Synergies between spiritual and natural heritage for habitat conservation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region

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Barents Euro-Arctic Region: a tool for international cooperation in the North of Europe

On 11 January 1993 in Kirkenes, Norway, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and Sweden signed a Declaration of the Establishing of International Organisation Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). BEAR has several mechanisms to promote the cooperation among the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. One of them is the Habitat Contact Forum (HCF). Gradually, HCF has started to incorporate cultural and even spiritual components to its work on nature conservation and, especially, on protected areas.

BEAR is managed by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) which is represented by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. BEAC elaborates the general strategy of cooperation. Practical questions are delegated to the Barents Secretariat, which is located in Kirkenes.

For practical reasons, the Barents Programme was organised into ten working groups on culture, environment, education, indigenous peoples, agricul-

< Remnants of a sacred grove next to the chapel of Saint Spirit in Glazovo village, Kenozero, Kenozersky National Park (Archangel Region, Russia).

ture, reindeer-breeding, economics, science and development, health-care, and transport and communications.

Nowadays, BEAR unites the Northern provinces of Norway (Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark), Sweden (Västerbotten, Norrbotten), Finland (Finnish Lapland, Oulu including North Ostrobothnia and Kainuu), and Russia (Republic of Karelia, Republic of Komi, Murmansk Region, Archangelsk Region and Nenets Autonomous Area).

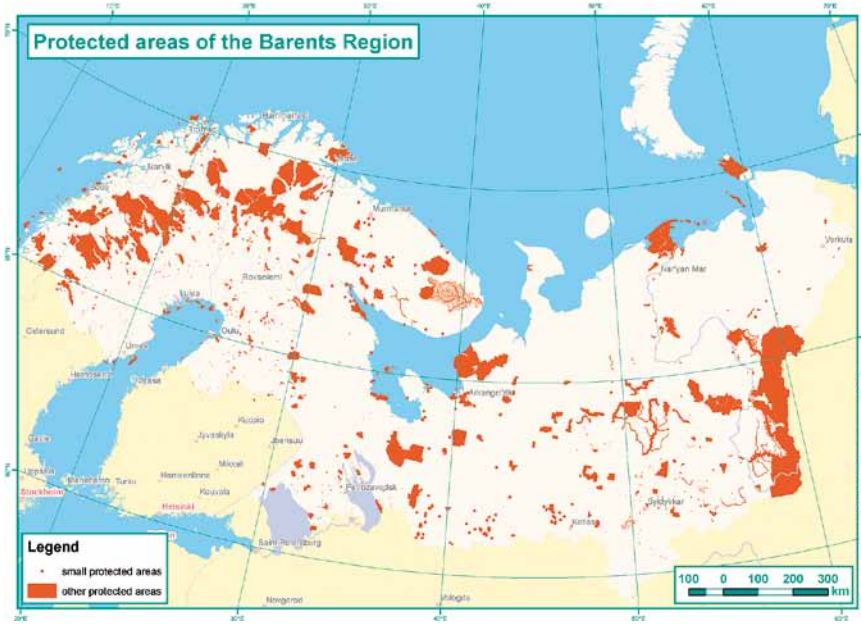
Habitat Contact Forum: a tool for international environmental and cultural cooperation in BEAR

The cooperation of the Nordic Countries with North-West Russia in the field of nature protection started with the international environmental expeditions in this region. All these expeditions included scientists connected with nature conservation and cultural heritage protection (Davydov, 2003). The first expedition was organised around the Onega Peninsula in summer 1997 (Onezhskoe Pomorje 1997). Inspired by the second expedition (Belomorsko-Kuloiskoe Plateau 1998), a group of experts started planning an international workshop on protected areas in BEAR.

The first International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation in the Barents Region (or Habitat Contact Forum) was established in Trondheim, Norway in November 1999 (HCF I, 2000). HCF was meant to be an arena for cooperation on habitat conservation issues in BEAR to achieve increased focus on the need for further establishment of new protected areas, proper management of existing ones, and other relevant issues (HCF II, 2003, Appendix 2: 1). At HCF I, a mandate was defined and a list of international projects was developed.

The second HCF was organised in November 2001 in Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia (Russia). A work plan for conservation issues of protected areas in BEAR was prepared on a 3-year basis to meet the obligations set by the Arctic Council (CAFF/CPAN), IUCN and the CBD. New projects were dedicated to designing and establishing new protected areas, biosphere reserves, 'green belts', and transboundary protected areas, as well as to sustainable tourism development in protected areas, but there were no special sessions or projects dedicated to their cultural and spiritual values.

The third HCF was organised in Kuhmo (Finland) on November 2003. There was a session on 'Nature and Man' and a working group created on 'Cultural and Ethnical Questions and Local Participation'. The working group stated that a deeper understanding of protected areas, including the cultural heritage, is an essential part of HCF work. It suggested that cultural components should be incorporated into the work on habitat conservation, especially the ideas of people living or near protected areas. HCF emphasised that 'although the natural heritage is relatively well-studied, the cultural heritage has not been sufficiently investigated and classified in relation



A map of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

to the environment' (HCF III, 2004: 14). In the paper by Davydov (HCF III, 2004:66-67) the term *spiritual habitat* was formulated based on the investigations of the holy groves tradition in Kenozero National Park.

The fourth HCF was organised in Syktyvkar, Republic of Komi (Russia) in September 2005. There were five working groups, including one on 'Ethic and Cultural Problems'. At the resolution, the role of the environment and indigenous and local populations was underlined (HCF IV, 2006: 235). The working group proposed that: 'In connection with economics globalisation and human interference in natural, cultural and historical sphere, we are greatly anxious about the matters of cultural and ethnic development and also the participation of the local population and indigenous people in habitat conservation. In this respect the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples living on protected natural territories is of vital importance. It is also important that the peoples and local population themselves should be involved in the system of direct consultation and decision making process concerning protected natural territories.' (HCF IV, 2006: 233). It also recommended to include an item connected with local population into the programme of the next HCFs and to develop a long term international ethnic and ecological project on natural, cultural and historical heritage in BEAR (HCF IV, 2006: 233). Unfortunately, the project was never realised.

The HCF themes were affected by the

work of the Delos Initiative. The SNS of Ukonsaari Island was presented at the first Delos workshop (Norokorpi and Ojanlatva, 2007) and the Solovetsky Islands SNS at the second Delos workshop (Davydov et al, 2009). At the Nordic-Russian conference on 'The last large intact forests in North-West Russia: protection and sustainable use' (Steinkjer and Lierne, 2007), the Delos Initiative was introduced by Davydov. The conference recommended introducing the ideas of Delos Initiative to the next HCF.

The fifth HCF was held in Umeå, Sweden, on October 2008. HCFs had became a part of the official Barents cooperation and they were organised with the participation of local people, NGO's, scientific institutes and federal and regional authorities of BEAR (HCF V, 2008: 3). At a session dedicated to forest biodiversity conservation, Davydov presented a paper on SNSs in the forests of North-West Russia, introducing the Delos Initiative to HCF (HCF V, 2008: 54). It was noted that SNSs offer an opportunity to integrate cultural and natural values. The approach may lead to a combination of conservation efforts that result in a synergy of benefits for both values (HCF V, 2008: 6).

The sixth HCF was held in Archangelsk from 31 May to 5 June 2010 (HCF VI, 2010). It included, for the first time, a session on the synergy of spiritual and natural values in the BEAR.

A paper by J.-M. Mallarach and Th. Papayannis on the Delos Initiative explained the idea of the Initiative and the activities developed so far. (HCF VI, 2010: 70–71, 157–158). A.L. Fedyaev and O.V. Churakova touched the questions of the reasonable practicality, and the spiritual and moral need to restore technologically damaged Northern areas (HCF VI, 2010: 156). S. Sohlberg discussed the RAIPON/CAFF Sacred Natural Site project (2001–2004), the RAIPON seminar (2007), and UNESCO meetings in Copenhagen (2006). He proposed that HCF VI should initiate a kick off meeting for a project of synergy of SNSs on natural and cultural heritages (HCF VI, 2010, 162).

The synergy was also emphasised in the cases from Finnish Lapland by Norokorpi (HCF VI, 2010: 158–159, the Russian North by A. Davydov (HCF VI, 2010: 155) and Svalbard/Spitsbergen by W. Gorter and T. Minaeva. Finally, N. Skytte presented results of a fieldtrip to Pym-Va-Shor, the SNSs and unique hot water springs in Bolshezemelskaya tundra of the Nenets Autonomous Area (HCF VI, 2010: 161–162). V. Sahi introduced folk music as a tool of expressing the spiritual values of nature (HCF VI, 2010: 160–161).

The Hyperborean dimension of the Delos Initiative

BEAR represents the northern most sacred sites in Europe: holy crosses scattered on Svalbard/Spitsbergen, Franz-Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya Archipelagos, which are now protected areas of different kinds.

In the mythology of many peoples *North*

is associated with an area filled with cold and purity, a place where 'the edge of the world' is located, or the border of *oekumene,* territory on the Earth occupied and developed by humans. North is also a 'country of spirits', the land of the dead. This mythological image of the North is emphasised by its geography. The North is truly an extraordinary land: winter night last for many months and the flashes of polar lights flare up in the sky. In the summer the sky remains light during the nights, and the sun and the moon can be seen at the same time. For centuries 'Northern dimension' has been surrounded by the odour of sanctity in the cultures of different peoples. In the Greek tradition, the legendary Leto (Lada), mother of Apollo and Artemis, who gave birth to them on the island of Delos, came from the North. The Hyperboreans loved by Apollo and many times visited by him, lived in an ideal country located 'behind Boreas'. (HCF VI, 2010: 155).

The concept of *sacred* is enriched by the extreme geography and climate in BEAR. The sailing in the Arctic Ocean is more dangerous compared to warm waters. The image of St. Nicholas, as a patron of sailors' revival on the coasts of the White and Barents Seas became popular. Crosses and chapels on islands and coasts are reflected in the Pomor sayings: 'There are 33 (St.) Nicholases from Kholmogory to the Kola Bay' (sailing route by White and Barents Seas), or 'That man who has not visited a Sea has not really prayed to God'.

To be a hermit in the taiga is incredibly hard, especially in winter time. The

Rock carvings (rock paintings) in Alta (Finnmark, Norway).

feeling of fate is believed to become sharper in the extreme conditions, which makes the attitude to the sacred places also keener.

All these factors bring people closer to each other, promoting mutual understanding among the people of BEAR.

The North of Russia traditionally was a country for monks, hermits, and saints; the land associated with purity and holiness for centuries. The spiritual importance of the North for all Russia was proclaimed by scholars and philosophers, such as Georgy Fedotov: 'Not only for us, but let the Russian North become a Country of Sacred Miracles, a Holy Land, in common with Ancient Hellas or Medieval Italy, calling pilgrims from all sides of the Earth' (Fedotov, 2005:142).

However, the fragile nature of BEAR in under an increasing pressures of military and industrial activities. Gas and oil deposits, gold and diamonds are of a growing economic interest in BEAR.

Sacred natural sites and World Heritage Sites in the North

Some SNSs have been designated World Heritage Sites (WHS) and included into the Field Guide to protected areas in BEAR (Günther, 2004).

Christian churches protected as World Heritage Sites

The Cultural and Historic Ensemble of the Solovetsky Islands in Archangel Region consists of more than a hundred islands (312.8 sq km). The area is protected by Solovetsky State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve since 1967. The monastery architecture complex of Transfiguration Cathedral (built in 1558–1566), the Church of Assumption (1552) and other buildings surrounded by the wall were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1992. In addition, there are the holy mountain Golgofa (Calvary) and the holy lake Svyatoe ozero. In spite of the ethnic and cultural changes, the geography of SNSs hardly changed. Sacred stones -*seidas*- and labyrinths are found on Zayatsky Island side by side with Christian Orthodox crosses and hermitages. Since the revival of 1990, Solovetsky Islands are as significant for the Orthodox Russia as the Holy Mount Athos (Davydov et al, 2009).

Kizhi Pogost (Kizhi enclosure) is a part of the State Historic-Architectural Museum Kizhy in Republic of Karelia. There is an ensemble of the wooden Church of Transfiguration (1714?), Church of Intercession (1708) and bell-tower (1862) on Kizhi Island. The island was considered sacred in the local folklore tradition. The museum has about 20 branches and there are chapels on the small islands and on the shores around Lake Onega. Some of these islands are also considered sacred in local folklore.

The Church Village Gammelstad in Norrbotten, Sweden is a unique example of a medieval church village in North Scandinavia, established in 1621. There are 424 small wooden houses around the stone church, creating a SNS complex. The houses belonged to families from remote countryside places, which stayed at Gammelstad for some days participating weddings and church ceremonies. The Gammelstadsviken Nature Reserve (435 hectares) was established in 1973, including Lake Gammelstadsviken and its surrounding.

Archaeological World Heritage Sites

Alta Rock Drawings in Finnmark, Norway, include a group of petroglyphs on the rocky coast of the Alta Fjord.

Sacred natural sites within the World Heritage Sites

Virgin Komi Forests (about 30 000 sq km) is the common name of the WHS of Pechoro-Ilychsky Natural Biosphere Reserve (11 346 sq km) and Yugyd Va National Park (18 197 sq km) in the Komi Republic, Russia. It is the largest mainland protected area in Russia. The eastern border of the Park goes along the ridge of the Ural Mountains. The pro-

tected area was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995. There are numerous well-known SNSs in the WHS: the Old Master, Stone Woman, Tel'pos-Iz Mountain, Arch grotto, Erkusey Mountain, Saran-Ded of Nenets people, and Man' Pupy Ner of Mansi people.

The Laponia World Heritage Site in Norrbotten, Sweden, includes Stora Sjöfallet (1278 sq km), Padjelanta (1984 sq km), Sarek (1970 sq km) and Muddus National Parks (493 sq km) and several nature reserves, valleys and lakes. According to F. Forsmark (County Administration of Norrbotten, pers. comm.) the Sámi people have several SNSs on the mountains, such as in Kvikkjokk and in Sarek, as well as in the forest landscape, for example, in Gällivare close by (Akkavaara/Saivo).

Nationally protected areas with sacred natural sites

The protected areas in the Spitsbergen Archipelago, Norway, include the northernmost Christian Crosses of Promise to God in the world, which were erected there by the Russian Pomores**.**

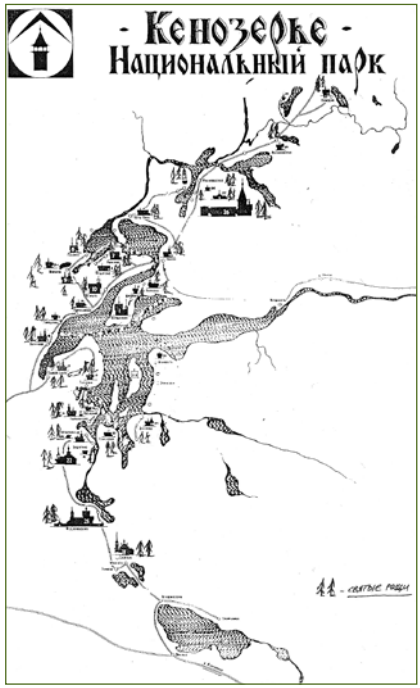
A protected area called Franz Josef Land Federal Zakaznik was established in the Archangel Region in 1994, with a total of 62 600 sq km of land and water area. The Christian Crosses of Promise to God were built there by the Russian Pomores

Russkaya Arktika (Russian Arctic) National Park, Archangel Region, was established in 2009, including a part of the Northern Island of Novaya Zemlya Archipelago (6320 sq km) and water area (7939 sq km); in total, it covers 14 260 sq km. There are Pomor Holy Crosses of Promise to God.

Vodlozersky National Park (about 5000 sq km, Republic of Karelia and Archangel Region) is the biggest wetland protected area in BEAR, including several SNSs such as the Petunij/Lyulyuostrov Island (connected in local folklore with *vodyanoy,* a spirit of water), the Dechy Island (according to local folklore, a place of sacrifice) and the Maly Kolgostrov Island with Il'insky Pogost - St Elias main church.

Vaigachsky Nature Reserve (3330 sq km) lies in the Nenets Autonomous Area, Russia. The Vaigach Island has been a sacred place for all of the Nenets people from Yamal to Kanin peninsula for hundreds of years. Among Nenet shamans there was a custom to visit Vaigach and to build there a sacred place of their own. The name of this island in Nenets language is *Heibedya Ya* (Holy Land). The most SNSs were: Cape Vesako (Old Man, Grandfather), Cape Hadako, (Grandmother), the stony cliff Nyuheh (Son) and the island of Zinkovy with Semikiky (Seven-Faces Spirit) wooden figure.

Inarijärvi Natura 2000 Area (900 sq km) covers the biggest part of Lake Inari in Finland (1043 sq km). There are several islands which are the old cemeteries. The famous Ukonsaari is a sacred rocky island differing from of the other islands. 'The God of Thunder *Ukko* (*Äijih*) was the most powerful of all the male



A scheme of the location of sacred groves in Kenozersky National Park (Archangel Region, Russia).

Sÿmi deities and his most important sacrificial site was Ukonsaari (Äijih)' in Inarijärvi (see Norokorpi and Ojanlatva, 2007).

Pyhä-Luosto National Park, Finland, includes the Pyhätunturi area which means a sacred fell. Pyhänkasteenlampi Pond is located in its centre between steep cliff walls. A stream flowing down into the lake forms a high shower-like waterfall, the Pyhäkaste. The names tell of the beginnings of Christianity and the old beliefs of the Forest Sámi (Pyhänkasteenlampi – Holy Baptism pond, Uhriharju – Sacrifice Ridge, and Noitatunturi – Witch Fell). Deer and their antlers were sacrificed on Uhriharju Ridge in hope of a successful hunt. (Y. Norokorpi, pers. comm.).

Kenozersky National Park in Archangel Region has 45 *svyatye roschi* (sacred groves) on its territory, most of them very discernible in the landscape. Some of these sacred groves look like a forest (Vershinino), whilst in other cases there are only a few trees surviving (Glazovo). The wooden crosses and Orthodox Christian chapels have remained in the sacred groves, but the old rites and folklore traditions show existence of the pre-Chirstian Fenno-Ugric spiritual substrate and a parallel with sacred groves of the Khanty and Mansi people in Siberia (Davydov, 2009).

In Muddus National Park in Norrbotten, Sweden, there is Måskosårså, the sacred natural site of the Sámi people.

In Bonden and Snöan Islands Nature Reserve in Västerbotten, Sweden, in the Gulf of Bothnia of the Baltic Sea, there are eight stone labyrinths. There are labyrinths also on Linskär and Stenskär Nature Reserves (Norrbotten, Sweden).

Pasvik Nature Reserve in the Murmansk Region includes the sacred Kalkupya/ Kalkuaivve Sámi mountain.

In Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park in Nordland, Norway there are several sacrificial sites of the Sámi people.

In Hossa Hiking Area in Kainuu, the Värikallio rock paintings are amongst the largest prehistoric rock paintings in

Finland. The pictures on the rock wall rising from Lake Somerjärvi were painted about 3500 – 4500 years ago, and are located along a water route that was used in ancient times, and include numerous separate figures depicting scenes of hunting and shamanic rituals. The pictures in the rock paintings are usually linked to hunting magic. Painted rock walls could also have functioned as cult places of shamanic worship (Y. Norokorpi, pers. comm.).

Sacred natural sites under the protection of monastic communities

Valaam Island in Ladoga Lake, Republic of Karelia, is surrounded by several small islands with skets. Since the twelfth century it became a hermitage and then, in 1160, a monastery. Now the entire archipelago is managed by the renewed Valaamsky Monastery. The first monk of Valaam Island was Greek monk Sergius, who came there as a hermit and also to proclaim the Gospel to the pagans. Now the Valaam Archipelago is managed by the revival monastic community of the Valaamsky Monastery.

Sacred natural sites protected by religious or folklore tradition

Sacred islands: Spildra is a famous burial site of *noitta/noaidi* (Sámi shamans) in Finnmark, Norway. Monasteries built on islands are typical of the Orthodox tradition of the Russian North. Old Sámi shaman places were used as places for monastery buildings (e.g. Kozhozersky Monastery on Lake Kozhozero). River and lake islands were favourite places for solitude of Orthodox monks who started monasteries on islands, such as Nelezin (River Volkhov), Kamenny (Lake Kubenskoye), Valaam and Kon'-Ostrov Island (Lake Ladoga), Roschinsky (River Svir), Moug (Lake Mougozero) and Kiy-Ostrov Island (the Onega Bay in the White Sea). As an example, on the islands of Lake Onega, there are more than twenty Orthodox chapels.

Sacred capes: *Svyatoy Nos* (Sacred Cape), is located on the Kola Peninsula in Russia. There are dangerous maelstroms and in order to avoid shipwreck, sailors would made sacrifices (e.g. food, flour, butter) near Svatoy Nos and pray to God to pass the place.

Sacred mountains: At Tjamstanberget in Västerbotten, Sweden, there are many Sámi legends connected to sacred mountains, e.g. *ättestupa*, a steep rock face where old and infirm people were thrown or threw themselves down (Karlsson, 1999: 172–173). According to a medieval legend, on the Witches Mountain on Vardø Island, in Finnmark, witches were burned. Minisey, the leader reindeer, (Russian name Konstantinov Kamen') is a sacred mountain of Nenets people on the North Ural Mountains. According to the legend, the Daughter of *Num (Num* is a supreme spirit of the Nenets), was attacked by *Na* (evil spirit) and all reindeers of her *argish* (relay, team) were turned into stones, which became the Ural Mountains.

Sacred stones: In the Republic of Karelia, special attention is paid to footmark-stones, e.g. those near villages, such as Kokorino, Vojnitsa, Rinnoyarvi, Hvoyny, Volkostrov, Vidany, Mashezero, Tarzhepol', Ladva, Kurkieki, Pogrankondushi, Kinelahta, Viglitsa, and Andrusovo. There are stones and mountains which have lacunas in the forms of feet, hands, arrows, rings, footmarks of reindeers, bears, etc. These stones were used as places of sacrifice, which were made famous by legends and local folklore.

Sacred springs: Pym-Va-Shor is a SNS with hot springs in the tundra of the Nenets Autonomous Area in the Republic of Karelia, there are famous sacred springs like Tri Ivana (Three men with the name Ivan), Kamenny Bor (Stone Pine Forest). Some sacred springs in the Archangel Region have chalybeate water (Matyora on Lake Kenozero, Gavrilovo on River Vya), but some of them do not (Lyavlya on River Severnaya Dvina).

Sacred groves and trees: the Koz'min Perelesok sacred grove of the Nenets people is situated on the Kanin Peninsula, Russia. Sacred pines are found near the Myagozero Village, Republic of Karelia.

Pilgrimage paths and routes: In North-West Russia there was a pilgrim path on the Onega Peninsula from Archangel to the Letnyaya Zolotitsa Village and then by sea to the Solovetsky Islands. However, the most popular was the sailing pilgrimage from Archangel to Solovetsky Monastery by the White Sea. A pilgrim path around Lake Kenozero started and finished by the walls of the Pahomiev Kensky Monastery. There was also a non-Christian traditional pilgrimage of the Nenets people on the tundra and then, using traditional sledges drawn by swimming reindeers, over the ice or on the water of the Yugorsky Shar Gulf, to Heibidya Ya (Vaigach Island).

Seidas of Sámi: include different geographic/natural objects. In Finland, e.g. Taatsi in Kittilä, Näkkälä in Enontekiö, Sieiddakäedgi in Utsjoki, Koskikaitiojoen suu in Inari, and Kirkkopahta and Porviniemi in Muonio (see Äikäs, *in this book*).

Place names. North-West Russia: numerous place names include terms like *svyatoy* (holy), *besov* (devil's), *bolvansky* (idol's), e.g. Svyatoe ozero (Holy Lake), Svyatoy Nos (Holy Cape), Besov Nos (Devil's Cape), Bolvansky Mys (Idol's Cape), Bolvanskaya Gora (Idol's mountain), etc. Place names with the Karelian prefix *pig-* in the Republic of Karelia (look *pyhä* in Finland). In the Nenets language there is the prefix *he-* (sacred), like Hebidya Ya, *hekur* (sacred small stone 'pyramid'), Yaumal He, etc. Northern Finland: see Väisänen (*in this book*) and Norokorpi and Ojanlatva (2007). Northern Norway: *Mortensnes* (Cape of Dead), the prefix *troll*, a mythology giant and spirit of mountains, e.g. Trollfjord. Northern Sweden: *Trollsjön.* For all of the territory of Sámi Land there are *seid* (*seida*, *seidi*).

Concluding remarks

Sometimes common mythology and cultural heritage can be used as an argument in developing the transboundary cooperation. For instance, the Finnish/Karelian epic *Kalevala* gave name to a large protection area complex, the Kalevala Parks, situated in Finland and Russia, including places where this epic poem was collected from the local people in the nineteenth century by Elias Lönnrot. The territory contains SNSs on capes and islands, where posts with bear skulls used to stand even at the beginning of the twentieth century (Metsähallitus, 2005: 336).

Both Pasvik-Inari and Interpark Kalevala will be included in the international project on the Green Belt of Fennoscandia, a new form of networking of forests, mires and fell areas spanning the borders of Northern Norway, Eastern Finland and North-Western Russia (HCF VI, 2010: 91,176; Günther, 2004: 50).

The Resolution of the sixth HCF stated that 'the need to take the cultural and spiritual values into consideration when establishing protected areas, and to encourage the use of folk art expressing the intangible values of nature and society. The HCF VI welcomed the application of the IUCN/UNESCO Guidelines on Sacred Natural Sites and the Delos Initiative, and expressed the support for the next workshop to be convened in Inari, Finland'.

However, despite all that has been explained on SNSs, research and inventory of SNSs in BEAR are still largely neglected, and the implementation of the Delos Initiative in the North of Europe is vital. This gap is reflected in the publications about protected areas in the BEAR which have not devoted special attention to SNSs, or to the spiritual heritage in general.

The North can be seen as a kind of refrigerator of cultural values, which let us start a international project which could be the identity of the BEAR in synergy of natural and spiritual values - a Hyperborean projection of the Delos Initiative.

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