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**IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE
BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC REGION –
CULTURAL COOPERATION AS AN
INSTRUMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Liudmila Lagutina: Identity Construction in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region – Cultural Cooperation as an Instrument

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The thesis examines how the Barents Euro-Arctic Region's identity is constructed by the means of multilateral cultural cooperation in the region. It argues that the development of a regional identity is a declared aim for the participants of Barents regional cooperation. There are also various projects in the sphere of culture which imply the realization of community-building practices aimed at *Barents regional identity* promotion. Therefore, it is proposed that cultural cooperation plays an important role in Barents identity construction. The issue of Barents regional identity is not a new phenomenon in the academic discourse, however, the research question of the thesis has not yet been answered. Currently, we do not know yet which role cultural cooperation plays in regional community building and collective identity development in culturally diverse regions such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

The research represents a multiple case-study and examines three cases at the practical level of cultural cooperation: two cultural research projects with the titles 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe' and the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region', and a cultural project not related to the academic sphere of cultural cooperation entitled as 'Barents Spektakel'. The analysis of the official institutional level of Barents cooperation significantly complements the study of practical-level cases. Methodologically, the thesis relies on qualitative content analysis of primary data related to the above mentioned practical cases and the official institutional level of cooperation in the region.

The study has shown that cultural cooperation serves as a tool which could be significantly useful in regional identity-building practices. At the same time, it has been established that actors of cultural cooperation in the Barents Region do not perceive Barents identity construction as a primary goal of their activities. Nevertheless, Barents regional identity promotion inevitably becomes a “by-product” of regional cultural cooperation.

Keywords: Barents Euro-Arctic Region, BEAR, identity, cultural cooperation, content analysis, constructivism

List of Abbreviations

BEAR – Barents Euro-Arctic Region

BEAC – Barents Euro-Arctic Council

BRC – Barents Regional Council

JWGC – Joint Working Group on Culture

JWGY – Joint Working Group on Youth

JWGER – Joint Working Group on Education and Research

EU – European Union

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) embraces the territories of Finland (Oulu Region, Lapland, North Karelia, Kainuu), Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten), Russia (Arkhangelsk, Karelia, Nenets, Komi, Murmank) and Norway (Finnmark, Troms, Nordland); combining various nations with their own unique traditions, values and cultures. At the same time we can see references to such a phenomenon as *Barents regional identity* (Honneland, 1998; New Horizons in the Barents Region 2011 – 2013; New Winds in the Barents region 2008 – 2010). As an example, the creation of regional identity is a publicly declared aim for the participants of Barents regional cooperation stated in the Barents Programme 2019-2023 (Barents Programme, 2019-2023: 5). Moreover, even Russia has presented its interest in Barents identity building in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council meeting in 2017 held under the Russian chairmanship. The ministerial declaration signed on the meeting states that 'the Council acknowledges the importance of Barents regional cooperation for the development and strengthening of the Barents regional identity which outstands by its openness and diversity'. (XVI Session Of The Barents Euro-Arctic Council Joint Declaration, 18-19 October, 2017).

It is also important to emphasize that one of the major aims for the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (the leading institute of transborder cooperation in the BEAR) is the creation of a shared identity, which would contribute to comprehensive security and cooperation in the region (Honneland, 1998: 12). Such an aim is mentioned in various programmes devoted to the BEAR development (New Winds in the Barents region 2008 - 2010, New Horizons in the Barents Region 2011 - 2013, Cultural Cooperation in the Barents Region Strategy 2014 - 2018). Thus, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) has proposed an idea of regional building which is based on the development of a transnational identity (Shlapeko, 2015: 27-28).

My Master's thesis addresses the issue of regional identity construction in the BEAR, focusing on cultural cooperation as an instrument of identity policy. The concept of identity is understood here as 'the understanding of person's belonging to a definite social group, which let them define their place in sociocultural community and take their bearings in the

surrounding community; identity is a background for natural and cultural sameness, which helps to distinguish 'us' from 'them' (Pavlova, 2011: 81).

It is significant to emphasize that strong regional identity plays a great role in consolidation of a region and serves as one of the main sources for its development and existence justification. The high level of people's self identification with a specific group leads to the increase in their loyalty to this group. According to Daniel Druckman, 'the stronger the loyalty, the more likely members of a group are to hold similar views and endorse similar strategies' (Druckman, 1994: 43-66 in Hall, 1999: 37). Consequently, the formation of a common regional identity serves as one of the major sources for regional community solidarization, therefore, providing a region with a longer subsistence and justifying its existence on the international arena. As Keating stated, 'in regions with strong popular identities, institutions based on these, may carry a greater legitimacy' (Keating, 2014 in Zimmerbauer, 2018: 242). Moreover, a feeling of joint identity may expand across national borders and lead to the development of new communities (Carlsnaes, 2002: 104). It follows that we may assume that a new regional identity within the framework of Barents regional cooperation may also be constructed and developed.

Following the ideas of Zimmerbauer, I understand the BEAR as a 'top-down construction of regional elite, serving primarily economic and business aspirations' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). Therefore, in order to enhance regional stability, get support and legitimization and as a result, prolong regional subsistence, for the BEAR it is significant to develop regional identity which should be embedded into the consciousness of people of the region uniting them into a regional community.

It is also worth mentioning that development of Barents collective identity could increasingly enhance the stability in the region as well as develop the relations among Barents member-states, due to the fact that 'individuals who are members of several groups based on several principles are less likely to invest themselves into conflicts than individuals whose entire self is defined in relation to a single group' (Eriksen, 1995: 435).

In order to gain acceptance of the public, a cross-border region needs to become visible throughout identity-work which is aimed at the promotion of regional identity (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). One of the major instruments for identity construction is cultural cooperation. Michael Keating insists that 'the mainstreaming of regional culture is the major part of the modern regional identity construction' (Keating, 2003: 92). According to Bloom, history and culture can provide 'an appropriate attitude for an experienced reality' and this

way, produce identification (Bloom, 1990: 52 in Paasi, 2003: 478). Therefore, the development of the cooperation in cultural sphere can serve as a great incentive for the development of regional identity.

In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that culture is an important part of Barents regional cooperation. As an example, the Joint Working Group on Culture operates under the frameworks of the Barents Euro Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council. Moreover, in 2013 a new strategy on cultural cooperation in the BEAR for 2014-2018 was adopted. Every year different programmes touching upon cultural cooperation are realized in the Barents Region and various cultural festivals are held. Since 2016 a special prize has been awarded for the contribution to the cultural cooperation.

The research contributes to studies of regional identity examining cultural cross-border cooperation as an instrument of identity construction in transborder regions which have significant cultural gap (in light of cultural differences between Western and Eastern parts of the Barents Region). The study also helps to understand the key features of Barents identity construction process which is crucial for vitality and development of the region. It is stated that formation of a joint regional identity serves as one of the major sources for a regional community solidarization providing it with a longer subsistence and justifying its existence on the international arena.

1.2. Theoretical Approach & Literature Review

This thesis focuses on *collective identity building* in the culturally diverse Barents Euro-Arctic Region. The research applies a *constructivist* approach, particularly I use *international relations constructivism*. According to constructivists, all communities are so called 'imagined constructs' which have a tendency to develop and are not the objective reality, but formed by the interested circles (Anderson, 2016: 47). In other words, international relations constructivism 'maintains that the sociopolitical world is constructed by human practice, and seeks to explain how this construction takes place' (Kubalkova et al, 1998: 20).

Identity serves as a key concept in constructivism theory. Constructivists define 'identity' as the understanding of a person's belonging to a definite group which implies full acceptance of values, norms and rules of this group (Pavlova, 2011: 81). In the context of the thesis, I want to point out that the formation of shared regional identity serves as a key

tool for regional solidarization providing a region with a longer subsistence and legitimizing it in the international arena, as people of the region are exercising the support to its activities.

At the same time, constructivism as such is quite broad to explain the regional identity formation processes, therefore, in my research I will also draw more on studies of collective identity formation and, particularly, 'regional identity' construction.

Following constructivism, I understand 'regions not as pre-given', natural territorial spaces, but as 'political and social constructs' (Söderbaum, 2016:6 in Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). As Zimmerbauer stated, the BEAR represents a 'top-down construction of regional elite, serving primarily economic and business aspirations' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). This notion is important, as it is groundless to claim that the inhabitants of the Barents Region perceive themselves as a regional community. Therefore, in order to enhance regional stability, get support and legitimization and as a result, prolong regional subsistence, for the BEAR it is significant to develop regional identity which should be embedded into the consciousness of people of the region uniting them into the regional community.

The concept of '*identity policy*' plays a key role in the research. In the thesis I would like to follow the idea developed by Tsumarova and distinct 'identity politics' from 'identity policy' (Tsumarova, 2012: 1). 'Identity politics' implies the political activities of disadvantaged groups aimed at the conscious formation of their collective identities in order to achieve their goals (Bernstein, 2005). In turn, 'identity policy' stands for the activities of political elites aimed at the collective (national; regional; local) identity formation (Tsumarova, 2012: 5). Thus, identity policy implies purposeful construction of collective identity (Achkasov, 2013: 72). Following the ideas discussed above, in my research I understand the result of identity policy as the acceptance by an individual of those stereotypes and values which are being transmitted by regional agents and, particularly, regional elite. The 'identity policy' as such is understood as a process of transmitting such stereotypes and values to the audience by regional agents in order to promote the development of regional consciousness.

In this thesis I will also apply the approach to the community-building practices developed by Eriksen (Eriksen, 1995). According to his ideas, 'there are two modes of group belongingness: *we-hood* and *us-hood*' or, 'we-as-subject and we-as-object', both of which serve purposes of social identification and group cohesion (Eriksen, 1995: 427). 'We'

implies 'interdependence and internal cohesion by virtue of a shared task' (Eriksen, 1995: 427). In turn, being 'us' refers to the 'cohesion by virtue of an external agent' and implies communication of 'a difference that makes a difference to all who are not included into the community' (Eriksen, 1995: 429). On the back of the ideas discussed above, in my thesis I concentrate on those promoted Barents regional features which point at the commonality within the BEAR community and existence of shared tasks and challenges. I also focus on those promoted regional characteristics which highlight Barents uniqueness in relation to 'others', that also need to be found.

In my research I assume that culture could serve as a major instrument of identity policy realization. According to Bloom, history and culture can provide 'an appropriate attitude for an experienced reality' and this way, produce identification (Bloom, 1990: 52 in Paasi, 2003: 478). Particularly, by the means of cultural cooperation it is most possible to transmit and popularize the narrative of regional identity. Therefore, I study how identity policy is implemented in the BEAR with the help of cultural cooperation.

There are only few studies on Barents identity construction. Honneland analyzed Barents cooperation and the perspectives of regional identity construction (Honneland, 1998). He argued that there is no sufficient background for the Barents identity to develop (Honneland, 1998: 10). In turn, Kaj Zimmerbauer justifies the possibility of building Barents identity (Zimmerbauer, 2013; Zimmerbauer, 2016; Zimmerbauer, 2018). Zimmerbauer highlights that 'image building and various promotion practices' could significantly 'boost the region and create the competitive edge through differentiation' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 913). For example, Zimmerbauer significantly emphasizes the role of regional branding in regional identity development (Zimmerbauer, 2016: 334). According to his ideas, region-branding makes a region more recognizable by a wider audience, thus, developing regional identity (Zimmerbauer, 2016: 334).

At the same time, Zimmerbauer argues, that the key motive for regional image-building in the BEAR is not the aspirations of its authorities for Barents identity creation, but the desire 'to show power centers that the region exists and deserves funding' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 913). The benefits of Barents identity remain unclear for the BEAR policy-makers, despite the fact the importance of the concept is recognized (Zimmerbauer, 2013: 99).

Such fact as extensive cultural difference between western and eastern parts of the region could also inhibit regional identity-building process (Zimmerbauer, 2018;

Honneland, 1998). At the same time, Honneland does not exclude the possibility of the development of Barents community belongingness within some part of its inhabitants (Honneland, 1998: 12).

The successful example of shared identity development within cross-border territories of the BEAR was also studied by Anastasia Rogova (Rogova, 2009). She stated that a new local identity has appeared among the population of the territories in the Russian-Norwegian borderland (Rogova, 2009: 41).

Nevertheless, there is a lack of works which analyze cultural cooperation as an instrument for the construction of collective identity, particularly in such cases where there is no cultural conformance. Currently, it is unclear which role cultural cooperation plays in regional community building as well as how identity policy in the BEAR is realized with the help of cultural practices.

1.3. Research Gap & Research Questions

The aim of the thesis is to analyze how the BEAR identity is constructed by the means of multilateral cultural cooperation in the region. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to establish which role regional identity narrative plays in community building practices in the Barents region. It is important to examine the actors of regional identity formation and their activities in the sphere of cultural cooperation, as well as to find out the peculiarities of Barents regional community illustrated in particular joint cultural projects. It is also important to understand how *we-hood* and *us-hood* modes of community belongingness are developed in the BEAR by the means of cultural cooperation in the region.

In my research I assume that to a great extent, *we-hood* and *us-hood* modes of community belongingness are promoted with the help of cultural activities. Therefore, I propose that cultural cooperation plays one of the major roles in regional and, particularly the BEAR, identity construction. These are the assumptions of my research. Therefore, I will study cultural cooperation activities in the Barents Region and see how identity policy and *we-hood* and *us-hood* community belongingness are promoted in the region with the help of cultural activities.

The research question is formulated as follows:

How is the BEAR identity constructed by the means of cultural cooperation in the region?

The following sub-questions specify it:

- *Who are the agents of Barents identity construction?* Specifying this sub-question I am also intended to understand which way they are involved in regional cultural cooperation.
- *What interests do the actors of Barents cultural cooperation follow in promoting their activities?* Answering this sub-question, I will also discuss how the creation of shared Barents identity is connected with the key aims of cultural cooperation in the region.
- *How does cultural cooperation in the BEAR serve as an instrument of we-hood and us-hood modes of Barents community belongingness development?*

The research questions of the thesis remain open as there are very few studies discussing the practical level of BEAR identity construction particularly by the means of cultural cooperation. Currently, we do not know yet which role cultural cooperation plays in regional community building as well as how identity policy in the BEAR is realized by the means of cultural practices. There is also an informative gap considering the interests of the agents involved in Barents identity promotion. Furthermore, in the thesis I am also interested in finding out which particular characteristics of regional identity the agents of regional cooperation try to express throughout specific cultural projects.

1.4. Methodology and Data

The research represents a multiple case-study. In order to answer the research question the thesis examines three cases represented by practical cooperation projects, particularly: two cultural academic research projects with the titles 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe' and the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' and a cultural project not related to academic sphere of cultural cooperation entitled as 'Barents Spektakel'. I also complement my research by the analysis of the official institutional level of Barents regional cooperation. This allows me to study collective identity construction from different points of view.

Therefore, my primary data consists of, 1) two books as an evidence of two cultural research projects, 2) semi-structured interviews with representatives of two cultural research projects, 3) interviews published in the mass media and project descriptions on cultural project 'Barents Spektakel'; 4) official programmes and strategies on cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region with an emphasis on documents touching upon cultural cooperation in the BEAR.

I apply qualitative content analysis as a method for my research. According to Mayring, 'qualitative content analysis defines itself as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification' (Mayring, 2000: 2). It is significant to emphasize that qualitative content analysis is applicable in studies which 'pay attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278).

In the process of my study I applied two basic approaches to qualitative content analysis: *conventional content analysis* and *directed content analysis* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Applying both of these approaches, I had a possibility to create and mix '*concept-driven categories*' which are based mainly on the chosen theoretical approach and '*data-driven categories*' derived from the collected data (Schreier: 2012, 85-90). In such a case the research is becoming more structured, exact and precise.

1.5. Thesis Structure

In the following chapters I will firstly introduce the theoretical framework of my research which is constructivist studies on identity building, regions and in particular, 'regional identity'. The concept of 'regional identity' should be examined in order to better understand the particularities of its development and its role in overall region-building process. In the third chapter, I will discuss how regional identity has previously been studied from the prospect of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Then, I will present data collection and methodology. Thereafter, in the fifth chapter I elaborate on the question of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region creation. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section I introduce the background for the BEAR creation according to previous studies. The second section is the first based upon the analysis of primary data and it covers the issue of Barents authorities interest in Barents identity development.

In the sixth chapter I continue the analysis of my primary data and study the key actors of cultural cooperation in the BEAR as well as their aims in promoting cultural projects and activities. The analysis of these aspects allows us to understand which key motives are lying upon the promotion of cultural cooperation in the region, as well as establish how the issue of shared Barents identity creation coincides with these motives. In order to answer this question, two levels of Barents cultural cooperation are analyzed, particularly, the official institutional and the practical levels.

In the next analytical chapter I present the analysis of identity policy realized in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Particularly, taking into account the research question of the thesis, I concentrate on the implementation of identity policy by the means of cultural cooperation in the region. The chapter is divided into two key sections which are devoted to the analysis of 'we-hood' and 'us-hood' modes of group belongingness. Thereafter, the analysis is followed by the discussion chapter. Finally, the conclusion summarizes my findings as well as elaborates on limitations thereof and recommendations for the future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter it is argued that constructivism could be widely applied to the understanding of region-building process taking into account that regions are understood as socially constructed spaces which existence in high level depends on the effectiveness of identity policy practices. In turn, a strong feeling of regional identity among broad regional population substantially consolidates a region and promotes cooperation which leads to regional economic and social development.

It can be assumed that culture serves as one of the key instruments for constructing regional community. Particularly, by the means of cultural cooperation it is most possible to transmit and popularize the narrative of regional identity. Thus, cultural cooperation can serve as an important tool in Barents regional identity construction. Therefore, below I will first introduce how I start from the international relations constructivism as a broader frame and then study the regional identity construction as such, referring to identity policy concept, development of we-hood and us-hood modes of group belongingness and cultural cooperation as an instrument of regional identity construction.

2.1. Constructivism in International Relations Theory and the Concept of Identity

As my starting point for theoretical discussion of my Master's thesis I use International Relations constructivism. Constructivism may be defined as an alternative to traditional materialistic approaches e.g. (neo-) realism and (neo-) liberalism as it refers not to the factor of 'materials' and 'substances', but to the concept of 'ideas'. According to constructivists all objects of material world are dependent on our own interpretations and language (Carlsnaes, 2002: 95). 'Constructivism sees the world as a project under construction, as becoming rather than being' (Carlsnaes, 2002: 95).

According to Alexander Wendt, 'material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded' (Wendt, 1995:73 in Carlsnaes, 2002: 100). Constructivists assume that 'the physical world may exist more or less as we sense it, but the social world exists because we participate in it and bring our wishes to bear upon it' (Kubalkova et al, 1998: 16).

Constructivism has its intellectual roots in critical social theory and assumes that world politics is socially constructed (Pace, 2005: 39). In other words, it 'maintains that the sociopolitical world is constructed by human practice, and seeks to explain how this construction takes place' (Kubalkova et al, 1998: 20). Social facts are interpreted through collective understanding and discourse and thus they are constructed and are not objective (Carlsnaes, 2002: 100). Constructivists focus on the effects of social communication on social relations (Carlsnaes, 2002: 102).

The active participants of social communication are called agents (Onuf, 1998: 59). According to Nicholas Onuf, 'agents need not to be individual human beings to be able to act on behalf of other, as agency represents a social condition' (Onuf, 1998: 60). Therefore, agents could be represented by specific persons, by groups or communities as well as by institutions etc. For example, in relation to the Barents Euro-Arctic Region it is possible to argue that its agents are represented by national and regional authorities (political elite), cultural elite, academic circles, business and non-commercial associations. 'Agents act in society' in order to 'achieve goals' which 'reflect people's needs and wishes in light of material circumstances' (Onuf, 1998: 60). In fact, they are trying to achieve those goals which correspond with their interests (Onuf, 1998: 65).

Language plays a significant role in constructivism as it serves a mechanism for interpreting material objects and social reality construction. Constructivists argue that people are striving to communicate their understandings of the world to others, therefore 'the process of communication is the process of making sense of the social reality' (Kowert, 1998: 104). By manipulating the language people and nations are able to influence on the reality interpretations and social identities formation (Kowert, 1998: 105). Therefore, in my thesis I examine the data represented in the form of texts.

Identity is a key concept in constructivism. It implies the 'understanding of the self in relationship to an 'other'' (Barnett, 2001: 267). According to Pavlova, 'identity is the understanding of a person's belongingness to a definite social group, which let them define their place in sociocultural community and take their bearings in the surrounding community; identity is a background for natural and cultural sameness, which helps to distinguish 'us' from 'them'' (Pavlova, 2011: 81). 'Identities are social and thus are always formed in relationship to others' (Barnett, 2001:267). The understanding of 'us' and 'them' is extremely important, as only by the means of contacts with other actors and structures appears the consciousness of personal uniqueness and importance (Pavlenko, 2015: 57).

Moreover, due to the social character of identities they are able and intended to change (Hall, 1999: 34). According to Alexander Wendt, 'the identities and interests of the agents are assumed to be in process, but not given' (Wendt, 1999:375).

Identity can be individual or collective, so that means that nations as well as members of regional communities also have their own identity in relation to this community. According to Daniel Druckman, 'membership in a clan, religious group, or ethnic group becomes part of the individual's self identity and critical to a sense of self-world. People learn to react based on their loyalties; they defend those groups that are important to their definition of who they are. Moreover, these loyalties differentiate whom in their environment is appropriate to support and whom to avoid. The stronger the loyalty, the more likely members of a group are to hold similar views and endorse similar strategies' (Druckman 1994: 43-66 in Hall, 1999: 37). Consequently, in the context of the thesis, it is important to emphasize that the formation of shared regional identity serves as a key tool for regional solidarization providing a region with a longer subsistence and legitimizing it in the international arena, as people of the region are exercising the support to its activities.

All in all, from the perspective of constructivism, the BEAR represents a social construction as its existence as a cohesive entity depends on its social acceptance by the members of the BEAR community. Thus, the development of 'regional identity' and community-building constitute significant tasks for the BEAR consolidation. In a light that identity studies represent the core element of constructivism and taking into account the diversity of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, a constructivist approach is applied to answer the research question. At the same time, constructivism as such is quite broad to explain regional identity formation processes, so further I will also draw on studies of 'regions' as well as collective identity formation and, particularly, 'regional identity' construction.

2.2. Regional Identity Construction

2.2.1. Understanding of a 'region'

Firstly, it is important to analyze the concept of a 'region' itself. Hettne stated that a region just as a nation is an imagined community which is based upon the territory (Hettne, 2002 in Yarovoy, 2007: 23). Hettne seems to be following Anderson and constructivist understanding of collective identity. According to Anderson, all

communities are so called 'imagined constructs' which have a tendency to develop and are not the objective reality, but formed by the interested circles (Anderson, 2016: 47). Referring to Smouts, taking into account that a region represents a construct, there is a need to study not a region as a result of this construction process, but region-building process itself (Smouts, 1998 in Yarovoy, 2007: 25).

On the whole, according to the constructivist point of view, regions could be perceived 'not as pre-given', natural territorial spaces, but as 'political and social constructs' (Söderbaum, 2016:6 in Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). Following the constructivist approach, it is possible to view regions 'as 'living' socially and intellectually constructed spaces' (Makarychev, 2003: 14). Consequently, Kaj Zimmerbauer underlines that 'regions are processes and social constructions, some, naturally, more 'solidified' and lasting than others' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 920).

As Zimmerbauer stated, in relation to the BEAR it is possible to assume that it represents 'a top-down construction of regional elite, serving primarily economic and business aspirations' (Zimmerbauer, 2018:911). Therefore, there is a need to construct the regional identity which should be embedded into the consciousness of the people of the Barents Region uniting them into the regional community. This is crucial in order to justify the existence of the region and get support and legitimization.

2.2.2. Regional identity construction and identity policy

Taking into account the topic of the thesis, it is also necessary to discuss the concept of collective identity and, particularly, regional identity. From constructivist point of view, identity could be transformed depending on the context, it changes both situationally and historically. Identity represents an empirical issue, which needs to be theorized in historical, cultural, political and social contexts (Yarovoy, 2007: 207). Following constructivist approach, I discuss regional identity as a construct which is developed by specific groups of interests.

Speaking about modern cross-border regions, according to Paasi, 'they are often units that have emerged rapidly from the desks of planners, politicians and business coalitions, not from long historical regionalization processes and the daily struggles of citizens' (Paasi, 2003: 480). Zimmerbauer supports this idea and argues that cross-border regions 'are often top-down constructions of regional elite, serving primarily economic and business aspirations' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). Therefore, such regions are not known to

a wider audience and people of such regions do not usually tend to acquire 'regional' identity. According to Zimmerbauer, if cross-border cooperation 'does not become recognized by a wider audience, the region itself is threatened with existing only in the perceptions of the elite, and only for as long as it stays on their political agenda' (Nelles and Durand, 2012 in Zimmerbauer, 2016: 323). Thus, in order to enhance regional stability, justify its existence, get support and legitimization and as a result, prolong regional subsistence, for such regions it is crucial to develop regional identity which should be embedded into the consciousness of the people of a region uniting them into a regional community. Moreover, the narrative of regional identity supported by the citizens of a region leads to the formation of a regional community and 'can trigger regional activism, increase participation and cause positive development across borders' (Veemaa, 2012 in Zimmerbauer, 2016: 323). Strong regional identity can also 'serve as a tool for economic prosperity through cohesion, commitment and cooperation' (see Haughton et. al., 2010; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 2006 in Zimmerbauer, 2016: 323). It is also worth mentioning that communities possessing a strong regional identity are less likely to be tear apart by any kind of conflicts. Taking into account possible a exacerbation of political tensions between Western and Eastern participants of the Barents cooperation, a developed regional identity can serve as an influential factor supporting regional collaboration and subsistence.

While theorizing about region-building process and regional identity construction, it is important to introduce the concept of 'identity policy'. In my research I would like to follow the idea developed by Tsumarova and distinct 'identity politics' from 'identity policy' (Tsumarova, 2012: 1). Following Tsumarova's approach, 'identity politics' traditionally stems for activities of social movements struggling for new identities (Tsumarova, 2012: 1). For example, Knouse defines 'identity politics' as 'political activism by identity groups' (Knouse, 2009: 752). On the whole, it could be stated that 'identity politics' implies the political activities of disadvantaged groups aimed at the conscious formation of their collective identities in order to achieve their goals (Bernstein, 2005).

In turn, 'identity policy' stands for the activities of political elites aimed at the collective (national; regional; local) identity formation (Tsumarova, 2012: 5). Such an approach is also shared by Achkasov, who stated that identity policy is aimed at the community integration and its perception formation which, in turn, is based on the

interpretations of culture and history specific to this particular community (Achkasov, 2013: 71).

Applying this approach to regional studies, I would like to refer to Meleshkina, according to whom, 'identity policy' represents purposeful activities of regional elites aimed at the formation of regional community in order to legitimize regional government institutions within and outside the region (Meleshkina, 1999: 26). It is important to emphasize that politics of identity primarily and mainly represents the political and social struggle which is aimed at the destruction of previous legitimizations and searches for the acknowledgment and recognition of a constructed community (Achkasov, 2013: 72).

The major agents of identity policy are represented by groups of interests which are involved in the process of political projects development (Tsumarova, 2012; Achkasov, 2013: 72). In case of region-building, the key actors would be represented by regional political elites interested in regional legitimization, however, other agents, for example, cultural elite and academic circles could also be involved in realization of identity policy.

As argued above, identity is not an integral attribute of a human being, instead it is constructed and redefined by the society, presenting the result of the submission to a specific discourse as a form of power (Wendt, 1999; Barnett, 2001; Achkasov, 2013: 73). Following the ideas discussed above, in my research I understand the result of identity policy as the acceptance by an individual of those stereotypes and values which are being transmitted by regional agents and, particularly, regional elite.

In case of the Barents Region, this notion is very important as it is groundless to claim that citizens of Barents Region indeed perceive themselves as a regional community, but at the same time the narrative of Barents regional identity exists, and the Barents regional community is being constructed and developed by several agents for several purposes. Actually, this idea has been developed, for example, by McSweeney, who stated that 'collective identity is not out there, waiting to be discovered, what is 'out there' is identity discourse on the part of political leaders, intellectuals and countless others, who engage in the process of constructing, negotiating, manipulating or affirming a response to the demand - at times urgent, mostly absent - for a collective image' (McSweeney, 1999: 77-78 in Paasi, 2003: 479). Thus, identity policy is used as a tool in order to impose 'the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world...to make and unmake groups' (Bourdieu, 1991: 221 in Paasi, 2003: 479). Applying such an approach to

region-building, according to Gleb Yarovoy, 'regioness' of a trans-border region, which actually the BEAR is, could not be perceived as a fact of life, but should be understood as a result of the social construction process (Yarovoy, 2007: 208).

According to Anssi Paasi, regional identity particularly represents a constant process, as he says that 'regional identity' is, in a way, an interpretation of the process through which a region becomes institutionalized, a process consisting of the production of territorial boundaries, symbolism and institutions. This process concomitantly gives rise to, and is conditioned by, the discourses/practices/rituals that draw on boundaries, symbols and institutional practices' (Paasi, 2003: 478). In practice, particular features of a region are used in the discourses in order to distinguish one region from others and, thus, create a specific regional identity (Paasi, 2003: 478). According to Anssi Paasi, 'narratives of regional identity lean on miscellaneous elements: ideas on nature, landscape, the built environment, culture/ethnicity, dialects, economic success/recession, periphery/centre relations, both of 'us' and 'them', actual/invented histories, utopias and diverging arguments on the identification of people' (Paasi, 2003: 477). It should be taken into account that 'it is not possible to create groups out of thin air through the mere introduction of symbols stressing its existence in opposition to others' (Eriksen 1995: 430). Eriksen insists, that 'social identities must be able to draw on some kind of international solidarity or cultural commonality - be it of a political, economic, religious or symbolic nature. They must have some degree of institutional support' (Eriksen, 1995: 435).

Under these circumstances, it is possible to state that identity policy functions in two ways, firstly, it stems from the existing practices and at the same time it is forming them. The key issue about studying identity is not to see it as something preconditioned, but to understand it as a rhetoric used in order to create the regional community and popularize it among its people as well as present to the external environment.

In my research I study how identity policy is implemented in the BEAR with the help of cultural cooperation. I analyze which characteristics of the Barents Region are used in order to promote its regional identity and consolidate the community of the region. I am also intended to understand what role identity discourse plays in Barents cooperation.

When speaking about community construction, it is also necessary to refer to the concept of the 'other'. According to Iver B. Neumann, the formation of a joint identity of a community is inherently connected with the formation of 'others' to this particular community. Social interaction between 'us' and 'them', in this sense, serves as a key to the

community formation (Neumann, 1998: 27). The existence of the 'others' itself stands a question about the existence of 'us' (Neumann, 1998: 26). According to Neumann, the reason for building a border between the community of 'us' and 'them' could stem from any difference between 'us' and 'them' which may attain a political value in the existing discourse (Neumann, 1998: 28). However, the most common distinctive factors are language, history, religion and culture (Neumann, 1998: 29). At the same time, it could also be argued that 'identity movements do not always base their activities on difference as it may be strategically beneficial to stress similarities' (Bernstein, 1997 in Paasi, 2003: 475). Eriksen has also developed the idea of the 'Significant Other' (Eriksen, 1995). According to his concept, collective 'identities are defined in relation to one dominant contrast' and their construction implies comparisons to 'others' (Eriksen, 1995: 431). In my research I use the ideas about 'others' developed by Neumann and Eriksen and try to understand who are presented as 'Significant others' by the agents of Barents identity policy which in turn, helps me to analyze how the interpretation of 'us' (Barents community) is being formed.

In this thesis I will also apply the approach to the community-building practices developed by Eriksen (Eriksen, 1995). According to his ideas, 'there are two modes of group belongingness: *we-hood* and *us-hood*' or, 'we-as-subject' and 'we-as-object', both of them serve purposes of social identification and group cohesion (Eriksen, 1995: 427). 'We' implies 'interdependence and internal cohesion by virtue of a shared task' (Eriksen, 1995: 427). 'The system is viewed from within, without direct reference to the outside world' (Eriksen, 1995: 429). *We-hood* 'must be founded in shared or complementary representations of shared practices' (Eriksen, 1995: 429). The cohesion of a group is achieved through sharing of certain practices which implies that 'we take care of each other'.

In turn, being 'us' refers to the 'cohesion by virtue of an external agent' and implies 'communication of a difference that makes a difference to all who are not included' into the community (Eriksen, 1995: 429). *Us-hood* stems from the interaction with the external world. 'Only the moment the pressure is perceived as an external one (by the means of sports, trade, migration and tourism)', does 'a group identification become meaningful' ('We are better than the X'es') and this leads to the activation of *us-hood* (Eriksen, 1995: 433). The process of exclusion becomes more important as the contact with outsiders increases (Eriksen, 1995: 429). Eriksen proposes two ways of *us-hood* development. The first one is dichotomization, and it 'refers to the establishment, through

contrasts vis-a-vis the other, of a distinct identity' (Eriksen, 1995: 434). In such a case the external agent could take a form of a real or an imagined enemy, and that enemy images strengthen identity of a group. Another way of us-hood formation, introduced by Eriksen is complementarization, which 'refers to the creation and reproduction of a comparative terminology for dealing with cultural differences, so that one can speak of' (Eriksen, 1995: 434). Complementarization 'is a different form of us-hood depending on comparability rather than enemy images' (Eriksen, 1995: 435). On the whole, it is possible to state that social 'identities are created, strengthened and maintained through the enactment of contrasts with others', but both 'we-hood (an internal sense of solidarity) and us-hood (contrasting vis-a-vis others) are necessary components' of identity formation (Eriksen, 1995: 435).

On the back of the ideas discussed above, I concentrate on those promoted Barents regional features which are pointing at the commonality within the BEAR community and existence of shared tasks and challenges. I also focus on those promoted regional characteristics which highlight Barents uniqueness in relation to 'others' that also need to be found.

I would like to emphasize it once more that, according to the constructivist point of view, regional identity is not something natural, that all regions are automatically have. Regional identity represents a constructed discourse. In this context, it may be argued that all regional institutions are aimed at building and promoting their 'regional identity' in order to consolidate the region. The Barents Euro-Arctic Region is not an exclusion, as there is not any pre-given Barents regional identity, the incentives to form it are mostly 'top-down, coming from the central governments, national business organizations' and cultural groups (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 917). Moreover, regions should be understood not 'as fixed or everlasting but as being subject to continuous renewal and restructuring processes in which they are socially constructed and deconstructed' (Zimmerbauer, 2013: 92).

2.2.3. Regional identity construction and cultural cooperation

Cultural cooperation and interactions serve as one of the major instruments for the community-building process. Thus, Michael Keating claims that 'the mainstreaming of regional culture is the major part of the modern regional identity construction' (Keating, 2003: 92). At the same time, Petra Zimmermann-Steinhart supposes that 'the easiest way to achieve regional identities within a relatively short period of time seems to create regions along traditional cultural boundaries' (Zimmermann-Steinhart, 2005).

According to Bloom, history and culture can provide 'an appropriate attitude for an experienced reality' and this way, produce identification (Bloom, 1990: 52 in Paasi, 2003: 478). This experience, Bloom notes, 'may be politically manipulated but any symbol/ideology without a relevant experience is meaningless and impotent in terms of evoking identification' (in Paasi, 2003: 478). Particularly, by the means of cultural cooperation it is most possible to transmit and popularize the narrative of regional identity. According to Gleb Yarovoy, it is impossible to study a region as a community regardless of its cultural context (Yarovoy, 2007: 20).

As Zimmerbauer states, 'place names and symbols (such as flags, songs and etc.) distinguish the region (and the inhabitants of one region) from others and serve as elements of collective regional identity by arousing divisions of the 'us and them'' (Paasi, 1986 in Zimmerbauer, 2013: 91). Names and symbols are inextricably linked to culture and serve as features of cultural representation. 'Regional culture and identity' are recognized as 'key elements in the making of regions as social/political spaces' (Paasi, 2003: 477 in Syssner, 2009: 437). However, it is significant to understand what is implied under term 'culture' itself. As Keating stated, culture is 'something that is continually being created and recreated' (Keating, 1998: 155 in Syssner, 2009: 447). Peter A. Kraus understands culture as 'a set of collective practices which are strongly institutionalized, where institutionalization refers basically to political institutionalization' (Kraus, 2008: 40). Typical examples of such institutionalization are 'national' histories and myths as well as their visualization (in monuments, museums, postage stamps and etc.), educational curricula, patterns of religious identification and etc. (Kraus, 2008: 40). Cultural resources could also be mobilized in order to 'establish the idea of the region not only as a political entity but as a cultural and economic entity with a unique history and mission to be competitive' (Syssner, 2009: 453).

It can be assumed that to a great extent, with the help of cultural activities it is easiest to promote we-hood and us-hood modes of community belongingness. Moreover, it may be argued that cultural cooperation plays one of the major roles in constructing regional identity and, particularly, identity of the BEAR, helping the region to find its own place in the regional system. These are the assumptions that guide my research. Therefore, I will study cultural cooperation activities in the Barents Region and how identity policy and we-hood and us-hood community belongingness are promoted in the region with the help of cultural activities. In the thesis I will see whether the results of my research support these assumptions.

To sum up, the theory of constructivism is applied in my research taking into account that I understand a region and, particularly, the BEAR as a top-down construction of regional elite which currently is not widely known to its audience and is lacking the significance among its inhabitants. Therefore, that implies that the BEAR does not have regional identity and does not represent an identity region. At the same time, I refer to the concepts of identity policy as well as we-hood and us-hood community belongingness development in order to understand how cultural cooperation in the region could serve as an instrument for Barents regional identity development and community-building.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON REGIONAL IDENTITY IN THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC REGION

The chapter addresses previous studies on regional identity construction in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. With this chapter I provide the background for the thesis as well as explore the existing literature gap regarding the topic.

There are only few studies on Barents identity construction. For example, Honneland analyzed Barents cooperation and the perspectives of regional identity construction (Honneland, 1998). He stressed that historically there was no Barents transnational identity, the narrative of it appeared only after the creation of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region on the governmental level (Honneland, 1998: 14). Honneland argued that there is no sufficient background for the Barents identity to develop from the rhetoric to the inherent part of the Barents inhabitants self-actualization; 'the historical transnational community in the area is a myth; the new northern identity so far a castle in the air; the Barents citizen an illusion' (Honneland, 1998: 10).

In turn, Kaj Zimmerbauer justifies the possibility of building Barents identity (Zimmerbauer, 2013; Zimmerbauer, 2016; Zimmerbauer, 2018). He points out that despite the fact that the BEAR represents 'a top-down construction' of regional elite and, therefore, is lacking the significance among its inhabitants, the practices of planning by various actors and institutions are able to nurture the idea of regional identity (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 919). Zimmerbauer highlights that 'image building and various promotion practices' could significantly 'boost the region and create the competitive edge through differentiation' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 913).

Zimmerbauer significantly emphasizes the role of regional branding in regional identity development (Zimmerbauer, 2016: 334). According to his ideas, region-branding is aimed at the enhancement of regional competitiveness, however, at the same time, it also promotes a region, making it more recognizable by a wider audience, thus developing regional identity (Zimmerbauer, 2016: 374). The key notion is that 'although it can be argued that strong regional identity is somehow a prerequisite for constructing regional image and brand, the process is bidirectional' (Zimmerbauer, 2016: 326). Therefore, the development of regional identity serves as one of regional branding outcomes.

As for the key agents of the Barents identity promotion, Zimmerbauer states that they are represented by instrumental institutions, and the 'idea of bounded space is mostly

promoted by the institutionalized planning and development system', e.g. regional authorities, while grassroots activity is less common (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 917).

At the same time, Zimmerbauer argues, that despite the fact that significance of regional community-building is admitted by the BEAR policy-makers, currently, it is still unclear (Zimmerbauer, 2013: 99). Regional institutions and developers are much more interested in regional branding than in the development of regional identity (Zimmerbauer, 2013; Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). Therefore, the key motive for region image-building in the BEAR is not the aspirations of its authorities for Barents identity creation, but the desire 'to show power centers that the region exists and deserves funding' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 913). Moreover, the 'logics of identity are often downplayed in favor of more concrete ones such as the logics of security or economic transformations' (Hurrell, 2005 in Zimmerbauer, 2018: 919). Nevertheless, identity development still represents a 'side-effect' or 'by-product' of regional promotion.

The problem which could inhibit this process is that 'national identities are strong inside the region, which makes supranational identity-work complex and contested' (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 919). Moreover, such fact as extensive cultural difference between western and eastern parts of the region may inhibit the process (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 916). According to Zimmerbauer, the 'differences between the Nordic countries and the Northwest Russia part apply to practically all areas of life: standards of living, language and culture, religion, history, and political and economic traditions' (Zimmerbauer, 2013: 94).

The idea was also discussed by Honneland who argued that the lack of cultural commonality could significantly inhibit the process of identity building (Honneland, 1998). At the same time, Honneland does not exclude the possibility of the development of Barents community belongingness feeling within some part of its inhabitants, 'appropriate to ask whether the new transnational northern identity relates only to a very limited group of entrepreneurial people with particular interest at the other side of the border' (Honneland, 1998: 12). Moreover, he poses a question: 'If we continue to tell people in East and West of the region how similar they are, maybe they would eventually believe us?' (Honneland, 1998: 14).

In turn, Zimmerbauer also concludes that despite the fact that the Barents Region represents a top-down construction, regional branding and promotion as well as knowledge

dissemination could significantly contribute in the development of its regional identity as well as community-building (Zimmerbauer, 2018: 919; Zimmerbauer, 2016: 334).

The successful example of shared identity development within the cross-border territories in the BEAR was studied by Anastasia Rogova (Rogova, 2009). Rogova analyzed the perceptions of borders and territories in the Russian-Norwegian borderland by its population. She concluded that due to the permanent interaction of people across the border, the territories of Kirkenes are not perceived by Russians living thereabout as foreign territories, 'practical, operative space has expanded for the local population who actively use border-related resources' (Rogova, 2009: 37). Therefore, she stated that a new local identity has appeared among the population (Rogova, 2009: 41). However, taking into the account the success of local identity building on the Norwegian-Russian border territory, Rogova questioned whether the Barents identity could become a reality on a scale of the whole region (Rogova, 2009: 40).

In the whole, studies on Barents regional identity are compliant with the idea expressed by Honneland that currently 'the Barents rhetoric is – nothing but rhetoric, an argumentative instrument in the hand of authorities aimed at creating an 'imagined community' between East and West in the area' (Honneland, 1998: 14). This again supports the idea that Barents Euro-Arctic Region represents a political and social construct.

We do not yet answer to the research questions set for this thesis as there are very few studies discussing the practical level of BEAR identity construction particularly by the means of cultural cooperation. There is a lack of studies which analyzing cultural cooperation as an instrument for the collective identity construction, particularly in such cases where is no cultural conformance. Currently, we do not yet know which role cultural cooperation plays in the regional community building as well as how identity policy in the BEAR is being realized by the means of cultural practices. Moreover, we should study which particular characteristics of regional identity the agents of regional cooperation try to express throughout specific cultural projects.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will first introduce the cases which I study in my research and present my primary data. Then I elaborate on the basic principles of qualitative content analysis and explain how I apply it as a method for my research.

4.1. Cases and Data Collection

The research represents a multiple case-study. In order to answer the research question the thesis examines three cases represented by practical cultural cooperation projects: two cultural academic research projects with the titles 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe' and the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' and a cultural project not related to academic sphere of cultural cooperation entitled as 'Barents Spektakel'. I also complement my research by the analysis of the official institutional level of Barents regional cooperation. This allows me to study collective identity construction from different points of view.

According to Florian Kohlbacher, 'case studies seem to be the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (Kohlbacher, 2006). In a multiple case study, the researcher examines 'multiple cases to understand the differences and similarities between them' (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995 in Gustafsson, 2017: 3). According to Gustafsson, 'an all-embracing fact is that the evidence created from a multiple case study is measured strong and reliable' (Baxter & Jack, 2008 in Gustafsson, 2017: 3).

According to the assumptions of IR constructivists, the existence of joint history is one of the major fundamental factors serving as a background for construction and development of collective identity. Therefore, I decided to take the 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe' project as a case for my research.

The objective of the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' project is to 'contribute to the compilation and dissemination of knowledge about the conditions of life in northerly transnational societies'; and 'it is expected to facilitate and stimulate interaction between citizens in the region in their capacities as businessmen, administrators, professionals and tourists' (Olsson, 2016: 20). The encyclopedia was developed in order to understand the region and promote information about the region, therefore, it can serve the BEAR identity- building purposes.

Taking into account that the above mentioned cases represent an example of the BEAR cultural cooperation particularly in the academic sphere, I decided to complement the research by the analysis of a cultural project which is not related to the academic side of cultural cooperation in the Barents Region. Particularly, I decided to analyze the materials on the 'Barents Spektakel' project conducted under the auspices of the group of activists 'Pikene på Broen' based in Kirkenes. The 'Barents Spektakel' is a festival which was established in 2004 'in order to promote cross-border connections between culture and politics and among citizens of the Barents Region' (Viken, 2016: 80).

All these projects represent the results of cultural cooperation in the region and their realization touches upon the development of Barents regional identity. Therefore, they can be examined as cases in the framework of my research.

I also complement the analysis of the above mentioned cases by the examination of the official institutional level of Barents cooperation. It helps to understand how the development of regional identity is perceived by the Barents political actors as well as how the BEAR identity policy is promoted on the official level of Barents cooperation.

The first part of my primary data refers to the cases and is consisted of 1) two books as an evidence of two cultural research projects, 2) two semi-structured interviews with representatives of two cultural research projects, 3) interviews published in the mass media and descriptions on cultural project 'Barents Spektakel'.

The first book is entitled as 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe'. The book provides a 'research-based history of the Barents Region from 800-2010 written by 27 history researchers from within the thirteen sub-regions of the Barents Region' ('The History of the Barents Region', n.d.).

The second book is entitled as 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' and covers such spheres of Barents cooperation as history, environment, economy, architecture, culture, art and media, education and science, languages, legal issues, people, politics and places of the Barents Region.

In addition, two semi-structured interviews with the individuals directly involved into the realization of the above mentioned projects were gathered and analyzed. Interviews were conducted with an editor of Barents History book and Barents Encyclopedia projects, as well as with a member of the international steering group of the above mentioned projects.

While selecting the interviewees I was interested in getting information from the experts involved in the BEAR activities or those who study processes in the Barents Region. Taking into account that in the study I pay a specific attention to the analysis of Barents History book and Barents Encyclopedia projects, I wanted to get in touch with experts who were directly involved in their development. While making the interviews I was interested in initial aims of cultural projects chosen as cases. In addition, I was interested in actors involved into the development of the projects. I also questioned concerning the application of these projects as tools for regional identity building in the BEAR, as well as discussed other cultural projects aimed at identity construction in the region and tried to find out about the main purposes of cultural cooperation in the BEAR. Interviews help to examine the perceptions of experts who serve as agents in the Barents regional identity construction, thus, it is possible to better understand their assumptions concerning identity-building process in the region. I asked six people for the interview, two of them agreed. One interview was arranged by the means of Skype session, another interview was made through the semi-structured questionnaire.

In order to analyze the 'Barents Spektakel' project I studied such materials as the interviews taken from the representatives of the art-group 'Pikene på Broen' which were published in the mass media, as well as the descriptions on the project and articles devoted to it.

The second part of my primary data is made by programs and strategies issued under the auspices of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Barents Regional Council (BRC), with a special emphasis to the programmes and strategies on cultural cooperation in the region issued under the auspices of the Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC) of the BEAC and the BRC. The detailed list of documents taken for the analysis of the official institutional level is presented in the table below (Figure 1.). The analysis of official documents significantly complements the study of practical-level cases.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)	The Barents Regional Council (BRC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norwegian Chair of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2011-2013; • Overview on the Finnish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2013-2015; • Russian Chairmanship Priorities for the BEAC 2015-2017; • Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2017-2019; • Joint Statement of Ministers of Culture of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Member-States, 2016; • Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Barents Programme 2014-2018; • the Barents Programme 2019-2023
The Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Program of cultural cooperation in the Barents Region in 2003-2006; • New Winds in the Barents Region 2008 - 2010; • New Horizons in the Barents Region 2011 - 2013; • Cultural Cooperation in the Barents Region Strategy 2014 - 2018 	

Figure 1. Analysed Documents.

4.2. Qualitative Content Analysis as the Method

I apply qualitative content analysis as a method for my research. According Mayring 'qualitative content analysis defines itself as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification' (Mayring, 2000). Qualitative content analysis is applicable in studies which 'pay attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278).

'The object of qualitative content analysis can be any sort of recorded communication', including e.g. transcripts of interviews, documents, articles

(Mayring, 2000). According to Titscher, content analysis is always used 'if the analysis is concerned only with the lexicon of a text' (Titscher, 2000: 66 in Kohlbacher, 2006). Taking into account that my research examines academic cultural projects represented by books, as well as interviews, project descriptions and official documents the choice of qualitative content analysis seems to be suitable as it implies the analysis of texts (articles in the books, transcripts of interviews and texts of official papers). According to James W. Drisko and Tina Maschi, qualitative content analysis draws on a constructivist epistemology (Drisko & Maschi, 2015: 92). Therefore, I consider it as an applicable for my thesis, taking into account that my research is based upon constructivist epistemology and examines such a phenomenon as construction of regional identity.

The work with qualitative content analysis traditionally is constituted by 'coding techniques for finding and marking the underlying ideas in the data; grouping similar kinds of information together in categories' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 in Gibson, 2003: 65). A code is usually 'a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data' (Saldana, 2013: 3). At the same time it is important to mention that data coding depends on personal interpretations of an investigator. There are not any specific rules considering which codes are right and which are wrong. However, codes should be derived according to the stated research questions.

While to codify means 'to arrange things in a systematic order', to categorize implies making 'something part of a system or classification' (Saldana, 2013: 9). According to Saldana, codes are categorized or grouped into "families' because they share some characteristics' (Saldana, 2013: 9). The organization of categories' system serves as an important outcome of qualitative content analysis. Categories are understood as operational definitions of variables (Titscher, 2000:58 in Kohlbacher, 2006). By the means of qualitative content research an investigator derives categories out of given data and then interpret them trying to find the apparent and latent meaning. The categories should be found and revised throughout the research and serve as key elements for text interpretation.

Referring the scheme proposed by Saldana (Saldana, 2013: 13), I would like to present how I used qualitative content analysis in my research in order to study identity policy in the BEAR carried out with the help of cultural cooperation (Figure 2.). In the scheme I illustrate how qualitative content analysis works and goes throughout the stages of codes and categories to the ultimate results.

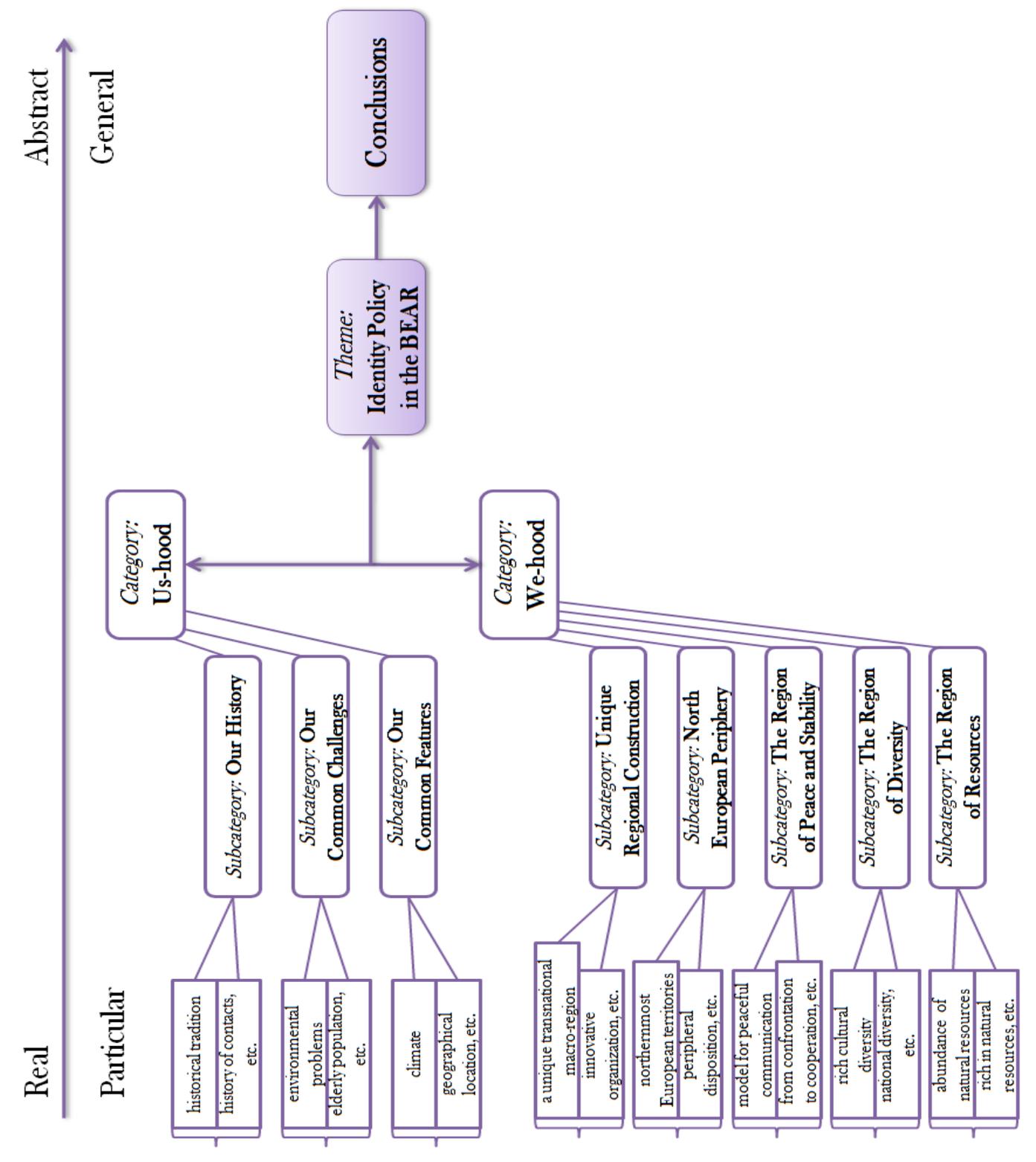


Figure 2. Qualitative Content Analysis of the Identity Policy in the BEAR.

For the better understanding of the table it is necessary to introduce some additional definitions. Thus, a 'subcode/subcategory' is a second-order tag assigned after a primary code/category to detail or enrich the entry, depending on the volume of data you have or

specificity you may need for categorization and data analysis' (Miles & Huberman, 1994 in Saldana, 2013: 77).

Dr. Maria de Hoyos and Dr. Sally-Anne Barnes support Saldana's qualitative analysis sequence and also give such a way of 'analysis' process (de Hoyos & Barnes, 2012: 6) (see Figure 3.).

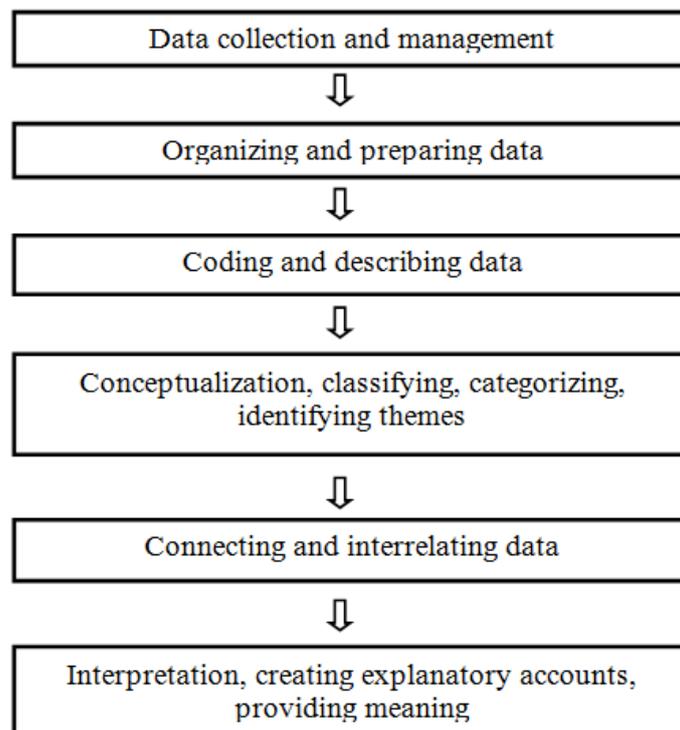


Figure 3. Qualitative analysis process (de Hoyos, Barnes, 2012: 6).

According to Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1277). There are three basic approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional content analysis, directed content analysis and summative content analysis.

Using the conventional content analysis method, 'researchers avoid using preconceived categories, instead allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1279). This method implies that, firstly, a researcher should carefully read through all collected data trying to understand the overall sense of it. Then a researcher should go through all the data again in order to derive the key thoughts and ideas and, also, make notes of his or her first impressions. Then, codes emerge relying on this preparatory job. Codes should reflect the key thoughts and 'often come directly from

the text and are then become the initial code scheme' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1279). Then, 'codes are sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1279).

The directed content analysis is oriented on the existing theory which helps to create codes and categories in advance. It allows making predictions considering the possibilities of categories variations, the initial coding scheme and the relationships among the codes. According to Mayring, this approach has been 'referred to as deductive category application' (Mayring, 2000 in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1281). Thus, applying both of these qualitative content analysis approaches, the researcher has a possibility to create and mix *concept-driven categories* which are based mainly on the chosen theoretical approach and *data-driven categories* derived from the collected data (Schreier: 2012, 85-90). In such a case the research is becoming more structured, exact and precise.

I apply both directed and conventional analysis or deductive and inductive coding. By the means of *directed content analysis* I established two major categories for my research, which are *us-hood* belongingness and *we-hood* belongingness to the Barents regional community. Both of these categories are coincided with the collective identity modes established by Eriksen (1995; see more above in the theory chapter). Their development is the key task of identity policy in any community. The precise study of these categories enables to understand how identity policy in the BEAR is being carried out, particularly by the means of cultural cooperation in the region. In addition to that, the directed content analysis method was applied in order to study *the actors* and their *aims* (which constitute sub-categories) in promotion of regional cultural cooperation. In this regard two core categories were deduced: *the official institutional level of cultural cooperation* and *the practical level of cultural cooperation*.

Taking into account that identity is a difficult concept to be captured relying on the deduction, as it is important to escape prejudices while making a study, *conventional approach* to content analysis becomes significantly useful in identity studies. According to conventional content analysis, the information is gained 'from study without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1279), that is why it helps to abstract a researcher's mind from the frameworks of personal perceptions which is impossible if codes are created in advance, but not derived from the collected data. Thus, in reliance upon the codes derived from the collected data by the means of conventional content analysis the following sub-categories were established: *Our History*,

Our Common Challenges, Our Common Features (these sub-categories specify we-hood category); *Unique Regional Construction, North European Periphery, The Region of Peace and Stability, The Region of Diversity, The Region of Resources* (these sub-categories specify us-hood category).

As this research combines various techniques of data collection in order to find answers to the research question (including analysis of official documents, articles and interviews), it is possible to say that I use 'triangulation' in data collection. The 'basic idea of triangulation is that data are obtained from a wide range of different sources, using a variety of methods, investigators or theories' (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Methodological triangulation in data collection can serve as a useful tool for less the chance of making errors and drawing inappropriate conclusions by diversifying sources of information and giving a researcher an opportunity to look on the situation from a different angle. According to Hilary Arksey and Peter T. Knight, the rationale of triangulation is that 'cumulatively the weaknesses of one research method are offset by the strengths of the others' (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Applying the above-discussed method of data analysis I did the following. Firstly, I carefully read official documents issued by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and Barents Regional Council (BRC) paying particular attention to those of them which are touching upon cultural cooperation in the region and studied them applying qualitative content analysis by following the analytics process suggested by Johnny M. Saldana as well as Dr. Maria de Hoyos and Dr. Sally-Anne Barnes. Using the same scheme for qualitative content analysis process, the next step for me was the analysis of data regarding the chosen cases. I studied the articles, projects' descriptions as well as interviews. Interviews helped to examine the perceptions of experts who serve as agents in the BEAR identity construction, thus, it was possible to better understand their assumptions concerning identity-building process in the region. As my interviews were conducted with people who were directly involved into studied cases, I managed to ask them about the peculiarities of project realization and development, but also I was intended to get the information concerning the overall situation in the sphere of cultural cooperation in the BEAR. The recorded interviews were transcribed and the method of qualitative content analysis was applied in order to analyze them.

5. THE CREATION OF THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC REGION

In this chapter I elaborate on the question of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region creation. It is important in order to give an insight into the BEAR, its agents, and particularities of Barents cooperation. The chapter is divided into two key sections. The first section is descriptive and contains information about the background and prerequisites of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region creation. It could be stated that Barents Euro-Arctic Region represents a political, economic and cultural formation, the initiation and construction of which reflected the uprising of regionalization processes in Europe. It is argued that Barents regional cooperation was primarily developed in order to promote peace and stability in the area, as well as encourage the overall development of the region and enhance living conditions of people living in the BEAR.

The second section is more analytical in nature and reflects on the issue of national and regional authorities interest in Barents regional identity development. Therefore, the second section contains the analysis of Barents member-states chairmanship priorities in the region as well as the analysis of Barents Programmes 2014-2018 and 2019-2023 adopted by the Barents Regional Council.

5.1. The Background for the BEAR Creation

The Barents Euro Arctic region embraces territories around the Barents Sea. Geographically region includes 14 administrative entities of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Cooperation in the BEAR was launched upon the initiative of Norway in 1993 on two levels: intergovernmental which is exercised under the auspices of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and interregional which is exercised by the Barents Regional Council (BRC) ('Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region', n.d., para. 1). Despite the fact that Denmark, Iceland and the European Commission possess a status of permanent BEAC members, the leading role in decision-making process as well as overall cooperation in the region is maintained by Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

Tracing back to the reasons which were behind the process of Barents Euro-Arctic Regions' institutionalization, it is worth mentioning, that such a decision could be referred to the foreign policy line specific to Europe after the end of the Cold War. The particular aim of such kind of policy was to resolve the conflict and bridge the gap between West and East by the means of cooperation and integration development. One may state that initially the initiative of regional Barents integration was a part of security policy pursued by the

Northern European countries in relation to the territories of strategic value (Svensson, 1998).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union there appeared a need to create a platform for the organization and maintenance of the dialogue between Russia and Northern Europe (Aalto, 2006). Thus, according to the logic of Norway and other Nordic states, it was planned to achieve stability and provide security by the means of development of economic and social connections in the region. Geir Hønneland stated that the cooperation project was aimed at 'reducing the military tension, the environmental threat and the East-West gap in standards of living in the region' (Hønneland, 1998: 2). It is important to emphasize that one of the BEAC major tasks which is mentioned in the Kirkenes Declaration of 1993 is 'to decrease the tension and increase the stability in the region' (Heininen, 2004).

The Participants expressed their conviction that expanded cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region will contribute substantially to stability and progress in the area and in Europe as a whole, where partnership is now replacing the confrontation and division in the past (Kirkenes Declaration, 1993: 1).

It is necessary to emphasize that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia was still seen in Europe as a potential threat or enemy, therefore, the aim was to create a new kind of inter-governmental forum and organization for multilateral and bilateral co-operation in order to build mutual trust (Heininen & Lomagin, 2016: 270).

The intention was to stimulate and facilitate long-term collaborative activities that would ultimately benefit the population of the new transnational regional constellation. It was also hoped that the agreement would lead to an opening of the previously closed east-west border and to an increased mutual understanding of the conditions of life and the future prospects of the people living in different parts of the region (Stoltenberg & Gorbachev, 2016: 17).

On the one side, there were the centrifugal forces in play when different nationalities within the former Soviet Union claimed their independence as sovereign nation states. On the other, there were the integrative forces of the current EU project, where national identifications merged into a new concept of Europe as a homogenized entity, a process that stimulated transnational region-building process and new kinds of regional identifications, the so called 'Europe of the regions'. Both these processes were necessary for the establishment of the Barents Region. Another driving force was the desire for political stability in the northern areas after the disarmament at the end of the Cold War (Elenius, 2015: 468).

Generally, the cross-border cooperation 'project was linked to the overall regionalization process underway in Europe as well as in the Arctic, turning previously peripheral border areas into meeting places between states in transnational networking

involving many-sided interaction' (Honneland, 1998: 2). According an interviewee 'This initiative partly reflected the political process of regionalization and trans-regional cooperation which was actively arising in Europe at that time... In 90-s the idea of 'transboundariness', 'transnationality', pegged to regions, transnational regions, was especially popular, and then the Barents Euro-Arctic Region appeared' (Interviewee 1).¹

One more reason for the establishing Barents cooperation which was especially significant for Norway was that due to the geographic factors Norway was excluded from the cooperation in the Baltic region. Thus, not least because of 'fear of losing its say in the making of Northern European security policy', Norway was primed to organize a political project where it could play one of the leading roles (Honneland, 1998; Svensson, 1998).

Initially the BEAR project faced skepticism and resistance both on the part of Norwegian Foreign Ministry and central administration and on the part of Russian military and security services (Heininen & Lomagin, 2016: 270). However, the idea that the initiative 'would create new platforms and channels for dialogue between the states with the potential to decrease military tension and increase political stability' eventually vanquished the hesitations (Heininen & Lomagin, 2016: 271).

Speaking about the aims of Barents cooperation, it is important to emphasize that the major goal of the BEAC and the BRC is facilitation of sustainable regional infrastructure development, bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the spheres of economy, trade, science and technologies, environmental protection, education and cultural exchange as well as assistance in the realization of projects aimed at the enhancement of indigenous peoples rights and living conditions (Kirkenes Declaration, 1993: 2).

It is important to note that practical interaction in the Barents Region is organized by 14 Working Groups (Yarovoy, Hønneland, 2016). The Working Groups are divided into BEAC Working Groups, BRC Working Groups, Joint Working Groups and the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples. Thus, the areas of cooperation embrace such spheres as rescue cooperation, environment, investments economic cooperation, transport and logistics, culture, education, energy, health and social issues, tourism, youth and indigenous peoples ('Barents Working Groups and Activities', n.d., para.2).

¹ Їто отразило отчasti политическїй протсесс регионализатсии и формированиїа трансграничных регионов, которї активно шел в Европе в то время... В 90-е годы идеїа трансграничности, транснатионал'ности с привїязкої к регионам, транснатионал'ным регионам, она была очен' активна, и тогда поїавилсїа Бarentс Евро-Арктической Region.

All in all, it could be stated that the Barents Euro-Arctic Region represents a political, economic and cultural formation the initiation and construction of which reflected the uprising of regionalization processes in Europe. The Barents regional cooperation was developed in order to promote peace and stability in the area, as well as encourage the overall development of the region and enhance living conditions of people living in the BEAR. For the reason that Barents regional cooperation is exercised both on international and interregional levels, we may assume that Barents region represents both international organization and trans-border region (Yarovoy & Hønneland, 2016: 69). This distinguishes the BEAR not only on a scale of the Northern Europe, but also in the whole world.

5.2. Are the Barents Authorities Interested in Barents Identity?

While describing the process of the BEAR creation it is also necessary to reflect on the issue of national and regional authorities interest in Barents regional identity development. In order to answer this question, I have analyzed their priorities in Barents cooperation.

According to the Norwegian Chairmanship priorities for a term of 2011-2013, Norway is interested in building a regional identity and supposes that good networks and close contacts are necessary for it (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Norway clearly stated its perception of the BEAR as *a recourse rich region* and declared its aspirations in regional image promotion. Speaking about Finland and its Chairmanship priorities on 2013-2015, there was not mentioned any aspirations about regional identity building, mostly, the practical aspects of cooperation were examined. In Russian Chairmanship Priorities for a term of 2015-2017 the necessity of developing the concept of Barents identity is mentioned (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Even more, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov mentioned in his statement at the BEAC Ministerial Session in 2015 that 'people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges will contribute to strengthening the concept of the Barents identity based on a common history and on association with the same social and cultural space' ('Russian foreign minister addresses Barents Euro-Arctic Council meeting', 2015). At the same time, the overall context of the statement as well as of the Russian Chairmanship Priorities is devoted to the practical sides of the cooperation, such as energy, forestry, healthcare, reduction of environmental hot spots in the Russian part of the Barents Region, transport

and logistics issues as well as emergency prevention and response. Thus, it is possible to conclude that Russia as well as Finland do not include the construction of Barents regional identity into their priority interests of BEAR cooperation. Speaking about Swedish Chairmanship priorities for a term of 2017-2019, Sweden is aimed at promoting the Barents identity characterized by *openness and diversity* (Government Offices of Sweden. Ministry for Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

Touching upon the interest of regional authorities in the development of Barents identity, it is necessary to note that according to the Barents Programme 2019-2023, it is a mutually recognized goal 'to continue to create and promote the positive and attractive 'Barents identity' within and outside the region taking into account regional diversity' (The Barents Regional Council, 2018: 5). Indeed, in the Barents Programme 2014-2018, it is also possible to find such a question: 'How can we increase knowledge about Barents inside and outside the region to become a stronger player on the European arena?' (The Barents Regional Council, 2013: 2). Thus, it is possible to conclude that Barents regional authorities are interested in promotion of common Barents identity and consider this task as one of their regional cooperation goals.

In overall perspective Barents cooperation was developed in order to increase the stability in the region, provide the environmental protection and reduce the gap in living standards between East and West in the European North. In this context, the creation of regional identity could be an important condition for successful implementation of stated goals, as it serves purposes of regional consolidation and development of trust-building relationships.

On the grounds of the conducted analysis of official documents issued under the auspices of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Barents Regional Council it is possible to conclude that, indeed, the participants of Barents cooperation are interested in promotion and development of regional Barents identity. Norway stands in as the most interested actor on the national level of regional cooperation. The idea is also supported by other BEAR member-states. However, according to the analysis of their Chairmanship priorities, regional identity building is not perceived as one of their priority interests, more attention is paid to the development of practical cooperation including such spheres as transport and logistics, environmental protection, investments and economic cooperation, tourism, energy cooperation as well as emergency prevention and response.

On the inter-regional level of cooperation there is a desire to promote Barents identity within and outside the region. It is admitted that the creation of Barents identity serves purposes of regional consolidation and legitimization. Cultural cooperation is acknowledged as an influential tool for regional branding as well as regional image construction and promotion. The important role of cultural cooperation in trust-building and inter-regional relations development is also admitted. Thus, it is possible to conclude, that regional identity concept is of a bigger importance and interest on the inter-regional level of cooperation than on the national.

All in all, it was established that, the concept of regional identity exists in the Barents regional cooperation discourse. Thus, it is significant to study this concept as well as analyze the way it is being created and promoted within the frameworks of cultural cooperation in the BEAR.

6. CULTURAL COOPERATION IN THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC REGION

In this chapter I analyze *the actors* of cultural cooperation in the BEAR as well as *their aims* in promoting cultural projects and activities. In order to answer this question, two levels of Barents cultural cooperation are examined, particularly, the official institutional and the practical levels. For this purpose official documents of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Barents Regional council (BRC) have been examined in order to study the official institutional level of cultural cooperation in the region. Furthermore, the data on 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe'; the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' and the 'Barents Spektakel' projects have been examined in order to study the practical level of cultural cooperation. The analysis allows us to understand which key motives are lying upon the promotion of cultural cooperation in the region, as well as establish how the creation of a shared Barents identity coincides with these motives.

In the chapter I argue that the participants of Barents cultural cooperation are interested in promotion and development of Barents identity and regional community building. Cultural cooperation is recognized as an instrument of regional identity development and serves purposes of we-hood and us-hood belongingness promotion. Nevertheless, I admit that regional identity construction represents not a primary objective, but a 'by-product' of regional cultural cooperation and is perceived as a long-term and quite indefinite prospective.

6.1. The Official Institutional Level of Cultural Cooperation in the BEAR

Cultural cooperation in the Barents Region is coordinated mainly by the Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC). The aim of the JWGC is 'to strengthen cultural identities, multicultural dialogue and cultural ties between the Barents countries and the regions' ('The Joint Working Group on Culture', n.d.).

In the period from 2003 to 2018 under the auspices of the JWGC there were formulated and adopted four programmes on cultural cooperation in the Barents Region. In addition to the adoption of programmes on cultural cooperation, meetings of ministers of culture of the BEAC member-states are held on a regular basis, various cultural projects are implemented with the assistance of the JWGC and, also, since 2016 a special prize is awarded by the JWGC for the contribution into the cultural cooperation in the region.

According to the programmes on cultural cooperation, the key goals of cultural collaborative activities in the BEAR include *making the region more prominent on the international arena* from a cultural point of view (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2002; Joint Working Group on Culture, 2008); *fostering mutual understanding and trust* (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2010); *increasing tolerance and interaction* (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2008: 6); as well as *developing the BEAR regional identity* as a unique cultural region in the north of Europe (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2002). Moreover, it is admitted that cultural cooperation serve as '*a tool for regional, social and economic development*' (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2008: 6; Joint Working Group on Culture, 2010; Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014).

According to the Joint Statement of Ministers of Culture of the BEAC Member-States which was issued in Moscow in 2016, the participants of Barents cooperation are aimed at the advancing the 'Barents Identity' (The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 2016: 1). Cultural cooperation could be used as an instrument in realizing this goal (The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 2016: 1). However, it is necessary to admit that mostly activities in the field of cultural cooperation serve purposes of contact development and network building which in turn enhance trustful relationships, therefore, developing mutual understanding which is important for regional stability. The regional identity construction seems to be a more long-term and indefinite perspective.

On the grounds of the analysis of Barents Programmes adopted for the terms of 2014-2018 and 2019-2023 under the auspices of the Barents Regional Council, it was established that, cultural cooperation is acknowledged as an influential tool for regional branding and positive regional image construction and promotion (The Barents Regional Council, 2018: 9). From the constructivist point of view, positive representation of a region in the eyes of the international community, can encourage its legitimization and provide with more political power and longer subsistence. The important role of cultural cooperation in trust building, mutual understanding and inter-regional relations development is also admitted (The Barents Regional Council, 2013: 4). Through the development of mutual understanding actors of the cooperation would be able to know each other better and, consequently, break existing perception borders. As a result, it is possible to conclude that cultural cooperation can serve purposes of both us-hood and we-hood community belongingness development. At the same time, it is necessary to admit, that regional identity construction is perceived mostly as a side and a long-term

effect of regional promotion and branding, network-building and mutual understanding development.

The leading role of the JWGC in cultural activities realization is emphasized (The Barents Regional Council, 2013: 10). At the same time, it is admitted that the Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) as well as the Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER) could also act as mechanisms for cultural cooperation promotion by the means of student exchange, regional workshops and national conferences, therefore, contributing to breaking down language and cultural barriers, developing common identity and, thus, laying a foundation for Barents cooperation as well as regional community consolidation (The Barents Regional Council, 2013: 10).

On the grounds of the conducted analysis of official documents issued under the auspices of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council it can be established that, the participants of Barents cultural cooperation are interested in promotion and development of shared Barents identity and regional community construction. The role of cultural cooperation in the development of Barents regional identity is recognized (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2008). Joint Working Group on Culture is perceived as an organization particularly responsible for the development of shared regional identity of the BEAR. However, JWGY as well as the JWGER could also act as mechanisms for cultural cooperation promotion.

I conclude that cultural cooperation could serve purposes of *regional branding, the promotion of the Barents Region on the international arena* as a united entity, as well as the *enhancement of intra-regional contacts, development of trust and openness and regional community consolidation*. Thus, *cultural cooperation serves as a tool for the development of us-hood and we-hood group belongingness*, which constitute the core modes of regional collective identity. At the same time, it is necessary to admit that regional identity construction seems to be more like a 'side effect' of cultural cooperation as such, as well as a long-term and quite indefinite perspective.

6.2. The Practical Level of Cultural Cooperation in the BEAR

In the analysis of the practical level of cultural cooperation, I studied the following projects: 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe'; the

'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' and the activities of the art-group 'Pikene på Broen' based in Kirkenes, particularly, their cultural project 'Barents Spektakel'.

Concerning the Barents History book and the Encyclopedia, both of them partly represent the response to a political order (Elenius, 2015: 25). Particularly, it is stated that the initiative to write a history book came from the Olof Palme International Centre in Stockholm and the Norrbotten County Administration Board which were occupied with the northern dimension of Europe during the final moments of the 2001 Swedish chairmanship of the European Union (EU) (Elenius, 2015: 9). According to an interviewee, '...partly it was an order initiated by Barents authorities...It was [the BEAR] a political, economic and cultural formation, consequently, some politicians had an idea to provide a logic and historical rationalization for it' (Interviewee 1).² The interviewee adds that 'The idea of politicians, who ordered these projects, was to show that historically people used to communicate across the border, that historically these territories had much more linkages which were built horizontally' (Interviewee 1).³ It is also possible to conclude that one of the reasons for this order was a desire of Swedish authorities to draw the EU attention to the northernmost European territories. At the same time it is, incorrect to deny personal interest and inducement of the projects' authors. 'Basically the projects were academic projects and the emphasis and guidelines were decided completely within the projects and academic collaborations on scientific grounds' (Interviewee 2).

Prior to these projects the territories of the region were not analyzed within the prism and scale of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. According to an interviewee, 'until very recently, histories of this region were written as national historiographies...Actually, Russia, was illustrated as a country beyond the Iron Curtain or beyond the border' (Interviewee 1).⁴ Indeed, according to the 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe', the Russian Europe is normally excluded from the discourse of Europe (Elenius, 2015: 471). Therefore, one of the project's goals was *to bridge the gap between Russia and Northern countries and enhance cooperation in the Barents Region* and, even more, to *present a new approach to the definition of the Northern European dimension*.

² ...otchasti èto byl zakaz sverkhu... Èto bylo politicheskoe, èkonomicheskoe, kul'turnoe obrazovanie, sootvetstvenno, u nekotorykh politikov vznikla ideia o tom, chtoby podvesti pod nego logicheskoe obosnovanie i istoricheskoe.

³ Ideia politikov, kotorye zakazali èti proekty, byla pokazat', chto istoricheski liudi obshchalis' cherez granitsu, chto istoricheski èti territorii imeli gorazdo bol'she sviazei, kotorye byli vystroeny gorizonta'no.

⁴ Istoriia ètogo regiona do nedavnego vremeni pisalis' kak chast' natsional'nykh istoriografiĩ...v riade sluchaev istoriia Rossii opisivalas' kak deistvitel'no , strany po tu storonu ot zheleznogo zanavesa ili po tu storonu granitsy.

At the same time, the overall objective which lead to the production of the projects is stated as 'to contribute to the compilation and dissemination of knowledge about the conditions of life in this northerly transnational region' (Olsson, 2016: 20). Indeed, it is highlighted that 'northern territories have been neglected in official historical narratives', as well as the BEAR is generally widely unknown (Olsson, 2016). Thus, there was *a need to promote the visibility of the Barents Region within and outside the region* and, therefore, promote the world's interest in Northern Europe (Olsson, 2016).

In a brief review on the Encyclopedia presented on the Editor's web page, it is stated that '...the legitimacy of this process [transboundary interregional cooperation] is greatly enhanced and collaboration is much facilitated and stimulated if people identify with the objectives of the project. One way of contributing to this goal is to compile and disseminate existing information about the situation in the various counties belonging to the Barents Region' (Olsson, 2009: 2). Thus, it may be concluded that there is *a declared aim to foster regional identity building by the means of knowledge and information dissemination*.

All in all, I conclude that the established objectives coincide with the process of we-hood and us-hood community belongingness development as they imply the promotion of the Barents specific features both within and outside the region.

It was found that the initial aims of the 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe' and the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' projects included: *to integrate the information on the region; to fill the gap in general knowledge deficit about the region; to disseminate the knowledge about the region and, therefore, promote its visibility; to bridge the gap between Russia and northern countries; to foster regional cooperation*. On the whole, such aims coincide with the idea of regional identity promotion, which represent a 'side effect' of all above mentioned activities.

I want to point out, that the authors of the projects stated that they were not trying to present regional or national identity (Elenius, 2015). Indeed, according to them, there is no Barents regional identity at the moment, 'The BEAR identity is still vague and exists more among regional politicians and officials than among common people' (Interviewee 2). Currently 'it represents a construct which is relatively inessential for people living in the

region'⁵ (Interviewee 1). However, identity construction constitutes one of the side-effects of these projects.

At the same time, it may be argued, that the realization of some exclusive cultural projects is not enough to promote community-building in the region to any significant extent. According to one of interviewees, 'The projects and books represent a good start, but three books written in a language (English) which is foreign language for all the Barents Region population of course cannot alone make a big difference. However, they form one basis which can help further collaboration and identity building' (Interviewee 2).

The 'Barents Spektakel' project is one more interesting case of cultural cooperation the analysis of which could complement the study and with the help of which other reasons for regional cultural activities can be examined. The project is conducted under the auspices of the group of activists 'Pikene på Broen' based in Kirkenes. 'Barents Spektakel' is a festival which has been organized since 2004 'in order to promote cross-border connections between culture and politics and among citizens of the Barents Region' (Viken, 2016: 80). Even if the project is organized by the group of activists, the financial support for its organization is received from such institutions as the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, Arts Council of Norway, BarentsKult programme which is aimed at the promotion of cultural cross-border cooperation in the BEAR (particularly Norwegian-Russian projects), as well as from regional authorities including Finnmark county (Northern Norway), Troms county (Northern Norway), Nordland county (Northern Norway) and Sør-Varanger municipality in Finnmark county ('Barents Spektakel 2019. The World's Northernmost Chinatown' n.d.). Thus, it is obvious that the 'Barents Spektakel' project is widely supported by Norwegian regional authorities and the BEAR institutions.

I want to mention, that initially 'Barents Spektakel' appeared mostly due to practical reasons. Mine bankruptcy caused a crisis in Kirkenes, therefore, citizens faced a necessity to find another resource for living. According to the interview with one of the 'Barents Spektakel' managers, Lyuba Kuzovnikova, 'Kirkenes, due to its geographical disposition, appeared to have other advantages, particularly, the Russian-Norwegian border is located within 13 km from Kirkenes, and the Finnish-Norwegian border is just a 50-minute drive from the town... Thus, Kirkenes becomes a strategically important place, so called 'gates to

⁵ ...ona opisyaet konstrukt, kotoryi otnositel'no malovazhen dlia naseleniia mestnogo regiona.

Russia'⁶(Fedorenko, 2010). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that cultural cooperation serves as *a resource for local Kirkenes community which sustains its livelihood and develops the town socially and economically.*

The 'Barents Spektakel' was designed as a meeting point (Biryukova, 2017). The idea of cultural cooperation was 'to build the bridges across the Barents regional borders by the means of culture and modern art'⁷ (Fedorenko, 2010). Indeed, the festival attracts people from various parts of the region as well as outside it, promoting regional-branding, however, mostly city-branding (Kirkenes).

The festivals' themes touch upon common regional challenges and features. This coincides with the idea of regional identity development. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize that the 'Barents Spektakel' *mostly serves city-development purposes*, while *Barents regional community building and identity promotion represent a 'side effect'* of the project realization. However, still it could *complement identity construction process* in the region, especially on a scale of Kirkenes. It is also possible to assume that, in such a case, the Barents identity rhetoric itself also serves as tool of city-branding. According to one of interviewees, 'addressing to this shared Barents identity, it is possible to distinguish oneself'⁸ (Interviewee 1).

All in all, it was established that objectives of Barents cultural cooperation depend on the actors of cultural cooperation. However, generally, the common aims imply: *enhancement of overall cooperation in the region; dissemination of the knowledge about the region and, therefore, promotion of its visibility; bridging the gap between Russia and northern countries. Regional identity construction seems to be more like a 'side effect' of cultural cooperation* as a whole, as well as a long-term and quite indefinite perspective. Moreover, it is necessary to admit that the realization of some exclusive cultural projects is not enough to promote community-building in the region to any significant extent. However, it is necessary to admit that the implementation of the above mentioned goals of cultural cooperation, indeed, implies the realization of identity policy in the region.

⁶ No u Kirkenesa v silu svoego geograficheskogo polozheniia otkrylis' drugie bol'shie preimushchestva, v chastnosti, v 13 kilometrakh ot nego nakhoditsia russko-norvezhskaiia granitsa, a v 50 minutakh ezdy – finsko-norvezhskaiia granitsa... Kirkenes stanovitsia mestom strategicheskoi ochen' vazhnym – 'vorotami v Rossiiu'.

⁷ Ideia byla v tom, chtoby stroit' mosty poverkh granits Barentseva regiona s pomoshch'iu kul'tury i sovremennogo iskusstva..

⁸ ...appeliруя k etoi nekoii obshchei identichnosti, ty mozhesh' sebii vydelit'.

7. IDENTITY POLICY IN THE BEAR

In this chapter I will present the analysis of identity policy implemented in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Particularly, taking into account the research question of the thesis, I concentrated on the implementation of identity policy by the means of cultural cooperation in the region.

The chapter is divided into two key sub-chapters which are devoted to the analysis of 'we-hood' and 'us-hood' modes of group belongingness. Each of the sub-chapters is also divided into several sections which are touching upon the core aspects of identity policy in the BEAR conducted by the means of cultural cooperation.

In the chapter I argue that identity policy is implemented in the Barents Region. We-hood is promoted by highlighting such features as common regional history, common regional challenges and common regional features. Us-hood is promoted by presenting the BEAR as a unique region in terms of its regional construction; geographical location; regional peace and stability; diversity and wealth of resources.

7.1. We-hood

According to Eriksen (1995), we-hood represents a mode of group belongingness which stands for the internal sense of solidarity with a community. 'We' implies 'interdependence and internal cohesion by virtue of a shared task' (Eriksen, 1995: 427). We-hood 'must be founded in shared or complimentary representations of shared practices' (Eriksen, 1995: 429). The cohesion of a group is achieved through sharing of certain practices which implies that 'we take care of each other' (Eriksen, 1995). Thus, on the ground of the conducted qualitative content analysis of the texts it was decided to present we-hood category by virtue of following sub-categories: *our history; our common challenges; our common features*.

7.1.1. Our History

According to the analysis of the official documents it was established that the existence of *historical interactions* in the region, indeed, serves as an important source for the justification of the BEAR official creation in 1993. The *historical tradition* of trans-border cooperation is highlighted.

We believe that people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges will contribute to strengthening the concept of the Barents identity based on *a common history* and on association with the *same social and cultural space* (Russian foreign minister addresses Barents Euro-Arctic Council meeting, 2015).

The analysis of cultural projects in the BEAR indicated that the representation of common regional history is an important part in regional discourse and plays a significant role in regional identity policy. Such aspects as *transnational/trans-regional tradition; tradition of borderless cooperation; history of contacts* are emphasized. It is stated that the creation of the BEAR was a natural outcome of historical contacts within a *common area*. Thus, the BEAR was created on the model of previous cross-border cooperation (Elenius, 2015). Indeed, the authors of the projects were intended to illustrate that ‘historically people communicated over the border, historically these territories had much more ties which were built *horizontally*’ (Interviewee 1).⁹ This communication was mostly exercised by the means of *trade ties (the Pomor trade)* and *cultural contacts*. Indeed, it is repeatedly highlighted that ‘in the past centuries people of these areas had interacted a great deal over the national borders’ (Interviewee 2).

Even more, in the ‘Encyclopedia of the Barents Region’ it was noted that there were no permanent borders until the 19th century and no strictly enforced borders until the 20th century. In the ‘The Barents Region: A Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe’ the concept of *flexible boundaries* is also emphasized. Thus, it is possible to establish that throughout cultural cooperation there is an attempt to present the BEAR as a natural outcome of historical trans-border tradition, putting a special attention to the historically *looser kind of frontier system, boundaries flexibility* and, as a result, existence of *common area* of the Barents regional community.

7.1.2. Our Common Challenges

The next category which was established by the means of qualitative content analysis is touching upon common challenges of the Barents community.

Stemming from the analysis of official documents it was found that there are three key challenges which are faced by the people of the Barents Region: *climate, environmental problems, demography*. It is stated that the Barents Region is ‘one of the

⁹ ...istoricheski liudi obshchalis’ cherez granitsu, istoricheski eti territorii imeli gorazdo bol’she sviazei, kotorye byli vystroeny gorizontally’no.

most vulnerable regions in terms of environmental degradation and climate change impacts' (Government Offices of Sweden, n.d.). In terms of demographic challenges, people of the region are affected by the increasing *elderly population* and there is *a need to attract young people* to stay in or move to the BEAR (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014). Such common issues as *pollution, unsustainable production patterns and use of resources, transport problems* are also mentioned on the official level of Barents identity policy, however, the first two could be also traced to the environmental challenges.

On the grounds of cultural projects' analysis *environmental issues (pollution, global warming, etc.), climate (extreme, coldness, climate change, cruel life)* and *demographic problems* were established as the key common challenges. Thus, we can acknowledge connection between the representation of key common challenges on the official institutional level and the practical level of the BEAR cooperation. However, in addition, to above mentioned common issues, being *a periphery* is also represented as a challenge which unites the community of the Barents Region due to the fact that peripheral disposition often implies underdevelopment.

All in all, it is stated that people of the Barents Region are facing *similar challenges* and have *common regional issues*. 'The northern areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia are all struggling for their progress' (Interviewee 2). Thus, on their road to the progress people of the region have to deal with common challenges represented by *harsh climate, environmental problems, peripheral disposition and demographic issues*.

7.1.3. Our Common Features

The possession of common features is one more core element which nourishes we-hood community belongingness, promoting the construction of collective identity.

In official documents the significant number of similarities of the Barents cooperation participants is emphasized (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014). Such similarities include: *Barents culture* (common cultural heritage), *climate and topography, geographical location, rich resources*. It is important to note that the concept of Barents culture remains underdeveloped, as apart from its name, nothing is mentioned in order to specify it, however, the similarity in the sphere of *northern design* is pointed out (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2002). In terms of climate and topography the Barents Region is depicted as a *geographically large and sparsely populated area* with similar *harsh*

climatic conditions. Sometimes climate of the area is also characterized as *Arctic*. The *Northernness* of the region is highlighted, it is stated that the BEAR represents the northernmost part of Europe which is also often identified with the *Arctic*. The region is also depicted as *a resource rich* both in cultural and natural senses.

The members of the Barents region share a significant number of similarities, most notably the Arctic climate, sparse population, long distances, vast natural resources and high exposure to the consequences of ongoing climate change (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014).

By the means of the analysis of cultural projects it was established that common regional features include geographical location, climate and topography and natural resources. Indeed, it is highlighted that before the USSR, there were a lot of similarities in the contemporary Barents Region (Elenius, 2015). For example, such similarities included 'living from hunting and fishing in the early ages of the regional history' (Elenius, 2015). Even after the ideological polarization the territories of the BEAR experienced similar influences, e.g. rapid modernization processes. It is also stated that North Russian intellectuals felt closeness to a broader Scandinavian community enjoying the access to Scandinavian literature and music (Bjerkeng & Aittaniemi, 2016: 432).

As for the regional geographical location, such features as *North*, *remoteness*, *Arctic* and *periphery* are highlighted. At some point the region is even represented as *a common area for people of the North*.

Throughout this book these subregions are referred to as the *northern areas* to portray their *common northern dimension* within each nation state. The '*northern areas*' is used to depict all the subregions within the present-day Barents Region as *a common transregional northerly area* from east to west (Elenius, 2015: 18).

In the book we will use various concepts to depict *the northern dimension*, depending on the time and perspective in different historical contexts, such as '*the northern regions*', '*northernmost*' part of Europe, 'nowadays' or 'today's' or the 'currents' Barents Region, or simply the '*northern areas*' when we want to draw the attention to *common*, both international and transnational, *area of the north* (Elenius, 2015: 23).

According to the interview with one of the 'Barents Spektakel' project managers and a participant of art-group 'Pikene på Broen', Lyuba Kuzovnikova: 'these projects, which we are doing, are designed as discussion panels, which should make ordinary people who live in the Barents Region, to think about who we are, what we are, *what is the North* and

*who is the North*¹⁰ (Fanajlova, 2010). Thus, people of the Barents Region are presented to be inextricably linked with *the North*. One of interviewees has also emphasized the regional affinity to the North: ‘The history and characteristics of the *northern areas (Barents Region)* were considered special...The *common northern identity and co-operation* may help promoting *common northern prospects and standpoints* towards national governments’ (Interviewee 2).

In terms of climate and topography the community of the Barents Region shares such conditions as *harsh/extreme climate, long distances, vast and sparsely populated area*. These features have similar impact on living conditions of the Barents society and, as a result, lead to similar challenges.

The conditions have influenced the identifying process of the people in the area, because the experiences of the landscape and climate, and their impact on daily life, also influence identification with the landscape (Elenius, 2015: 448).

It is also stated that territories of the Barents Region possess *rich natural resources*. This notion also represents a common regional feature and could serve as an input into we-hood group belongingness development.

7.2. Us-hood

Us-hood as contrasted to we-hood implies the process of contrasting vis-à-vis a Significant Other. ‘Us’ refers to the ‘cohesion by virtue of an external agent’ and implies ‘communication of a difference that makes a difference to all who are not included into the community’ (Eriksen, 1995: 429). Us-hood stems from the interaction with the external world, external environment.

Branding a region as a unique one implies the development of us-hood belongingness of a regional community. A community is being contrasted to ‘Others’ and its group identification becomes meaningful (‘We are better than the X’es’ as it was proposed by Eriksen, 1995) and this leads to the activation of us-hood. It was found that in all official documents and cultural projects the uniqueness of the BEAR is highlighted. Thus, it is possible to assume that, identity policy aimed at the integration of the BEAR regional community is conducted.

¹⁰ Èti proekty, kotorye my delaem, my ikh zamyslivaem kak diskussionnye forumy, kotorye zastaviat imenno zadumat’sia prostykh liudei, zhivushchikh v Barents-regione, o tom, kto my takie, kto my est’, chto takoe Sever i kto takoe Sever.

All in all, in the course of the research five directions of us-hood development were established, namely they are: *unique regional construction; unique geographical location (North European periphery); the region of peace and stability; the region of diversity; the region of resources*. Each direction represents a sub-category of the broader ‘us-hood’ category and the explicit analysis of them is introduced further.

7.2.1. Unique Regional Construction

The uniqueness of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region’s construction is emphasized. Such characteristic as *the interaction between the national, regional and individual levels* is presented in the official documents as one of the key features which differentiate Barents regional cooperation.

Barents cooperation to be a unique undertaking that confirms the value of close interaction between intergovernmental cooperation, cooperation among county administrations and direct people-to-people cooperation (Kirkenes Declaration, 2013).

According to the Kirkenes Declaration of 2013, the specific system of Barents Region’s construction could be an example for other regions in Europe. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the BEAR is being contrasted to other European regions which act as ‘Significant Others’.

The uniqueness of the Barents Region in terms to its organization is also promoted by the means of cultural cooperation. In cultural projects the BEAR is being presented as a new and novel political region which challenges earlier ways of nations and regions construction. In many cases, the Barents Regions’ construction is coincided with the *postmodern* era and *globalization*, it is stated that such a kind of region could appear only in the epoch of postmodernism. Such a notion again emphasized *the uniqueness* of the BEAR construction. On the whole, the BEAR is depicted with such descriptions as: *a unique transnational macro-region, novel political construction, innovative organization, specific organizational design, first macro-region which moved beyond the Iron Curtain* and etc. The key notions are: *a unique, novel, specific and innovative*.

The Barents Region is, therefore, a unique transnational macro-region but is also typical of the globalization process and of postmodernity (Elenius, 2015: 10).

The uniqueness of the BEAR is emphasized, thus, it is being contradistinguished to other previously existed regions in terms of its organization and construction which, in

turn, promotes the enhancement of us-hood regional community belongingness and brands the region in the eyes of the international community as well.

7.2.2. North European Periphery

The Barents Region is actively promoted as the region combining the *northernmost European territories*. On the one hand, the promotion of such an image of the BEAR serves as an instrument for we-hood belongingness development, emphasizing the fact that people living on the BEAR territory are all related to the North of Europe despite they live in various states. In addition to that, depicting the region as a North European Periphery for people of the North serves as a tool for us-hood group belongingness development as, thus, the regional community is opposed vis-à-vis the South Europe which in such a case plays a role of the Significant Other.

The overall Barents vision strives to improve people's living conditions, to encourage sustainable social and economic development, and to create peaceful and sustainable development in the northernmost part of Europe (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014: 9).

In the course of cultural projects' analysis, it was found that regional geographical location served as a great source for us-hood community belongingness and regional branding development. The BEAR is represented as *a common region for people of the North*, thus, people from the 'South' are represented as the 'other'. Such descriptions as *northern areas, northernmost parts of four nation states, northerly dimension* are also highlighted, therefore, opposing the region to the southern, particularly, South European territories.

Seeing the region from a more confined European perspective, the change in 1991 not only put an end to the Cold War, is also opened ways in which to redefine northern Europe, reinstating a broader northerly regional dimension (Elenius, 2015: 446).

It is necessary to mention that regional *peripheral disposition* is also highlighted in cultural projects conducted under the auspices of the BEAR. Thus, the region is being contrasting to the 'Centre' (*centre-periphery tensions*), which is represented by the southern territories of each member-state (southern in relation to the BEAR) characterized by rapid development. The regional *remoteness* is also promoted as one of the key Barents Regions' characteristics.

There is *a northern dimension* which binds the people together in a feeling of being *on the fringe of the nation state*... These parts of the nation states have been depicted as young and novel parts of their nations, as regions with bright future but also, somewhat

inconsistently, accused of *being backward and drawing on the reserves of the nation* (Elenius, 2015: 20).

7.2.3. The Region of Peace and Stability

According to the analysis of official documents, the Barents Region is depicted as *the region of peace and stability*, therefore, forming its positive image in relation to the external environment and promoting us-hood community belongingness development giving the people of the Barents Region a sense of regional uniqueness. In this context the BEAR is promoted as a '*successful model for peaceful international and interregional communication*' (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014: 9). It is also stated that Barents regional cooperation '*could be an example to other regions in Europe*' (Kirkenes Declaration, 2013). Thus, on the basis of such BEAR characteristic as '*a region of peace and stability*' it is opposed to other regions which may not stand out by the success of regional trans-border cooperation, particularly in other parts of Europe, but in other parts of the world as well. Therefore, the inhabitants of the BEAR are also affected as they acquire the sense of pride of being the members of such outstanding regional community.

Barents cooperation remains a successful model for peaceful international and interregional cooperation, and can be replicated in other parts of the world (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014: 9).

Mutual trust built through the Barents Cooperation can thus serve as a model for others on how neighbouring countries can resolve differences peacefully through dialogue and negotiations, and thus help release the huge potential of the regional and European integration (Kirkenes Declaration, 2013: 1).

In the studied cultural projects the BEAR is also promoted as *a peaceful cooperative area*, which succeeded to move *from confrontation to cooperation*, being the first macro-region to move beyond the Cold War's Iron Curtain. Thus, the Barents Region is presented as a successful example of region-building which promotes the cooperation between formerly confronting states. That again highlights its uniqueness, taking into account, that traditionally regional cooperation is exercised within allied territories.

7.2.4. The Region of Diversity

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region is also promoted as a region of diversity. Indeed, regional diversity could not serve as an instrument for increase of internal sense of solidarity and we-hood group belongingness. However, it can work as a tool for us-hood

development as self-conscious plurality could give the inhabitants of the Barents Region 'sense of uniqueness, and can as such function as a source of regional pride when it is directed outwards through the communication with the outside world' or external environment (Eriksen, 1995: 429).

Specifically, the diversity of the BEAR is highlighted in the context of its cultural and national multiplicity. In this context, the region is depicted as *a region of rich cultural diversity, a dynamic and open cultural area, a unique social and cultural fabric, multicultural dialogue*.

The wealth of the region is in its cultural diversity, and cultural cooperation increases mutual understanding and respect (Joint Working Group on Culture, 2014: 12; Joint Working Group on Culture, 2008: 7).

Throughout the analysis of cultural projects it is also possible to trace that *cultural, national and ethnical diversity* is presented as one of the BEAR features.

One of the most characteristic features of the Barents Region is its multi-ethnically composed societies, historically as well as today (Niemi, 2016: 519).

However, it is important to emphasize that the analysis of cultural projects has indicated that cultural diversity is admitted as a dissociative factor. Thus, it is necessary to admit that sometimes, cultural regional diversity is studied through the prism of *multiculturalism* (Niemi, 2016: 519). In this context, it is possible to assume that it could be an attempt to diminish influence of cultural differences on the way to regional consolidation.

7.2.5. The Region of Resources

On the grounds of qualitative content analysis of official documents, it was found that the Barents Region is promoted as *a region rich of resources*.

The Barents region is a region that increasingly attracts international attention. It is *a region with vast resources* – both human and natural – and a great potential for new economic development...During its chairmanship Norway intends to highlight and promote the Barents region as *a resource rich region in Europe* (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.: 1).

Thus, it is possible conclude that the BEAR is being contrasted to other parts of Europe in terms of its resource riches. Especially *vast natural resources* are highlighted.

According to the analysis of the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region', Barents natural resources are represented as one of its key regional outstanding features.

The economy of the Barents Region is characterized by its northern location with a cold but still varied climate, its relatively late urbanization, and its *abundance of natural resources* (Westin & Druzhinin, 2016: 151).

Therefore, it is assumed that the promotion of Barents Region as *a region of resources* contributes into us-hood group belongingness development among the inhabitants of the BEAR, as well as supports regional branding. Thus, it represents one of the BEAR identity policy directions and enhances community-building and regional consolidation.

All in all, it may be concluded that identity policy is implemented in the Barents Region. By 'identity policy' I understand a process of transmitting specific stereotypes and values to the audience by regional agents in order to promote the development of regional consciousness. It is important to emphasize that politics of identity primarily and mainly represents the political and social struggle which is aimed at the destruction of previous legitimizations and searches for the acknowledgment and recognition of a constructed community. Therefore, I argue that the development of we-hood and us-hood group belongingness to the regional community is conducted in the Barents Region by the means of cultural cooperation.

We-hood is promoted by highlighting such features as common regional history, common regional challenges and common regional features. In terms of common regional history, it is promoted that historically flexible borders and close ties eventually result in the appearance of a common area of the Barents regional community. Among common challenges environmental issues, harsh climate and demographic problems are identified. Common regional features include climate and topography which have a similar impact on living conditions of the Barents society; geographical location (a common area for people of the North) and the possessiveness of rich resources. It is interesting to note, that peripheral disposition of the region serves both a feature enhancing we-hood group belongingness (a common feature and a common challenge) and a feature enhancing us-hood group belongingness (centre-periphery dichotomy). The same is also possible to conclude about such features as geographical location (North vs South) and rich regional resources (wealth vs lack).

From the point of us-hood promotion, it is also necessary to add that the BEAR is being presented as a unique region in terms of its regional construction; geographical location; regional peace and stability; diversity and wealth of resources. Thus, it is quite difficult to distinguish one specific 'Significant other' for the Barents Region.

8. DISCUSSION

In this section I concentrate on findings of my research in connection with previous studies on regional identity in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and theoretical considerations. I refer to such upper-level questions as the importance of regional identity construction studies in general and, particularly, in the BEAR and elaborate on what my findings tell about this in comparison with previous studies.

I want to emphasize that strong regional identity plays a great role in consolidation of a region and serves as one of the main sources for its development and existence justification. The solidarity of regional community increasingly enhances its stability as well as serves as a basis for its subsistence. The more a specific group becomes a part of people's self identity, the stronger their loyalty to this group will be. Consequently, the formation of common regional identity serves as one of major sources for regional community solidarization, providing a region with a longer subsistence and justifying its existence on the international arena.

In my thesis I follow the idea of Zimmerbauer, and understand the BEAR as 'a top-down construction of regional elite, serving primarily economic and business aspirations' (Zimmerbauer, 2018:911). Therefore, I assume that there is a need to construct regional identity which should be embedded into the consciousness of the people of the Barents Region uniting them into the regional community. This is crucial in order to justify the existence of the region and get support and legitimization.

On the grounds of the research it was established that the concept of regional identity exists in the Barents regional cooperation discourse. Indeed, the participants of Barents cooperation on the national and regional level are interested in promotion and development of Barents identity. Norway stands in as the most interested actor on the national level of regional cooperation, and the idea is also supported by other BEAR member-states. However, according to the analysis of Barents states Chairmanship priorities, regional identity building is not perceived as one of their priority interests, more attention is paid to the development of practical cooperation including such spheres as transport and logistics, environmental protection, investments and economic cooperation, tourism, energy cooperation as well as emergency prevention and response.

On the inter-regional level of cooperation there is also a desire to promote Barents identity within and outside the region. It is admitted that the creation of the BEAR identity serves purposes of regional consolidation and legitimization. It was also established that all

cultural projects chosen as cases got financial support from regional authorities and Barents institutions. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that cultural cooperation projects coincide with the interests of Barents authorities and to some point represent instruments of their policy realization, particularly, in the field of regional branding and identity promotion. This conclusion is consistent with that detected by Zimmerbauer (Zimmerbauer, 2018). His idea is that the key agents of the Barents identity promotion are represented by instrumental institutions and the 'idea of bounded space is mostly promoted by the institutionalized planning and development system', like regional authorities, while grassroots activity is less common (Zimmerbauer, 2018).

In this context, it is also necessary to admit the interest of cultural elite in the BEAR identity promotion. However, in such a case the Barents identity is used as a rhetoric serving the purposes of cultural activities manifestation. According an interviewee, 'addressing to this shared Barents identity, it is possible to distinguish oneself...Getting involved into this Barents cooperation, you automatically significantly enhance your audience' (Interviewee 1).¹¹ At the same time, we cannot deny that by bringing the subject of Barents identity up the agents are promoting it simultaneously.

On the whole, the role of cultural cooperation in the development of Barents regional identity is recognized on the official institutional level of regional cooperation. Touching upon the key actors of Barents identity construction, the Joint Working Group on Culture is perceived as an organization particularly responsible for the development of a shared regional identity of the BEAR; the JWGY as well as the JWGER could also act as mechanisms for cultural cooperation promotion.

At the same time, it was concluded that regional identity promotion does not represent a priority goal, rather constituting a secondary objective. Therefore, I agree with the statement made by Zimmerbauer that regional institutions and developers are much more interested in *regional branding* than in the development of regional identity (Zimmerbauer, 2013; Zimmerbauer, 2018: 911). Primarily that happens due to the fact that benefits of regional branding seem to be more clear for them than benefits from regional identity development.

Thus, in my research it was established that the key goals of cultural cooperation in the BEAR could be summarized as follows: enhancement of overall cooperation in the region; dissemination of the knowledge about the region and, therefore, promotion of its

¹¹ ...apelliruiã k ètoĩ nekoĩ obshcheĩ Barents identichnosti, ty mozhesh' sebiã vydelit'... Podkliuchaia's' k ètomu Barents sotrudnichestvu, ty avtomaticheski vo mnogo raz uvelichivaesh' svoiũ auditoriiũ.

visibility; bridging the gap between Russia and northern countries; social and economic development of the region. Indeed, regional identity construction seems to be more like a 'side effect' of cultural cooperation, as well as a long-term and quite indefinite perspective. This notion coincides with a conclusion made by Zimmerbauer that identity development represents a 'side-effect' or 'by-product' of regional promotion.

Cultural cooperation is primarily acknowledged as an influential tool for regional branding as well as regional image construction and promotion. However, despite the fact that regional branding is prioritized by regional actors more than identity building, the promotion of the region logically leads to the development of regional identity. Indeed, the manifestation of regional positive image in relation to the external environment *promotes us-hood community belongingness* giving the people of the Barents Region a sense of regional uniqueness. The inhabitants of the region are affected as they acquire the sense of pride of being the members of such a unique regional community. Moreover, they acquire the understanding of their community's borders as while being promoted to the external environment the region is being compared to 'others'. This conclusion coincides with the idea of Zimmerbauer that by the means of regional branding and promotion as well as knowledge dissemination, the development of regional identity as well as community-building are forced (Zimmerbauer, 2013). Therefore, the development of regional identity serves as one of regional branding outcomes.

The important role of cultural cooperation in trust building as well as the enhancement of intra-regional contacts, development of trust and openness and regional community consolidation makes it an important instrument of we-hood group belongingness promotion. By the means of joint cultural projects the inhabitants of the region get an opportunity to know each other better and, consequently, break existing perception borders. Therefore, cultural cooperation serve as a tool for *we-hood community belongingness development*.

Due to the fact that the realization of identity policy implies the promotion of we-hood and us-hood group belongingness of regional community inhabitants (Eriksen, 1995), it was concluded that cultural cooperation represents one of the major instruments of identity policy in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region conducted by regional authorities and cultural elite groups.

Throughout the course of the research it was established that we-hood of Barents regional community is developed by highlighting such features as common regional

history, common regional challenges and common regional features. In terms of common regional history, it is promoted that historically flexible borders and close ties eventually result in the appearance of a common area of the Barents regional community. Among common challenges, it is possible to distinguish environmental issues, harsh climate and demographic problems. Common regional features include climate and topography which have a similar impact on living conditions of the Barents society; geographical location (a common area for people of the North) and the possessiveness of rich resources.

It is interesting to note, that peripheral disposition of the region serves both a feature enhancing we-hood group belongingness (a common feature and a common challenge) and a feature enhancing us-hood group belongingness (centre-periphery dichotomy). The same is also possible to conclude about such features as geographical location (North vs South) and rich regional resources (wealth vs lack).

From the point of us-hood promotion, it is necessary to add that the BEAR is presented as a unique region in terms of its regional construction; geographical location; regional peace and stability; diversity and wealth of resources. Also, it has been already stated that the development of regional us-hood community belongingness is congruent with regional branding process. Therefore, in my research I support the ideas of Zimmerbauer who justified the possibility of building Barents identity (Zimmerbauer, 2013; Zimmerbauer, 2016; Zimmerbauer, 2018).

At the same time, referring to Zimmerbauer, cultural and national differences are often perceived as an obstacle to the common Barents regional identity development (Zimmerbauer, 2018; Honneland, 1998). Indeed the extensive cultural gap between western and eastern parts of the region impede we-hood community belongingness evolution. However, at the same time such a feature manifests regional uniqueness, thus, it is extremely applicable in regional branding and, therefore, us-hood group belongingness promotion. The key notion is that the Barents cultural diversity should be manifested in the discourse as a unique feature of the Barents Region as a cohesive entity, but not as a challenge forcing regional division.

It is concluded that the realization of cultural cooperation implies the implementation of regional identity policy. However, I have to admit, that the realization of some exclusive cultural projects is not enough to promote the community-building process in the region to any significant extent. Therefore, according to the results of the research, some

recommendations potentially could be applied for the improvement of regional identity policy effectiveness.

First of all, due to the fact that identity construction does not represent a priority area of Barents regional activities, there is a need for the development of more structured and cohesive plan of what should the Barents Region present as a cohesive entity. In addition, such a strategy could significantly help in regional branding and development. At the same time, this task is of a special complexity due to the fact that the BEAR represents a political project embracing the interests of various actors. The development of strong Barents identity may not coincide with the interests of these actors as it implies weakening of national identity and border blurring.

Moreover, identity building in the BEAR represents a long-term perspective. Taking into account that currently the region is highly dependent on the overall international situation and relations between East and West, changes in the political agenda of the Barents cooperation member-states could prohibit regional identity promotion and development as well as Barents cooperation on the whole.

In order to promote construction of joint regional identity it is also significant to support the development of cultural cooperation and realization of joint cultural projects aimed at the establishment of trustful and open relations within the population of the BEAR as well as regional branding and dissemination of knowledge on regional issues, history, challenges and distinctive features.

To conclude, one cannot deny the importance of findings in this research according to which identity policy in the BEAR is realized and cultural cooperation serves as a key instrument of its implementation. I would like to point out that the actors I have studied have connected cultural cooperation and identity building with such upper-level aims as peace and stability in the region as well as its overall development. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if the Barents identity becomes the reality for Barents inhabitants in the future.

9. CONCLUSION

In this study the aim was to analyze how the Barents Euro-Arctic Region's identity is constructed by the means of multilateral cultural cooperation in the region. I also managed to find out the place of regional identity narrative in the Barents cooperation project. In addition, I demonstrated the actors of regional identity formation as well as their activities in the sphere of cultural cooperation. I also established which key goals are pursued by the means of cultural cooperation and how these goals are coincided with promotion of regional identity policy. Moreover, I intended to show how we-hood and us-hood modes of community belongingness are developed in the region by the means of cultural cooperation.

To answer my research questions a multiple case study approach was applied. In order to understand how cultural projects serve as a tool of regional identity policy realization I gathered and analyzed data consisted of 1) two books as an evidence of two cultural research projects, 2) semi-structured interviews with representatives of two cultural research projects, 3) interviews published in the mass media and project descriptions on the cultural project 'Barents Spektakel', 4) official programmes and strategies on cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region with an emphasis to those documents touching upon cultural cooperation in the BEAR. The collected data was analyzed by the means of qualitative content analysis. Throughout the course of the research it was established that all practical-level cases coincide with each other in point of the BEAR representation and its identity promotion. The analysis of the official institutional level of Barents cooperation is consistent with and complements the analysis of practical-level cases. Therefore, it is possible to make general conclusions on the grounds of studied primary data.

The empirical findings of this study provide a new understanding of identity policy in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. This is the first study that reports on the Barents regional identity construction by the means of cultural cooperation in the BEAR. The present study confirms previous findings of the research conducted by identity and regional studies researchers and contributes additional evidence that suggests that the BEAR identity is constructed generally by the means of cultural cooperation in the region.

The study has shown that the rhetoric on regional identity exists in the Barents regional cooperation discourse. However, the development of regional community does not stand as one of the priority interest for national and regional Barents authorities and

institutions as well as cultural and academic regional elite who, particularly, serve main agents of identity policy in the BEAR.

Indeed, cultural cooperation is admitted as a significant tool which could be useful in community and identity-building processes in the region. At the same time, key aims for the promotion of cultural activities in the BEAR are touching upon enhancement of overall cooperation in the region; dissemination of the knowledge about the region and, therefore, promotion of its visibility; bridging the gap between Russia and northern countries, economic development. Thus, regional identity construction seems to be more like a 'side effect' of cultural cooperation, as well as a long-term and quite indefinite perspective. However, it was established that the promotion of cultural cooperation and the realization of the above mentioned aims inevitably implies the consequent promotion of identity policy in the region. Therefore, cultural cooperation serves as a major tool for we-hood and us-hood community belongingness development.

Throughout the course of the research it was established that we-hood of Barents regional community is developed by highlighting such features as common regional history, common regional challenges (environmental issues; harsh climate; demographic problems) and common regional features (climate and topography; geographical location; rich resources). From the point of us-hood promotion, the BEAR is presented as a unique region in terms of its regional construction; geographical location; regional peace and stability; regional diversity and wealth of resources.

Regarding the theoretical contribution, it was affirmed that branding coincides with identity development process, particularly, activating us-hood belongingness mode of the community. Therefore, in regions with significant cultural diversifications, such distinctions could serve as a source for regional branding and us-hood group belongingness development providing the inhabitants with a sense of pride in living in such a unique region.

It was also established that identity building even not representing a primary goal of cultural cooperation, inevitably becomes a “by-product” of cultural activities which are promoted and conducted under the auspices of the regional entity, and are aimed at the manifestation of the region and establishment of trustful relationships among its inhabitants.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. Unfortunately, only a few representatives of cultural cooperation involved into the realization of case projects were interviewed due to a lack of opportunities to reach this highly significant cohort. Secondly, only three projects were analyzed as cases, taking into consideration that there are quite a few projects providing predominantly equal representation of Barents states and regions, as well as there is a little information available concerning the majority of projects in quantity sufficient for proper analysis.

This research has also presented questions in need of further investigation. More research is required in order to better understand either whether there is a need to boost identity policy in the Barents Region or whether it should remain the “side effect” of the overall Barents cooperation, taking into account that the region represents a political construct and some participants of cooperation may be opposed to the enhancement of Barents identity. Future studies may also elaborate on the issue of regional branding, as there is a need to work out a coherent image of the BEAR which could be used not just for purposes of identity construction but primarily for purposes of regional economic development. There is also a need for studies touching upon the effectiveness and role of grass-roots regional activities in the Barents identity construction.

In conclusion, the results of this study have made a significant contribution to the studies of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region identity promotion and construction. This work can be useful for the BEAR foreign policy and public policy. I want to conclude by citing ‘eventually the regions on paper and regions in discourses may transform into regions in social practice’ (Johnson, 2009; Paasi, 2001 in Zimmerbauer, 2016: 334).

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APPENDIX

Questions for semi-structured interviews with the representatives of 'The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe' and the 'Encyclopedia of the Barents Region' projects

1. Can you tell about yourself, your field of work and professional interests?

Questions about the projects

2. Which way were you interacted in the Barents Encyclopedia and Barents History book projects?

3. What was the initial aim of the development of the Barents Encyclopedia and Barents History book projects?

4. Was this aim achieved ultimately?

5. Which groups of interest were involved in the development of the projects (governments, academic circles, politicians, social activists, etc.)? Which interests did they follow?

6. On what grounds were the articles and the authors for the projects selected and who was responsible for the procedure of their selection and approval?

7. How do you think, do the before mentioned projects represent an effective tool of regional identity building in the Barents Euro-Arctic region (BEAR)? Please, explain, why?

Cultural cooperation in the BEAR questions

8. Which other cultural projects in the BEAR were you also involved?

9. Were these cultural projects somehow related to the identity constriction in the BEAR?

10. Which groups of interests mainly promote the Barents identity building?

11. How do you think, what are the key interests of these groups in promoting the BEAR identity?

12. How do you personally understand the concept of BEAR identity, what are the key features of it and is it important to develop Barents identity?
13. Do you think, that cultural cooperation in the Barents region serves as an effective tool of the regional identity construction? Please, explain, why.
14. In your opinion, what are the main purposes of the cultural cooperation in the region?