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Candidate number: Tarakina Olga

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## To the question of identity of Russians living in Norwegian-Russian borderland

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Key words: Barents identity, borderland Russians, dialogue of cultures, border mentality, Barents cooperation, cultural identity, regional identity, Barents region.

Abstract: This article is based on sociological research which took place in Russian Norwegian borderland. It is about the identity of Russians living in Murmansk region. The author investigates the question of existing of Barents identity here.

This paper focused on the possibility of building the “dialogue of cultures” in Russian-Norwegian borderland. It also shows how the cooperation process in the frames of Barents Euro-Arctic Region influences on people’s identity in this area.

### **Introduction**

Norwegian-Russian borderland is the unique land. There is no so big amount of distrust here anymore and cross-border contacts in different spheres continue its growing despite of political situation and propaganda. It goes without saying that relations across the borders became more “normal” during the time. A big role in this process played not only political links but people-to-people contacts which built some kind of the bridge between our countries. And this bridge still functions despite of all difficulties. The whole generation grew in atmosphere of friendship. For this generation crossing the border between Russia and Norway is normal.

People from Murmansk are not borderland citizens in the full sense. But the border influences on them too. The port of Murmansk is something like the borderland of second level. The author interviewed people from Murmansk and Nikel with different life experience, of different age, gender and social status. Some of them have never been in Norway. Others had big experience of contacts with Norwegians. Few of them has work dealing with cooperation in Barents Region. The oral history was the main method. More than 35 interviews were made. There were respondents from Murmansk, Nikel, Norway and Leningrad region.

### **The meaning of identity**

Author examine the concept of identity as the identification of the self with a certain environment, the awareness of self in the world, the consciousness of the existence and characteristics of own personality. The need for identity is specific human characteristic.

Identification had different components which depends from gender, racial, ethnic, religious, social, class, political, ideological and other differences.

There are two levels of identity — personal-psychological and socio-psychological. The first one can be define as awareness of the man himself (self-identification). The second one is the awareness of involvement in a particular social group.

Many years ago identities were understood to be a matter of human nature, predestination, and fate (Bauman 2001). The concept of identity changed during the time. Globalization processes have led to major changes in the nature of identity. Nowadays construction of identity is understood as an individual project.

The identification is multicomponent. The man can have a lot of identities at the same time: ethnic, social, professional, gender, civil, religious, racial, political, cultural, regional and many others. Some scientists say that each man has multiple identity, others that there are a lot of identities in each person. Whatever it was one fact is obvious – person can choose only from identities which are available for his observations. The formation, operation and development of each identity and the relationship between them, depends on the situation including ideological and political beliefs.

The identification is the demarcation between “Self” and “Other”. It is the definition of the circle of persons with whom the individual is connected and consciously identifies himself, and the circle of persons to whom he actually opposed.

The problem of identity in the times of globalization includes first of all personal identity (forming person’s stable representations of himself as a member of society) and cultural identity which helps person to determine its place in the transnational space. It is very important to save traditions in modern world but intercultural dialogue is also very important. We should be open to the acquaintance with cultural traditions of other countries and try to make our own cultural heritage familiar for other cultures.

The essence of cultural identity is the conscious acceptance of the person of the cultural norms and patterns of behavior, values and language, understanding of the “I” from the standpoint of the cultural characteristics that are accepted in a given society, self-identification with the cultural patterns of this particular society. Culture forms people’s feeling of belonging to a particular community (a sense of identity).

Cultural identity can be described as the feeling of the belonging to the some culture or cultural group. The essence of cultural identity contains the individual conscious acceptance of the cultural norms and behavior patterns, values and language, in the sense of the self from the standpoint of the cultural characteristics that are accepted in this society, in self-identification with the cultural patterns of this particular society. Cultural identification comes to the fore whenever there was a “meeting” of different cultures. Castells wrote that cultural factors dominate in modern society (Castells 2004: 6).

According to the Cultural Studies each person is the part of the culture in which he grew up and matured as a person. Particular qualities of native culture become visual when individual meets with representatives of another culture. Individual realizes that there are other forms of experiences, behaviors, ways of thinking that are significantly different from the usual and well-known. The individual identity continues its development during comparing and contrasting positions of different cultures. The separation of people of native and other cultures is the basis of cultural identity.

Cultural identity is the group identity. This means that those qualities with the help of which the man identifies himself relates not only to the personality but to the belonging to a particular cultural group. Even state policy and forming different international blocks (like BEAR) is based on cultural affinity.

A lot of respondents said that local population has special, unique features (behavior, character, habits and others). Some Norwegian respondents said that they feel that they have something common with the residents of Murmansk region. Some of them even say that they are different from people from South Norway.

As G. Hønneland the author is mainly preoccupied with “ordinary people’s cultural identities and how they are constructed and confirmed through every-day conversations and narratives” (Hønneland 2010: 6). This paper also examines if people feel a spirit of community with their neighbours and how the proximity to the border influences on them.

“Concept of narrative identities says that there are reasons to believe that there are strong identities based on both public narratives relating to local history and nature and metanarratives about globalization and cross-border communities” (Viken 2008: 23).

“First, ontological narratives refer to people’s personal experiences. Second, public narratives are shared, for example within a local community or particular place. Third, people have professional, knowledge or work-related identities that are based on conceptual narratives. Finally, some identities are based on metanarratives in the sense of, for example, grand theories or ideologies. All these narratives are continuously constructed and therefore also contestable, and by definition unstable” (Viken 2008: 24). This paper will be based on ontological narratives (stories that individuals use to make sense of their lives). This paper is based on interviews of people whose opinions of northerners are based on their own observations. It examines regional and cultural identity in the context of dialogue of cultures.

### **Identity of people from Russian part of the Barents Region (Murmansk region)**

Researcher Geir Hønneland believes that the extensive human contacts across the borders already have resulted in the emergence of a “Barents generation” in the areas which are close to the border. Really in today’s Russia the power of internationalization is growing. There is movement not only of people and goods but of information and ideas also. Identity is changing, transforming and deforming in the borderzone. We should stress that the other’s identity can not be the basis of one’s own identity. But people can open their “own” in the process of the cognition of the “Other”.

Today you can hear about the Barents identity. It seems to be something like a kind of the common identity in Barents Region including Norwegian-Russian borderland. Some researchers say that the state is no more the main actor on the market of identity. So German philosopher Ulrich Beck says that “cosmopolitan state” can be one of the answers to the challenges of globalization. This state must be based on indifference of existence of national identities according to the constitutional principle of tolerance. This kind of state is impossible without formation of a certain way of thinking, supranational identity, culture and institutions. To be cosmopolitan in this case means simultaneously recognize both equality and differences and feel committed to the benefit of all mankind (Beck 2000).

Globalization is the objective process. It influences on all spheres of society’s life and can not be canceled. But the interaction of cultures, elimination of borders for the exchange of cultural values does not lead to the assertion of a single culture. Features of different cultures are preserved. These distinctive, individual features help nations to understand themselves better, to build their own path of development, to improve relations with its neighbours and

the peoples of other countries. Globalization is characterized by increasing the depth and strength of mutual penetration of cultural, political and economic ties in different countries, the development and interplay of cultural, financial, industrial and other relations between states.

At the moment Norway and Russia are main participants in the Barents cooperation. For centuries these countries lived in the atmosphere of mutual suspicion and mistrust. Prejudices and stereotypes can't disappear at once. Russians and Norwegians have different mentality and national character. We feel the closeness and similarity, but the cultural differences between us are great. We have a lot in common due to the influence of similar climate, nature and so on. But sometimes it is very difficult to understand each other.

Geir Hønneland in his book "Borderland Russians" portrays the Russian Northerner as well-educated, cultured, restrained and introvert. His views are not far from reality. Hønneland writes: "I did not discover a large amount of suspicion towards the Nordic countries among my interviewees, but there was substantial derision and contempt. Such sentiments resonate with age-old Russian perceptions of the West, but in my interviewees I got the impression that they were found not too far under the surface - ready to be activated when someone demands an opinion of Scandinavians from you, but possibly also ready to be modified in encounters with alternative narrative practices" (Hønneland 2010).

Nowadays some people (Russian and Norwegian) living in the borderland feel that their "own" territory is not limited by the state border. "They are neither Russian, nor Norwegian in the full meaning of these words. Local identity has changed and their life is like walking in two worlds. Furthermore, political and cultural elites of the region are actively constructing the concept of the Euro-Arctic Barents Region as an identity region" (Rogova 2009: 31-42). The individual today can design his own identity from many different identities. A lot of people feel themselves as cosmopolitans, "global citizens". They are at home in any country. The self-identification often based on multiple identities.

On the other hand the culture of borderlands is often viewed as a marginal space for a sort of cultural hybrids, which have adopted some "foreign" cultural traits. Russia has type of culture different from Western countries. It combines European individualistic and Asian community basics. Western values can't be just borrowed. They can be adapted for alien

cultural environment. Nowadays cultural globalization leads to a weakening as well as to a strengthening of national feelings of identity.

The research made by author is based on 35 interviews of people of different age, gender and profession. The biggest part of respondents is inhabitants of Murmansk and Nikel. 29 respondents were born in Murmansk region. The majority of them have education at university level. 19 of them were in Norway. 6 were in Norway many times. 5 have Norwegians friends. 16 have never been in Norway. 3 of them have never been in Norway and don't want to visit this country. Many interviewees have no personal experience of communicating with Scandinavians.

The people of age after 50 sometimes called themselves Soviet people. Nobody mentioned that they belong to such organization as the Union of Independent States or BEAR. Europe-wide identity occupies the last position despite the proximity of the region to the border. The kind of identity people mention first of all depends on the age of them. Young people and people elder than 50 give priority to local, ethnic and national identities. Regional, religious and supranational identities are more important for old people. Some young and middle-aged people told about common to all mankind identity.

The features of regional identification were studied by means of series of questions concerning the quality of self-esteem of people living in the Murmansk region. Russians call themselves open, emotional, generous, unpredictable, hardy, strong, brave, noble. To be Russian is to know Russian history, to remember Russian traditions, to be proud of Russian history, to love Russia and to protect the interests of Russia. Russian national character is the mixture of kindness, patriotism, responsiveness, hospitality, credulity. Russians are beautiful, handsome, strong, powerful, kind, friendly, reckless, good-natured, sympathetic, cordial, quick-witted, gambling, very peace-loving, cheerful, hardworking, purposeful, non-possessors. They are able to fend for themselves. They read a lot.

One woman said that she does not know more tolerant nation than Russian. She said that it cause problems for Russians. They are too open. That's why Russians as nationality are losing their national roots. They have too wide-open soul. Other respondent said that Russians are a little bit lazy, non-greedy, unpunctual dreamers. She said: "Russia is my home. All my relatives lived here. Now my children and me live here". To be Russian is to think



about meaning of life, to think how everything is bad, dirty and so on. And it is Russian tradition to blame everyone and everything in it and to produce dust by yourself.

Russian national character is the mixture of desire for freedom and great deal of patience, sacrifice, ability to exploit. Russian is more nation than ethnos. Russian blood is the mixture of blood of different ethnicities.

Russian northerners are more generous, more interesting in communication, more friendly, more polite, more positive, more peaceful, warmer, heartier than other Russians. They are kind, open and always ready to help. Russian Northerners have more active life position. Russians living in the North love and try to save the nature. Northerners are kind, open, patient and clever. Northerners distinguishes provincialism, simplicity, friendliness. They have fewer complexes and are better educated than other Russians. People from Murmansk travel more. They like traveling and love to make friends. Russians living near Norwegian-Russian border are sociable, hospitable, open for everything new, friendly and mobile. They are prone to empathy. The view that the Earth is round and not all foreigners are spies and russophobes is much firmly established in the North of Russia. People living in Murmansk are people with hot hearts and souls.

Not all my respondents wrote only pleasant things about Russians. One woman wrote that they are lazy and careless. But at the same time she gave only pleasant characteristics to Northerners. People living in Murmansk are kind, responsive, generous, open and believing everybody and everything. They are patriots of their land. They curse their land but do not leave it. One woman said that Russian Northerners are more polite than other Russians but closed in communication. By the way a lot of people mentioned that residents of Murmansk region are different from other Russians.

Murmansk is the capital of Arctic. The climate is severe but people are softer. People live closer to Europe here. During last decades Murmansk became modern city. The life in the North of Russia is constantly changing. The biggest part of my respondents thinks that it is changing not for good. Not all population of Murmansk likes that the number of migrants is constantly increases. Economy of Murmansk region is unstable. The ecology is bad here. Only shopping centers are building in Murmansk now. The North of Russia is “more European” but the life in Russian North becomes harder every day. Conditions were better in the North earlier. Now people feel abandonment of the north and unnecessary of people’s

being here. People try to move to other regions. Standards of living falls, factories close and so on. Now salaries are the same as in other regions of Russia and the prices are higher.

Most of my respondents from Murmansk don't feel the proximity of the border. For some of them to live near Norway means to have opportunity to go shopping there. To live near the border is to go to the other country more often and to see foreigners on the street of native town. It is great opportunity to know the culture of neighbouring country better. People can find the work abroad if they want. A lot of Russians now work in Kirkenes for example. Residents of Murmansk region know Norwegians better because Murmansk region have the border with Norway and because there are economical relations with this country. But "it can't change people's nature and their mentality" – said one man. Some of my respondents said that living near the border gives the opportunity to communicate with foreigners, to travel abroad, to exchange the experience with Norwegians, to understand the mentality of them. It is easier to apply for a visa if you live in Murmansk region.

People in Nikel see Norwegians more often than other people from Murmansk region. Border regions of our countries are experiencing socio-cultural impact of the neighbouring countries, however, as the adjacent hinterland area. Some residents of border regions can speak Norwegian and understand Norwegian language. People who live in Murmansk region used to see foreigners, people of other culture. Residents of Murmansk region treat the Norwegians as neighbours and not as representatives of the NATO threat. People here don't copy foreign culture. But they understand that there are different cultures and they are unconcerned about this. Norwegian and Russian cultures influence on each other.

One respondent wrote that Russians and Norwegians have something common in character, attitude to the life. Many ordinary Norwegians are very similar to Russians. They are tolerant, friendly, able to remember a good attitude. Human values are the same. On the other hand one respondent said that Norway is as different from Russia as Earth from Mars. Norwegians and Russians are absolutely different. Norwegians live and Russians survive.

There is cooperation but ordinary people don't know about it. There are different festivals, meetings with writers, exhibitions, performances etc. Some people wrote that there is international cooperation but it does not extend. There are professional ties but there are not so much of them. Others wrote that the cooperation was developing until recent time. And there are some people who wrote that the cooperation between Russia and Norway develops.

Some people even want to be the part of cooperation process. Few of them are already the part of cooperation. Almost none of respondents feel military tensions in this region. A lot of respondents said that we need to make friends with the neighbours.

The author made several interviews with Norwegians living in Norwegian town Kirkenes. He asked them the same questions as Russians people were asked. Norwegians called Russians cheerful, sociable, kind, friendly, patient. Norwegians mentioned Russian hospitality (differs from the Norwegian hospitality, which is also present, but not so obvious). It shows that ethnic stereotypes do not depend much on the current political situation and the influence of media in border regions. They are based on years of communication with the residents of neighbour state. Several Norwegian respondents told that they have Russian friends and personal contacts with Russians and their Russian acquaintances are the funniest, sweetest, strangest and coolest. One woman said that for her Russia comes off as a country with slightly more traditional values than Norway. Russians are very family-oriented. Russians marry young.

One Norwegian woman mentioned that Russia is very different from Norway. It's a totally different culture with other customs they don't have in Norway. The food, the clothing style, the way of thinking are different. She was too young then the Iron Curtain fell, but said that the border was opened and there was more Russians coming to Kirkenes and Norwegians going to Russia. She mentioned that the cooperation and contacts still develops here and she doesn't feel military tensions on the border between Russia and Norway. There is a long tradition of cultural exchange across the border that goes for visual art, music and theatres on both sides.

Norwegians who take part in cooperation process believe that there's some kind of a border mentality. They said that we are very close to each other. Norwegians noticed that cooperation between Norwegian regions and Murmansk region continues it's development. But some of them can feel military tensions on the border between Russia and Norway now. One girl mentioned that Russia is a huge country, hard to generalize about something that covers so much land. Russia is mostly different from Norway by size and amount of people. It was very useful to interview Norwegians. It helped to make the picture of borderland Russians more or less full. It is always good to see yourself from the other's eyes.

Sociological research shows that there is no ethnocentric or disadvantaged ethnic identity in Murmansk region. We can call the identity of residents of Murmansk region quite normal. It means that the image of people living here is seen as positive, but there is no favoritism. The relation to Norwegians is quite tolerant. A lot of respondents said that they are proud to be Russians.

The North unites Norwegians and Russians. It is difficult to say if cooperation is developing now. After the sanctions against Russia it seems that there are no any perspectives for cooperation between Russia and Norway now. But it is impossible to build new Iron Curtain in modern world. Cooperation can be developed only in such spheres as culture, sport and tourism. The situation in the field of economy and politics is more difficult.

Some vigilance in relation to neighbouring countries, indicated in recent years, is a temporary phenomenon. Relations with neighbours are being built under the influence of a more long-term factors rather than short-term “political games” of the central authorities. The attitude to the representatives of other country depends not only on the presence of kinship and friendship ties but on the frequency of trips abroad too. Unfortunately the frequency of visits of Russians to the Norway has decreased significantly in recent years due to a number of negative factors. But the biggest part of Russian respondents thinks that Murmansk region should develop cooperation with Norway.

This shows that efforts to form the “neighbourly” identity were very important. The return to the “oppositional” model of identity in this border region is impossible despite the negative propaganda in the media trying to divide the people of the region to “us” and “them”. Russians and Norwegians have long been allies and partners. It is as difficult to destroy the fruits of more than 20 years of close cooperation in the framework of the BEAR at once as it was difficult to build its foundations at the initial stage of cooperation. In the case of preserving the possibilities of direct contacts of the population living on different sides of the state border the artificial imposition of “oppositional” identity model becomes difficult.

### *Is the transborder identity possible? The dialogue of cultures*

Cultures are open, dynamic systems which are connected with each other by global net. People should switch their perception and behavior between two or more cultures, to feel themselves representatives of one or another culture in different circumstances. It means to have bicultural or multicultural identity. It is possible only for people who underwent a

process of socialization and enculturation on the verge of two or more cultures. Cultural identity is the group identity. It means that all qualities with the help of which person identify himself belong to the particular cultural group.

It goes without saying that identity of people living in Russian-Norwegian borderland is changing but it is not common identity. We can speak a lot about Barents identity but it is still only utopian construction. A lot of Russians have experience of crossing Norwegian border. Each time the man crosses the border he should be ready to the perception of a completely new. It doesn't mean that he reject his own values and representations. He just tries to understand the world of "Other" and his identity is changing in this moment. Do not take the neighbours as the "Others" is a great advantage. We should have the desire to understand, trust and to become friends before building the dialogue across border.

We compare ourselves with others. We can understand our "self" only with the help of "not-me" and this "not-me" will be the part of our "self" nevertheless because we will distinguish only features which are close to our "self" from "not-me". Any social and even personal identity is actualized in a collision and conflict with someone else's identity.

The image of "Other" can be the instrument of affirmation or self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-criticism and even self-improvement. There are common values for all humankind. There are national features also. It complements the universal, but never contradicts it. The processes of globalization lead to the construction of a universal global culture where the common principles will be combined with national characteristics.

Bakhtin also believe that "the Other" is involved in the formation of identity. At all times, the identification process is based on your/someone else's opposition. "The other" is a foreigner also, frightening his strange speech, clothing, manners (Bakhtin 1979: 352). The concept of dialogue of cultures is very important for Bakhtin. The dialogue of cultures means communication through the scope of universal significance and is expressed in the equal importance of the subjects of communication. The meaning occurs in a zone "between" actors and it's aim is the establishing of understanding.

The idea of a "dialogue of cultures" has considerable potential of the establishment of peace and cooperation, replacing mutual confrontation. The subjects of such dialogue are cultures. Realization of the idea of Bakhtin expressed in dialogical co-existence may become

the key to the cultural development without conflicts. According to Bakhtin all modern cultures should be included in this dialogue. The dialogue actors should recognize the right to cultural diversity.

The rejection of the logic of confrontation and approval of the logic of compromise and cooperation are very important. The dialogue of cultures should be based on tolerance. It will prevent different social disasters - both local and global. The purpose of the dialogue is the communication which leads to understanding. The understanding in this context is not the process of finding of the meaning. It is the process of formation of the meaning. The ability of the subject to the establishment of understanding as a result of the dialogue is the most demanded in today's culture. The dialogue is the only acceptable basis for modern civilization and cultural balance. It can help to save cultures in their various forms.

The dialogue of cultures is possible if there is equality of cultures. If inequality is present the dialogue will inevitably become not only a monologue but, most likely, the systematic application of certain policies designed for the interests of the dominant subject of communication.

Bibler understands the idea of dialogue as adequate form of being in the culture, as the form of communication and the form of understanding of other culture. He wrote that XX century is the time of reorientation of the mind from the idea of understanding the world as an object of cognition to the idea of mutual understanding (Bibler 1991: 7-8). The mutual understanding is very important for the philosophy of dialogue. The finding of the meaning is it's central part. Bibler said that monologue is preparing for creative dialogue (Bibler 1991: 295).

Regional identity has it's own specific. It depends on the region and characteristics which distinguish it from other regions. It also depends on the culture. Regional identity is connected with self-identification of people living in certain area. Regional identity of people is constantly changing due to the influence of globalization and regionalization. This is true for the border regions of Russia and Norway. Border regions are special districts. They are situated on the outskirts of the country and perform barrier, filter and contact functions.

Today political situation isn't easy. The role of border region in process of international cooperation increases in these circumstances. People who take part in cooperation between

Pechenga district and Finnmark told the author of this paper that cooperation is developing even now. A lot of new projects existed in these difficult times here, at the edge of the world, far away from the capital cities. There are a lot of different factors separating people from two sides of the political border like religion, language and others. But nevertheless there are different kinds of cooperation here.

If we will look on each other like on equal partner everything will be good in the future. The emphasis on a relationship of dialogue is important. It is important not to look on each other in “we–them” way. Norwegian-Russian relationships here must be based on “dialogue” and “partnership”. It will also enhance regional security. It is also very important to know the history and culture of neighbour country to build the dialogue of cultures.

Cultural cooperation is not necessary from first sight. It often cannot even appeal to categories like usefulness. It is based on a voluntary basis. But cultural cooperation is very important for international relations. It helps to build symmetric relationship between our countries. Culture policy and artistic activity is a kind of identity-forming project here. A cultural cooperation between parties of different cultural backgrounds is built on the mutual acceptance of equality. The cultural diversity in Russian-Norwegian borderland can be described as a mosaic. We should encourage this diversity rather than creating a common regional identity.

Several respondents called themselves Barents citizens. They are representatives of so called Barents elite. But there are not so many such people. So we can make the conclusion that it is too early to say about something like Barents identity in global scale now. But identity of small groups also can influence on cooperation process and people living in this area.

“In modern world it is neither possible to isolate one’s identity from interacting with others nor feasible to erect boundaries and build walls to protect one’s own sense of belonging. Living in harmony with others, being open to others and feeling comfortable with other cultures are attitudes many would find easy to accept” (Feyzi 2013: 232). Modern man may feel a citizen of a particular country and region and citizen of the world at the same time.

Media in Russian and Norwegian border regions seldom express the common identity. Norwegian journalists often describe Russians like “the Other” from the East. Such situation

takes place in Russia too. The common identity in its turn can be built only on the basis of a feeling of likeness with other individuals belonging to the Barents Region. The interviews made by author also show that we are not so similar with each other. We carry different but equal identities. The building of common regional identity is hardly realistic right now.

Steven Vertovec wrote that “an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both” (Vertovec 2001: 579). Sometimes they can feel something like cosmopolitan sense of participation and belonging.

Interviewing shows that there are not so many people which can say that they are people-in-between. Nevertheless people living in Russian-Norwegian borderland can be called “people in-between”. The interviews with people from Leningrad region shows that Russians from Murmansk region differs from other Russians. They are more tolerant to foreigners for example. The attitude to foreigners is more negative in other parts of Russia.

Some theorists use the word “hybrid” talking about “in-betweenness” of identity of some people and group of people. Mobility itself has become normalized for some people. Some people may feel “at home in movement”.

Beck wrote that a local type of cultural community different from national type is forming during the process of globalization. People may make new identities with the help of different cultural sources. Something like hybrid cultural identity we can see in Kirkenes and Nikel. Norwegian cultural specific is present in Nikel’s houses. Norwegians living in Kirkenes are changing through the communication with Russians too.

American philosopher Richard Rorty said that cultural diversity will become useless in the future. He argued that the “hybridization” of cultures do not require much time. The common world culture will be built. But it is hard to imagine that all people on Earth will identify themselves with a certain single, global culture.

There is the main purpose of all this Barents cooperation — to understand each other and to become friends. We must break something in ourselves to understand “the Other”. We must try to look on neighbours like friends not like strangers. It will be the great advantage. And for the fruitful dialogue we need trust. And before the dialogue we must have the desire



to understand. It goes without saying that we should try to create a new type of international dialogue.

One of my respondents is the best example of so called Barents elite. She really feels herself border resident. But I think that she is living in artificial environment because all concepts of common (Barents) identity are utopian in present situation. I think that identity in Norwegian-Russian borderland (in Nikel and other places situated near the border) is slowly changing. But political situation is not conducive to the development of a sense of community. I think that developing of the cooperation may affect the transformation of identity in the border area. But it will take more than several decades.

Politicians and journalists say that cultural exchange initiatives with Norway are prosperous and flourishing today and say about successful exchanges and integration in Barents Region and even about common Barents identity in this area. But the biggest part of ordinary people even doesn't know that is Barents cooperation. I must say that now the process of cooperation repeated traveling from the same people to and from Norway. Cooperation involves a limited group of people as Arvid Viken said "exchange elite". In his article Viken says that "a more open border would probably stimulate a new era, where the features of an integrated borderland could become stronger" (Viken 2008: 39). "The construction of the Barents identity is supported rhetorically by the central authorities but the border is still one of the most controlled and surveyed on earth" (Viken 2008: 40). "The Barents identity highlights a collection of values and ideologies relating to an international or universal level of cosmopolitan activity. It also refers to related values of inclusion, integration and multiculturalism" (Viken 2008: 40). But ordinary people in Kirkenes says that they are patriots first of all, not Barents citizens. In Murmansk and Nikel the situation is the same.

"The youngsters appreciated "multicultural" Kirkenes, but at the same time they stated that the Barents rhetoric sometimes feels out of touch with real life: "I feel that there is so much talk about Barents, Barents, Barents ...but do we really have that much to do with Barents?"" (Viken 2008: 37).

The concept of Barents identity which political and cultural elite of Barents region try to build here, in the North of Europe, is mostly artificial construction. There is a group of people in Region involved in cooperation. We can call them professional participants of cooperation.

Due to the many contacts with foreigners they really can feel themselves Barents residents. At the same time a lot of ordinary people even can't explain that is the Barents cooperation and the proximity of the border means nothing for them.

Now the common identity of borderland citizens is an illusion. But it is impossible to build new Iron Curtain in the modern world. At the same time political situation will influence on the process of cooperation and this influence will not be the best.

Borderland regions will become engines of economic growth, innovation centers, if the central government does not ignore the specific interests of border regions, and do not interfere with their intended cooperation. The author believes that regional cooperation between Russian and Norwegian will likely continue in the present situation. It is very important to understand "other's" mentality and language to be able to save peace in the region.

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