



## Territorial Social Innovation in the Nordic Countries and Scotland



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### **Pikene på Broen**

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Pikene på Broen is a good practical example from Norway showing how art cutting across culture and politics can be used as a tool to strengthen regional identity, increase attractiveness of the area for people to settle down and challenge the contemporary global view of the north that is dominated by natural resources and heavy industry.

## Preconditions, Inspiration, Nurture

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Pikene på Broen (Girls on the Bridge) is a collective of curators and producers based in the Norwegian town of Kirkenes, in the far north of the country. It has a population of about 3,498 people (2013) and the region numbers about 10,000 inhabitants. Kirkenes is located 11 km from the Russian border and 35 km from the Finnish border.

The NGO Pikene på Broen was founded by 5–6 local residents in 1996, around the time of the decline of the mining activities in Kirkenes. The mine had been the corner stone of the economy but also of civil society in the area. In 2001, a Joint Stock Company (JSC), Pikene på Broen AS, was established.

The concept behind establishing the organization was quite idealistic. Local activists felt that culture and arts could be a driving force for cross-border cooperation with Russia and also bring a new perspective and vision to the town of Kirkenes, currently hit by the economic downturn as a result of the mine closing down. The initiators believed that culture and the arts could play an important role in shaping a new identity for the town and also bringing Russia closer.

The name Pikene på Broen is borrowed from the painting by a Norwegian painter, Edvard Munch.

## Implementation

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Since its establishment in 1996, the organization has been realizing both large and small-scale projects at the crossroads of different art genres on both sides of the Norwegian–Russian border.

Among the best known initiatives is Barents Spektakel, which is an annual festival started in 2004. The event is described as ‘a cultural–political cocktail with contemporary art and music, theater and performance, literature and architecture, seminars and debates as its ingredients—all spiced with current issues related to the Barents Region and the High North in general’<sup>1</sup>. The festival attracts considerable national and international attention, and engages local and regional residents. Holding an event like this in such a remote area is quite unique.

Besides the festival, Pikene på Broen organizes other events with the involvement of residents throughout the year, such as Transborder Café, which is a year-round forum drawing on contributions from artists, musicians, writers, politicians and researchers. The format is an open discussion that involves the audience and covers current political and cultural issues relevant to the north.

Among the issues discussed recently has been the refugee crisis on the Norwegian–Russian border; the information and media war (the way Russia and Western countries report on different events); and the re-development of Kirkenes (how the city might sustain itself without a mine). The discussion platform attracts a broad audience with a good spread of ages, possibly due to keeping the events lively and interactive.

An international artists-in-residency program also targets the local community in different ways; from workshops and artists’ presentations to using verbal knowledge to give a different perspective on certain issues and topics.

Pikene på Broen also has several projects targeting young people aged 16–19 in a cross-border context.

When it comes to future plans, Pikene på Broen will move to a new exhibition space and workshop space in autumn 2016, which is more centrally located, and the organization will become more visible in the community on a daily basis.

## Resources

Pikene på Broen has received funding from a number of actors. The organization has particularly relied on strengthening cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, which

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<sup>1</sup><http://pikene.no/about-us/>

was established as a political construction in 1993. Pikene på Broen has different funding streams, both long- and short-term (project-based). The Norwegian Barents Secretariat (BarentsKult and people-to-people cooperation programs) is among the main funding bodies today.

Among other funding bodies are the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, KORO - Public Art Norway, Fritt Ord, Sparebank1 Nord-Norge Cultural foundation, Arts Council Norway, Nordic Culture Point, the three northernmost counties in Norway and a commercial supporter, Total (oil and gas company). The international artists-in-residency program is supported by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat (BarentsKult) as an annual funding stream. The individual projects carried out by the artists also receive individual support.

## **The Network / Cooperation**

The organization has a broad network and a number of cooperation partners at local, regional, national and international levels. In addition to the cooperation partners listed in the section above (see Resources), the network includes cross-cutting contemporary art centers, cultural institutions, youth organizations and other partners from Norway, northwest Russia and beyond.

Pikene på Broen is an 'idealistic JSC.' The company is funded by public organizations, among other financial sources. This means that the profits are not distributed among the shareholders but are used for the Organization's needs and projects.

## **Enablers and Barriers**

Setting up an organization like Pikene på Broen in such a small and remote place as Kirkenes has not been easy. Local residents were rather skeptical about arts and culture in general. The people engaged in the work of Pikene på Broen had to work hard to increase the local residents' social engagement and to become accepted as a part of the town and established in the local community.

Access to funding, political support and integration of the local community into artistic productions have been crucial factors for establishing and running the organization, which has currently been active for 20 years.

Among the external facilitating factors for establishing the organization were the closure of the mine, which triggered rethinking of the development direction for the town and its identity and the search for new ways of bringing people together. Another facilitating factor was the opening of the border with Russia. Building cultural bridges between Norway and Russia was initially the main mandate of Pikene på Broen.

The activities of the organization rely on the warm and durable relations with Russia that exist in the north despite the disputes and conflicts between Oslo and Moscow. This entails both challenges and opportunities. Pikene på Broen continually responds to the changing political climate between Norway and Russia. During times of increased tension, the cultural dialogue that the organization facilitates becomes even more vital.

## Social Innovation Effects

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### **Outcomes, Impact and 'Scaling'**

The initiatives implemented by Pikene på Broen have an important impact on the local community, as they provide a way to reflect on local themes and issues in the area, and offer a different perspective and a discussion platform. Being a part of the local community in Kirkenes for 20 years, the organization has provided new sources of inspiration and new ways of shaping identity as alternatives to the traditional mining activities.

Pikene på Broen contributes to building a common regional identity in the Barents region and increases people-to-people contacts between Norway and northwest Russia. Many of Pikene på Broen's projects and activities have started long-term and positive exchanges in the border area.

Due to a number of year-round events and happenings, Pikene på Broen plays an important role in increasing the attractiveness of the border area, especially for young people.

## Lessons Learned

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Pikene på Broen applies art and culture as 'soft diplomacy' tools with a goal to facilitate dialogue between professional artists, as well as between people living on both sides of the border. Access to funding and political support have been among the key enabling factors for a successful development of the organization.

Pikene på Broen is a good example showing how art cutting across culture and politics can be used as a tool to strengthen regional identity, to increase the attractiveness of the area for people to settle down and to challenge the contemporary global view of the North that is dominated by natural resources and heavy industry.<sup>2</sup>

Having a platform like Pikene på Broen is important for increasing the attractiveness of rural and remote areas like Kirkenes for young people. Engaging young people in culture and the arts, and encouraging their creativity, critical thinking and engagement in the issues relevant for their local area contributes to building stronger ties with the local community and to strengthening the northern / Barents identity.

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.beac.st/newsletter/Newsletter-1-2012/Luba-Kuzovnikova>

## References

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Michael Miller, Media and Public Relations, telephone interview, June 8, 2016

<http://pikene.no/about-us/>

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