Smart Regions Group
9 Meeting
Minutes

DIGITAL MEETING

15 MAY 2020
1. Participants

Cllr Beate Marie Johnsen, Chair Smart Regions Group (Agder CC, Norway)
Cllr Birgitta Adolfsson, Vice-Chair Smart Regions Group (Västra Götaland Region, Sweden)
Cllr Kerstin Brunström, President, North Sea Commission
Cllr Iris Walker (Aberdeenshire Council, Scotland) (1st part only)
Cllr Marte Eide Klovning (Rogaland County Council, Norway) (2nd part only)
Cllr Faruk Brahimi (Rogaland County Council, Norway)
Cllr Helge Stormoen (Vestland County Council, Norway)
Cllr Pål Sæther Eiden (Trøndelag County Council, Norway)
Mr Geir Sør-Reime, Advisor, Smart Regions Group (Rogaland County Council, Norway)
Mr Magnus Engelbrektsson, Executive Secretary, North Sea Commission
Ms Clara Zakariasson, Assistant Executive Secretary, North Sea Commission
Mr Davide Strangis, CPMR Executive Director EU Programmes, Partnerships and Geographical Commissions
Ms Claire Street, CPMR Project and Policy Officer
Ms Dawn Marie Syvertsen (Vestfold og Telemark County Council, Norway)
Mr Alistair Reid (Aberdeenshire Council, Scotland)
Mr Iver Jan Leren (Rogaland County Council, Norway)
Ms Siv Hemsett (Agder County Council, Norway)
Mr Jon Halvard Eide (Agder County Council, Norway)
Mr Stein Ivar Mona (Trøndelag County Council, Norway)
Mr Lars Holmer-Hoven (Agder County Council, Norway) (2nd part only)
Mr Olle Jonäng (Västra Götaland Region, Sweden)
Ms Åse Lil Nordhus Barstad (Vestfold og Telemark County Council, Norway) (1st part only)
Mr Steinar Aspli (Trøndelag County Council, Norway) (2nd part only)
Mr Tore Engelsen (Agder County Council, Norway) (2nd part only)
Ms Joanna Magdalena Derdowska (Agder County Council, Norway) (2nd part only)
In addition, the following presenters were also present:
Mr Chris Foy, CEO VisitAberdeenshire
Ms Christina Nunez, Secretary-General NECSTouR
Mr Fredrik Linden, CEO West Sweden Tourist Board
Ms Marie Linde, Deputy CEO West Sweden Tourism Board

2. Welcome

Beate Marie Johnsen, Chair of the group welcomed all participants to this first-ever digital meeting of the group, opened the meeting, and asked all participants to make a short presentation of themselves.
The meeting was divided into two sessions, one between 10.00 and 12.00, and one between 13.00 and 15.00. The first session focused on tourism, whereas the second was divided into two parts: one hour migration issues and one hour North Sea Region 2030 Strategy and related issues.

3. Tourism in the time of Covid-19 and thereafter

This session was opened with a case study from Aberdeen, presented by Mr Chris Foy, CEO of VisitAberdeenshire.
They have been working on a recovery plan for the tourism industry after the lockdown. They are looking into the three Ms: Money, Motivation and Means. These factors will be influenced by Supply – who and when will be permitted to open, are still trading, Community – social distancing,
acceptance of visitors, and Priorities – cash into businesses, campaigning, business as usual, business recovery plan.
VisitAberdeenshire is working with marketing and communication, B2B sales and marketing and tourism development.
In Phase 1 of the plan is ‘leaving a light on’, developing digital and virtual experiences to inspire a future visit
Phase 2 concern easing of lock-down measures, focus on local people, get people out, discover your ‘backyard’, avoid bottlenecks, spread
Phase 3 is staycation activity, travel Scotland and North England
And in phase 4, there is a more fluid travel situation, and England and Norway are targeted.

Currently, Aberdeenshire now sees mostly regional visitors as there are quarantine challenges for foreign visitors. The UK government supports businesses, but this is not sufficient for the tourism businesses, especially those with seasonal offers only, although the support includes cash support for companies and 80% wages for staff not working.

After this presentation, Ms Christina Nunez, Secretary-General of NECSTourR (Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism) talked about the recovery plan for European tourism.
First, she told about the new co-operation agreement between CPMR and NECSTouR, which covers important areas like knowledge exchange and lobbying for sustainable tourism.

NECSTouR has had a dialogue with the EU Commission concerning the new recovery pack for European tourism, and the Commission has listened to what the NECSTouR has promoted. The pack looks at travel quarantines, technical assistance and marketing and communication. The EU is supporting leisure travel, but for many destinations, business travel is as or even more important. Many destinations now prepare for a shift from business to leisure travels. The quarantine regulations will limit leisure travels for the time being. Therefore, destinations will have to focus on domestic tourists, but some areas are completely dependent on foreign tourists, like the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands.
NECSTourR hope that destinations will use the current crisis to accelerate sustainability, digitalization, innovation, upskilling etc., in time for ‘normal’ business in 2022. We need a smart recovery of tourism!

The last presentation was also a case study by Fredrik Linden and Marie Linde, CEO and Deputy CEO of West Sweden Tourist Board.
This organization is owned by the Västra Götaland Region and is responsible for development and marketing of tourism.
With the lock-down, the West Sweden Tourist Board has taken several measures:

1. – stopped marketing
   - Cancelled seminars, replaced by webinars
   - Has mapped the situation for 200 businesses
   - Are working on plans for the future
2. – established a helpdesk
   - Has assisted cash refunds
   - Has analyzed bookings for the summer 2020 (currently 15-20%, normal rate would have been 50% at this time of the year)
   - Has introduced a training program for business
Normally, the region has around 30% international tourists, 20% domestic and 50% local domestic travelers. It is hoped that the last 50% remains or even grows.
The board has also started an online training program, where the participants’ employers are refunded 70% of staff costs. The program runs for 8 weeks full time and has 200 paid participants and 100 non-paid. It has 8 components, including sustainability, hospitality, events, social media, personal development.

They also gave an overview of Swedish government support for the tourism industry; the question remains whether these measures are sufficient to get the industry through this crisis.

In conclusion, it was decided that the Smart Regions Group should follow this theme up during next year.

3. Migration

Davide Strangis and Claire Street from the CPMR secretariat updated members on CPMR’s actions and initiatives relating to asylum, refugees, and integration since CPMR started working with these issues in 2015.

There are both internal (EU) and external dimensions to this.

Internally, regions have faced the humanitarian emergencies related to irregular migration, and not the least, the integration/inclusion of migrants.

Externally, there is a need for better coordination and support for the intercultural dialogue.

CPMR has established a Migration Task Force to work with these issues.

CPMR has issued two issue papers:
- Migration and Asylum in the EU
- Working together – the regional strategy

CPMR has also produced a map showing migration/integration policies and responsibilities in the various European countries. Currently, the map covers few North Sea regions (only two Norwegian counties). All NSC member regions are encouraged to contribute, and the advisor will distribute a template all member regions are asked to fill in.

The CPMR action plan includes giving reactions to the proposed new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, lobbying the development of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to include funds for receipt and integration of migrants, notably the new AMF (Asylum and Migration Fund), the NDICI (Neighborhood, Development and International Co-operation Instrument), the ESF+ (the European Social Fund) and the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund).

CPMR will also contribute to the public consultation on the EU Action Plan for Integration and promote regional actions for migrants and refugees, also through the partnership with the Committee of the Regions initiative ‘Cities and Regions for Integration’.

The new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is expected to:
- Provide better coordination of the internal and external dimension of migration
- Reform the Common Asylum System (CEAS)
- Co-operate with countries of origin and transit on re-admission and return
- Tackle root causes of migration
- Introduction of legal resettlement and circular migration schemes
- Better search and rescue services
- Establishment of humanitarian corridors and fight against smugglers
- Better border controls to maintain the open Schengen area

CPMR will also lobby for a greater and formal role of regions
- As this is a multi-level and crosscutting issue
- Regions should be included in the CEAS system
- The ‘frontline’ regions face specific problems that needs to be addressed
- There should be more resources available to regions
- Regions have a long-term integration role
The financing, the AMF will finance receipt and initial integration, different aspects of long-term integration can be funded by ESF+, Erasmus+, ERDF and EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development), and the external dimensions by NDICI.

CPMR is also leading the REGIN (Regions for Migrants and Refugees Integration) project financed by the AMIF program for two years starting February 2020. No North Sea region is partner in this project. The project also links to the MIPEX-R, the European Migrant Integration Policy Index. Non-REGIN partner regions are also encouraged to contribute to the MIPEX-R.

Magnus Engelbrektsson informed about the revised strategy document due to be debated at the upcoming ExCom meeting in June. The revised document includes input from the consultation with member regions.
Geir Sør-Reime gave a brief presentation of the associated Action Plan 2020-22, and there came up some suggestions for improvement.

5. Youth Involvement in the North Sea Commission
In the absence of the NSC Youth Advisor, Ms Esme Leitch, Magnus Engelbrektsson gave an update on the work to incorporate youth participation and involvement in the work of the North Sea Commission.

6. Other organizational issues
The planned Youth Conference, Annual Business Meeting and North Sea Conference in Rotterdam in June has been cancelled. At least the ABM will be held late in the autumn, place and date will be announced before the summer holidays.

There are no registered applicants for the vacant position as Vice-Chair of the Smart Regions Group.

There is one applicant for the position as new Advisor of the Smart Regions Group. The new advisor will be appointed by the ExCom in June.

7. Next meeting
It was decided to have a new meeting on 26 June. Details will be announced after a meeting of the Chairs’ group on 25 May.