden, Haparanda, Övertorneå, Pajala and Kiruna. Representatives were appointed equally by the Finnish and Swedish municipalities and the regional councils. The obtaining of finance for employing staff and implementing cooperative projects was difficult at the beginning by comparison with national organizations, but since 1988 there has been a permanent post of secretary to the organization (Alamäki 1997). Three new members have joined the council during the present decade, the Norwegian mu-
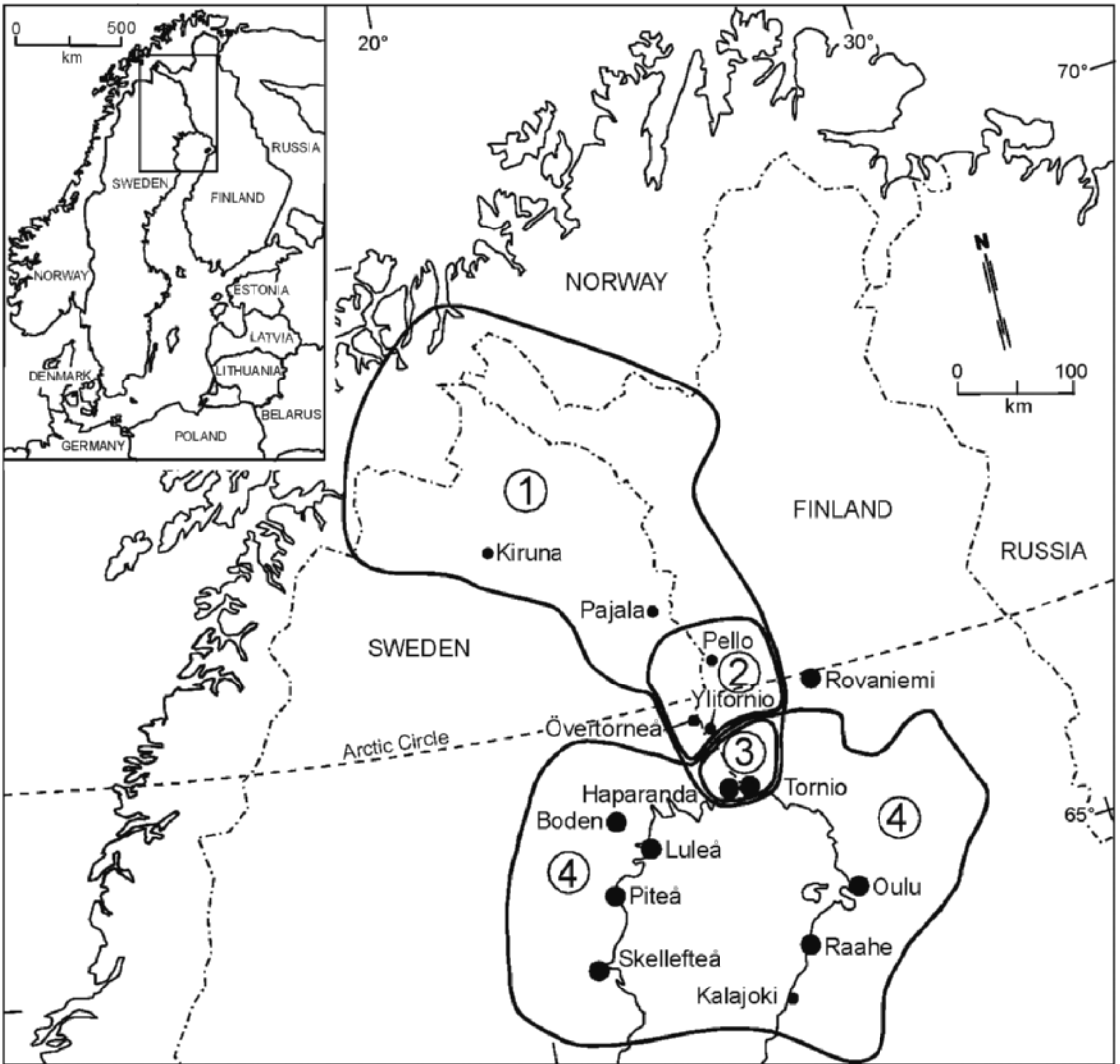
Fig. 2. Map of tourist destinations defined by the administrative districts which are members of the cross-border organiza-
tion: (1) the Council of Tornio Valley, (2) Arctic Circle Network AB, (3) Provincia Bothniensis and (4) the Bothnian Arc.

nicipalities of Kautokeino, Kåfjord, Storfjord and
Nordreisa.

The roots of the organization lie in national col-
laboration between border municipalities, which
was officially started up in Finland in 1923 and in
the Swedish Tornio Valley a couple of decades
later, in 1941. These two already had some com-
munication at that time, and several infrastructural
initiatives such as the building of bridges over the
border river were coordinated between them in
1960s and 1970s. Since then cooperation projects

have been taking place in several branches of ac-
tivity: energy, fishing, education, employment,
tourism and local resources (Alamäki 1997:
225–226).

The council serves as the representative organi-
zation for the Tornio Valley in the Association of
European Border Regions (AEBR), and was respon-
sible for the planning of the first proposal for the
INTERREG III programme in the Tornio Valley re-
gion (Council of Tornio Valley 2008a) and for the
coordination and implementation of several cross-

border projects. Its tourism and leisure-related initiatives include the "Cultural tourism network in the Tornio Valley" (Kulttuurimatkailuverkosto), started in 1997 and the *Northern Lights Highway* (2003) and *Northern Lights Highway – road signs* (2005) projects. The objective of the first project was to build up networks of contacts among local cultural associations and museums in the region. One of the motives was that such a network, together with the collection of information on cultural tourist attractions in this cross-border destination could be of particular use to local entrepreneurs (Lantto 1998: 44). The homepage *StudyTours Tornio Valley* represents the final product of this project, consisting of a map of tourist destinations and information about attractions in each municipality (see Council of Tornio Valley 2008b). Similarly, the construction of the Northern Lights Highway as a tourist road is an attempt to serve tourists and to further the development of the Tornio Valley region as a tourist destination (see Lantto 2003).

## Arctic Circle Network AB

The adjacent border municipalities of Ylitornio and Övertorneå are located at the latitude of the Arctic Circle within the Tornio River Valley and have been engaged in cooperation in various branches such as public health services, education and fire services since the 1970s, and also at the level of sports and culture. One of the cooperation intermediaries for the municipalities is the Council of the Tornio Valley, of which they are founder members.

Since customs and many border restrictions were removed from the crossing points at Ylitornio (Aavasaksa) and Övertorneå in 1995, cooperation has been developing further in various branches. The available INTERREG funds, requiring cross-border management, have provided the necessary motivation for creating new forms of cooperation. In tourism, official cooperation began in 1998 with the foundation of the joint corporation *Arctic Circle Network AB*, which involves local actors and tourism professionals in both countries and is linked to many interest groups in the tourism industry. The first two-year project was started in 1998 – at the same time a joint tourist information centre was established in the old customs building – and involved the creation of joint marketing material and the development of web pages for the project (Lapin liiton… 2005). Accordingly, the cor-

poration has completed several cross-border projects with the principal purpose of creating sustainability and continuity in regional tourism development (projects that include *Kulle* 2002–2003 and *Quality to packet and packet to internet* 2002–2004). Objectives in tourism development and in the projects included the development of joint marketing strategies, the creation of networks among entrepreneurs in the region, the commercialization of tourism brochures and a joint tourist homepage introducing the cross-border region as a harmonious entity. The tourist information homepages include maps, information about the regional culture and history, attractions, accommodation and services in both municipalities, introducing the region as a cross-border destination, the *Land of the Arctic Circle* (see Ylitornio-Övertorneå tourism 2008).

## Provincia Bothniensis

Provincia Bothniensis is a cooperative organization established between the towns of Tornio (Finland) and Haparanda (Sweden) in 1987. The towns have a central geographical location as the southernmost overland border crossing point (typically tourists passengers arrive from the south) and it has been estimated that more than eight million people cross the border here every year (Lantto 2003: 77). Border shopping is common, mostly involving people coming from Finland to Haparanda, but it has varied in extent and significance according to the political and economic situations.

The close geographical proximity and cultural coherence between the two towns have motivated official cooperation in public services since the 1960s (e.g. joint use of a single swimming baths, a joint district heating plant, educational cooperation) (Pietilä 1994) as the political ambivalence between the countries has eased. The objective of the organization Provincia Bothniensis is to promote and coordinate cooperation between these "twin" towns. In practise, cooperation is implemented through projects in parallel with national and international partners. There is equal representation of both towns in the administration of the organization and on its working committee (Provincia Bothniensis 2008).

Provincia Bothniensis is a central organization in cross-border project planning and implementation. Cross-border initiatives have become perhaps the most visible part of regional planning and image building in this area since Finland and Sweden

joined the EU, and there have been several INTER-REG projects to back up the construction of a "borderless" city centre, which has given the region much positive publicity (e.g. the *Mediapolis* 2002–2004 and *På Gränsen – Rajalla* 2004–2006 projects). The development has been cumulative, with one of the most popular tourist attractions in this border region developing in Haparanda in the form of the opening of a branch of IKEA in 2006.

The tourism strategy is to market the twin towns as a *boundless* destination (Service Guide… 2006). They have a joint tourist information centre next to the customs office in the Finnish side of the border and a joint homepage, where it is possible to find information on all services, accommodation, attractions and events in the area (see Haparanda-Tornio 2008).

### Bothnian Arc

The Bothnian Arc association was established in 1998. The members are Boden, Haparanda, Kalix, Luleå, Piteå, Skellefteå and Älvsbyn in Sweden and the Raahe, Kemi-Tornio, Oulu and Ylivieska regions in Finland. In addition, there are members from industry, commerce and certain universities. It is therefore geographically and organizationally more extensive than Provincia Bothniensis, Arctic Circle Network AB or the Council of the Tornio Valley.

The association places emphasis on the geographically central and strategic location of the Bothnian Arc between the Baltic Sea Area and the Barents Region, and stresses that in terms of communication, culture, social structure and economics it is a transit zone between these geographically wider regions. Cooperation in the area of the Bothnian Arc is understood as opening up "new opportunities for creating a strong and competitive region" (Bothnian Arc 2008).

The Bothnian Arc initiative has been termed an "umbrella project", the aim of which is to promote cross-border cooperation and networking between Finland and Sweden in this particular region. Regional development has been implemented though three sub-projects (1998–2001): *Vision, Strategy and Network, Communication Systems and Tourism and Environment*, which gained funding from the respective countries and the INTERREG III C programme. The objective of the tourism subproject was to examine the conditions for sustainable development in the region and to market the region as a tourist destination in its own right

(Bothnian Arc 2001). This work of developing tourism has been continued in the later programme period under a project entitled The Bothnian Arc – Arctic Coastal Tourism Region (with funding from the Baltic Sea INTERREG III B programme between 2002 and 2005), the objective of which was "to make the Bothnian Arc a well-known borderless destination with a unique Arctic character in the far north Europe" (Council of Oulu Region 2008).

## Cross-border initiatives, cooperation and sustainable tourism

Cross-border cooperation and partnership have been specified as the basis for sustainable tourism development in the EU. Recent empirical research in the Finnish-Swedish border region, however, indicates that there are several "stumbling blocks" in the promotion of cross-border partnership and the establishment of cross-border destinations from the perspective of sustainable tourism development. The review of cross-border initiatives and their accomplishments point out that multi-scalar governance and cross-border partnership do not, in itself, enhance sustainable tourism development economically, socially or environmentally. In many cases it is first and foremost a strategy for regional developers to obtain co-funding from EU programmes and only a secondary means by which to achieve sustainable tourism development.

Firstly, in their examination of the Bothnian Arc project, Ioannides et al. (2006: 137) observed that the protection of national interests often eliminates the potential regional benefits to be achieved from cross-border cooperation. Secondly, the similarity between the tourist attractions on the Finnish and Swedish sides of the border often leads to competition rather than collaboration. Similarly, it has been predicted in the tourism strategy for Finnish Lapland (Council of Lapland 2003: 14) that competition between the Nordic Countries will be even more intense in the future, particularly as far as winter and Christmas tourism is concerned. Similarly, the municipalities on both sides of the Tornio Valley are marketed Arctic nature and activities and the cultural uniqueness of the regions in much the same way. Thus there is an indication of competition between tourism destinations, in which both sides are trying to appeal to tourists with similar services and attractions. Entrepreneurs

have also felt that the implementation of cross-border projects is too bureaucratic (Ioannides et al. 2006; see also Lähteenmäki-Smith 2003).

Secondly, the case of Arctic Circle Network AB shows that, particularly in the northern rural municipalities, such project-oriented cross-border co-operation can causes problems from the perspective of sustainable tourism development. In the case of the Arctic Circle network the fact that cross-border tourism development has relied on short-term INTERREG funding is shown to be particularly problematic. This has caused discontinuities and created a dependence on a few key actors that are in charge of the projects. The bilateral corporation has also faced fundamental problems, for example, with the resignation of one its leading members during the third project to be established. This indicates a certain organizational distance and vulnerability in cross-border initiatives, their dependence on support from both cross-border municipalities and the difficulties encountered in pursuing long-term tourism development strategies – and thus organizational sustainability (Haywood 1999). Project funding may bring artificial external support for rural border municipalities, but it cannot provide continuity, as the municipalities are not always willing to provide financial support for cooperation themselves. Short-term project funding also is in conflict with the principles of permanence and sustainable development within the tourism industry. Similarly, financing has created some new thresholds in the case of the Council of the Tornio Valley. Because this council is not a governing body (any more than are the other three organizations), it has no executive power and it is highly dependent on political and economic support from the national and regional administrations (Hagström 2006). Moreover, the importance of public-private partnership and multi-scalar networks is evident in the direction followed by Arctic Circle Network AB, but the efforts to create networks among Finnish and Swedish entrepreneurs and the private and public sectors have only partly succeeded if perceived only in terms of the quantifiable indicators used in the INTERREG programme, since the intensity of interaction inside the networks has remained rather low (Prokkola 2007). Similarly, in the Bothnian Arc project less than one third of the firm managers in the region (in Sweden) were familiar with the initiative (Mattsson & Pettersson 2005).

Thirdly, with the exception of the project implemented by the Bothnian Arc, issues concerning environmental protection have not gained much attention. The primary goal in the projects has been to promote services and attractions which will encourage more tourists from abroad to visit the region. Sustainability is therefore evaluated mostly in industrial and economic terms, which perhaps reflects the fact that the number of tourists visiting the region is relatively low compared with many other regions such as the mountain resorts in Finnish Lapland. Moreover, there is a lack of cross-border communication and insufficient transportation services across the border. One of the objectives in cross-border cooperation and in INTERREG co-funded projects, particularly, has been the development of tourism routes and cross-border transportation. The establishment of a daily coach transportation link between Oulu (Finland) and Luleå (Sweden) is one of the few concrete achievements of the Bothnian Arc cooperation (Koivumaa 2008: 209). This link and the coach service between the towns of Tornio and Haparanda together serve as the main sources of public transportation across the southernmost border crossing point. At the other five permanent border crossing points (bridges) there is no frequent public transportation across the border making it rather difficult to travel from Finland to Sweden or vice versa, unless by private car. Accordingly, the development of tourism routes coordinated by the Council of the Tornio Valley has included the improvement of sanitary and other services in parking places alongside the road (Lantto 2003: 78). By this means the development of proper tourism facilities and services alongside the main tourist routes supports environmental protection.

Fourth, the existence of mental barriers and mistrust create hindrances for cooperation between local stakeholders. For example, it has been argued that cooperation between Tornio and Haparanda appears less ideal from a socio-cultural perspective, however, as it has not succeeded in removing the mental barriers between the Finnish and Swedish-speaking populations (Jukarainen 2001; Zalamans 2001). On the other hand, compared with many other border regions the organization and achievement of cross-border cooperation between the twin towns of Tornio and Haparanda in the setting of Provincia Bothniensis has been shown by Kosonen and Loikkanen (2005) to be progressive in all sectors, including between the public and private sectors, by comparison with other similar cross-border initiatives. In particular, the opening of a branch of IKEA has contributed

positively to the development of tourism, multiplying the number of border crossings from Finland to Haparanda for shopping purposes, although seen from the perspective of some entrepreneurs in Tornio the benefits have not been felt on the Finnish side (Manninen 2007). However, one important principle for the local communities in the region is impartiality and mutual benefit (see Paasi & Prokkola 2008). The suspicion that this might not be the case could even prevent further cooperation and create barriers to sustainable tourism development.

## Conclusions

Cross-border tourism development is connected with multi-scalar spatial networks and diverse operational environments. In this paper cross-border tourism development has been discussed in the context of the Finnish-Swedish border. Cooperative tourism development in the Finnish-Swedish border region is showing how the previously coexistent border regions are now searching for partnership and collaboration. The level of cross-border partnership is relatively high for it has been maintained by stable and institutionalized cooperation since the 1960s (cf. Timothy 1999: 185).

In this paper the particular focus has been on the four cross-border organizations which have supported continuous cooperation between Finnish and Swedish municipalities, entrepreneurs and other local interest groups. Cross-border tourism development and destination building in the each of four cases has proceeded in the following stages. Firstly, municipalities and other instances have established a cross-border organization (in the case of Arctic Circle Network AB and Bothnian Arc this was motivated by the possibility of obtaining external funding for cooperation projects from the INTERREG programme). Secondly, cross-border projects have been implemented to support tourism development in the area covered by these municipalities. Thirdly, tourism development has involved the commercialization and marketing of the area concerned as a single destination. Moreover, cross-border tourism can be developed on various overlapping scales, so that one municipality can belong to several tourism destinations, for example. Thus the cities of Tornio and Haparanda are members of three cross-border organizations and tourist destinations.

So, in the cases discussed here the foundation and commercialization of cross-border tourist destinations as imaginary tourism regions is bound to organization and financing to a greater extent than in the case of many "authentic" tourist destinations (cf. Quack 2006). Cooperation, destination building and commercialization have been supported politically and financially by means of cross-border initiatives. There can be several districts along one national border, and also overlapping cross-border tourism destinations created and commercialized by different organizations and associations. Strengthening the image of a region as a desirable cross-border tourist destination both reflects and promotes increasing border permeability. This, as well as the commercialization and marketing of the area concerned as a single destination, shows how *touristic production of space* contributes to the process of giving meaning and identity to the newly "discovered" and established cross-border programme regions in the EU (cf. Paasi 2008). On the other hand, the border region is still far from being a functional tourism region. This is manifested, for example, in the fact that frequent public transportation across the border is found only in the southernmost border crossing point in Tornio-Haparanda.

The potential for cross-border tourism development cannot be predicted by any single factor, but a set of factors can be put forward, such as geographical distance, political and economic environments, means of communication and sociocultural cohesion in the regions concerned. The research carried out to date in the Finnish-Swedish border region supports conclusions drawn from other similar collaborative regions, in that economically and socially sustainable cross-border tourism development has proved to be a challenging undertaking even in regions where border permeability has been high for centuries (see Leimgruber 1998; Hartman 2006). Even though regions on opposite sides of a border are close in terms of geographical distance and frequently have viable systems of communication with their neighbours, the (often long-term) existence of the border creates a degree of differentiation that introduces cultural and organizational distance between them when it comes to the development of cooperation (Hartman 2006; Quack 2006; Prokkola 2007). Organizational hindrances and competition are certainly to be found in state-centric tourism development initiatives and partnership, but these are perhaps easier to manage in a socio-culturally coher-

ent environment. In cross-border initiatives it is this socio-cultural distance which forms "additional" barriers to cooperation and tourism development.

Cross-border cooperation and tourism development is supported and co-funded by the EU, but funding is also required from national and regional organizations. However, such politically driven tourism development in a cross-border context can be problematic, particularly from the perspective of economic and social sustainability. The tourism industry in the northern rural regions of Finland and Sweden is less self-reliant than in the more central city regions, which have more diverse tourist attractions, services and professional tourism personnel. In such rural and peripheral regions, where the development of the tourism industry is linked with overall regional development policies, an open border environment can cause politically motivated and therefore often unsustainable competition. On the other hand, cross-border collaboration can offset this competition and provide a means of creating more sustainable tourism development and synergetic advantages in the long-term. Hence, when viewed from a wider societal and cultural perspective, the significance of cross-border partnership and networking in the development of tourism cannot be measured only on pragmatic grounds, in terms of the accumulation of regional income, for example. Its substance should be understood and evaluated in the wider European region-building context in which peripheral border regions are redefined as zones of economic activity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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