

Towards Borderless Maritime Tourism Co-operation in Bothnian Bay

Results of the project and start for the discussion of future work

5.6.2023



**POHJOIS-
POHJANMAA**
COUNCIL OF OULU REGION



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A

GOALS AND PHASES OF THE WORK

About the project

Maritime Tourism Co-operation in Bothnian Bay -partnership theme was launched in spring 2022. **Launching and strengthening the collaboration between various actors in tourism** and identifying a desirable joint development path has been in the heart of the project.

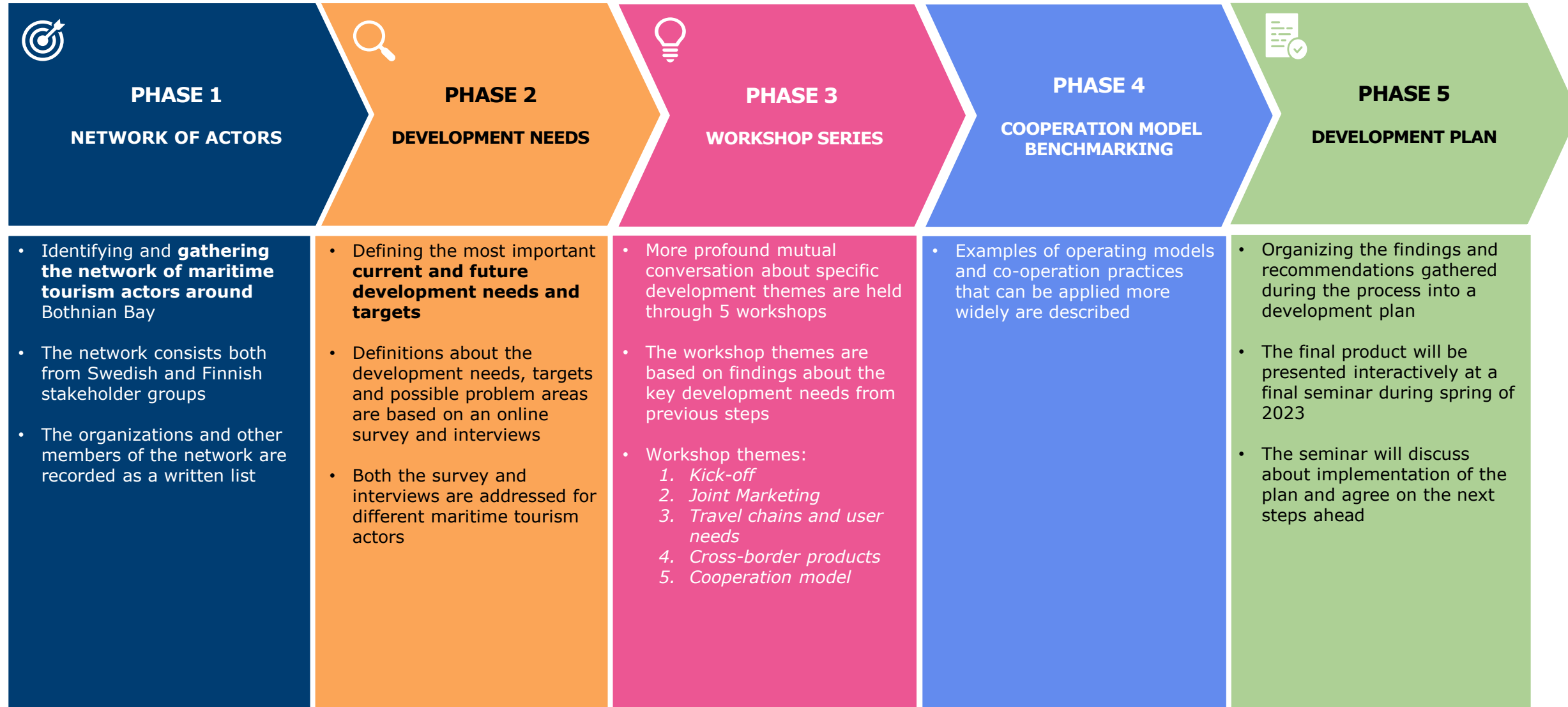
The work has included:

- Identifying area's **network** of tourism actors
- **Online survey** about cross-border cooperation
- **Interviews** for key actors
- **2 site visits**
- **5 workshops** in following topics:
 - *Kick off*
 - *Joint marketing*
 - *Travel chains and user needs*
 - *Cross-border products*
 - *Co-operation model*

The end result of the project: **cooperation model & action points** for the joint development of cross-border tourism in Bothnian Bay.



Work phases



DIALOGUE DURING THE PHASES

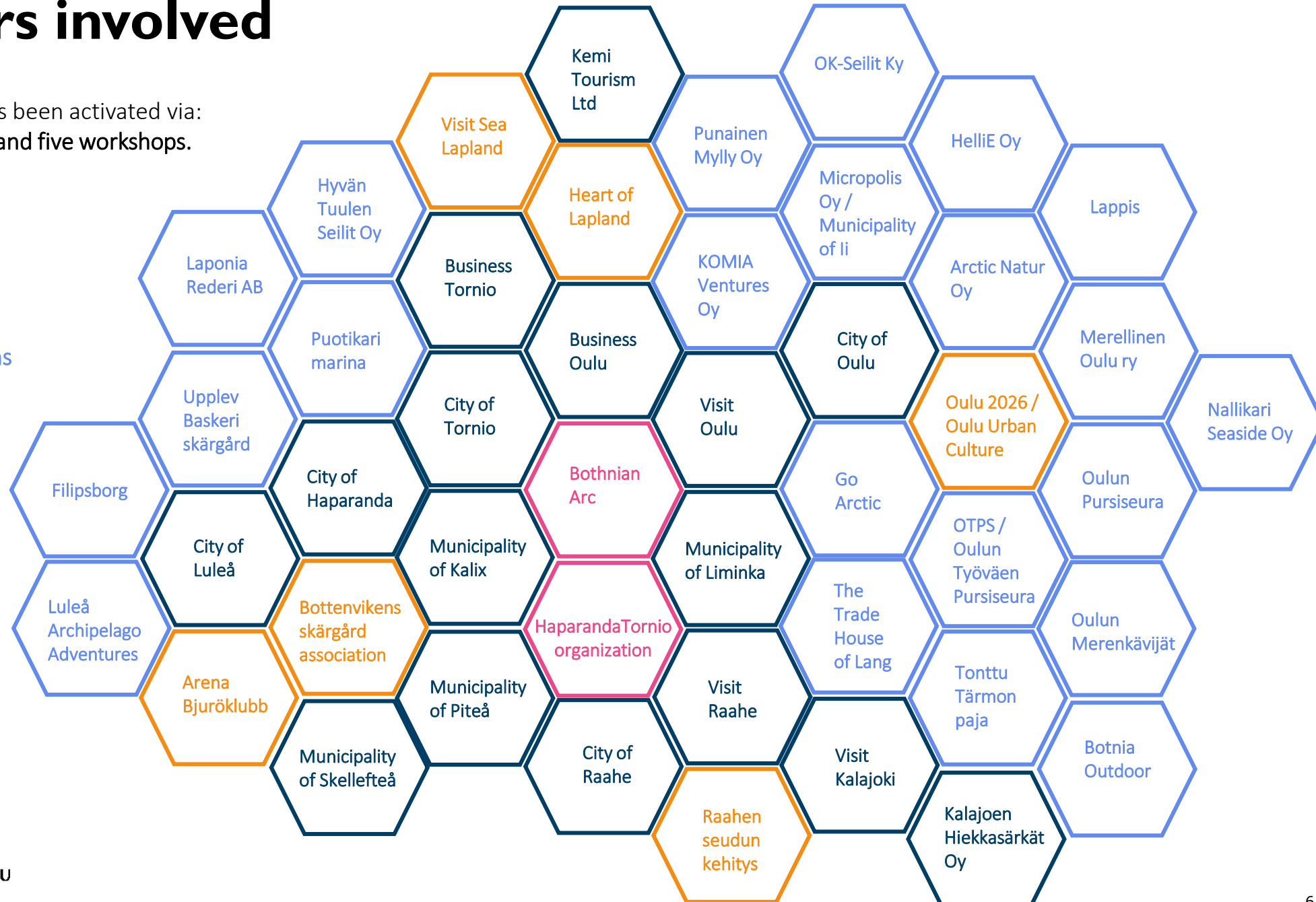
- | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 st work group meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online survey Interviews 2nd work group meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 workshops Site visits (2) 3rd & 4th work group meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings about different cooperation models has been learnt during the workshop speeches Work group meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final work group meetings Final seminar |
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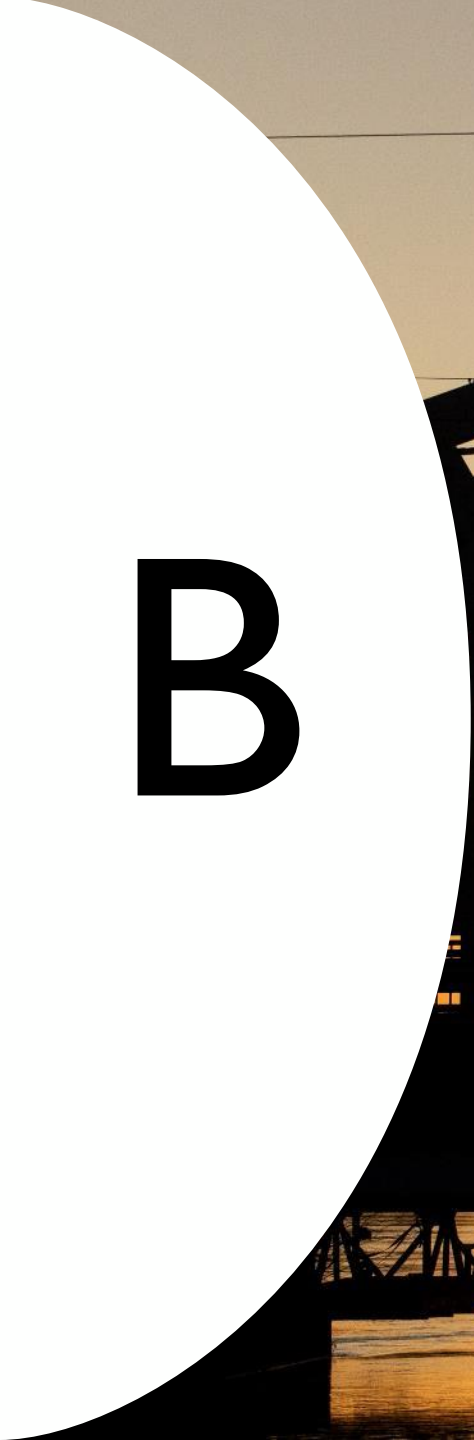
Stakeholders involved

Dialogue during the project has been activated via: stakeholder survey, interviews and five workshops.

The stakeholders involved are:

- Cross-border organizations
- Regional organizations
- Local organizations
- Companies and associations





B

DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Findings from stakeholder survey, interviews & workshops

Current state of cross-border tourism cooperation

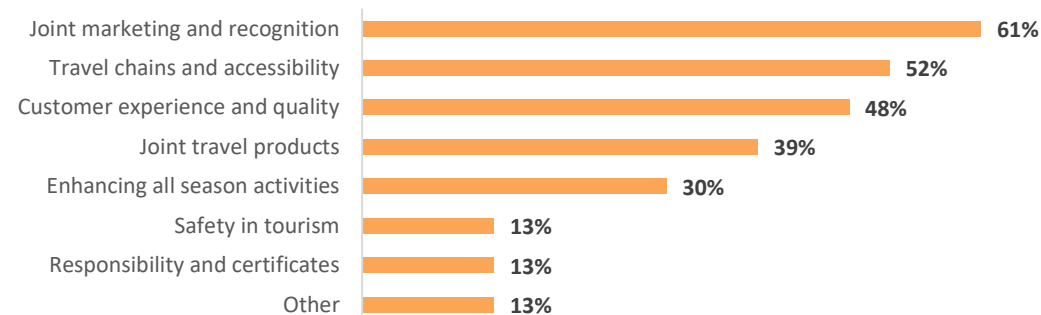
An online survey (in summer 2022*) for different stakeholders in tourism of Bothnian Bay was conducted during the project.

Key findings about the current state of cooperation:

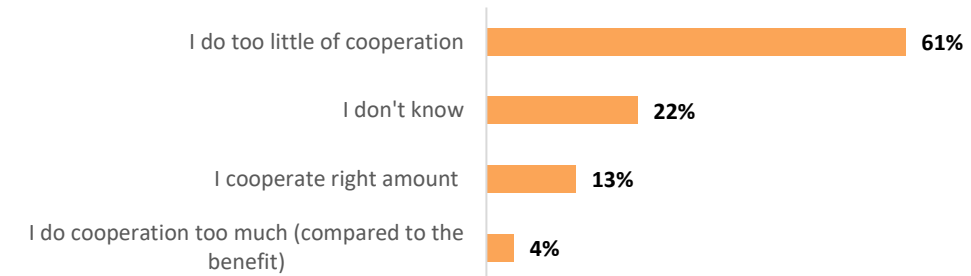
- **61 % of respondents** see the need for more cooperation
- Big portion of respondents participated somehow in cross-border cooperation, majority of which participate in workshops
- Joint marketing activities have already been carried out, but **not so much direct selling**

As a summary of the answers, a relatively large amount of joint marketing has been carried out, but the sale of joint tourism services alias more concrete actions, has been carried out clearly less. **However, cooperation is seen to be important.**

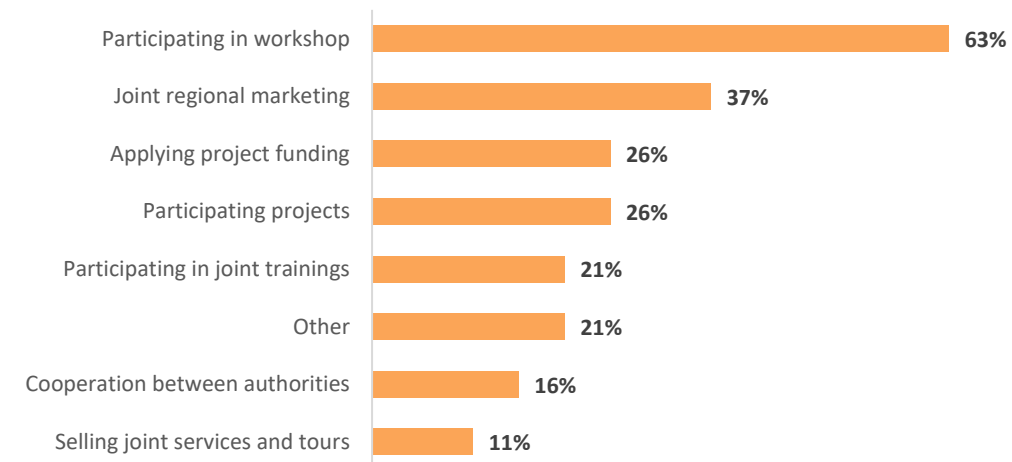
Most important topics to develop together in cross-border cooperation



Current state of cross-border cooperation in tourism from your point of view. (n=23)



In which ways you have been doing cross-border cooperation? (n=19)



* In total 23 persons answered the survey. 57 % of respondents were from Finland , 48 % from Sweden. However it was possible to choose 2 regions to represent itself. The whole survey summary is to found in the appendix.

Development needs of cross-border tourism cooperation

The key development needs in Bothnian Bay tourism were clarified in the survey, workshops and one-on-one interviews.

Key themes and findings on how to develop cross-border cooperation in tourism:

NETWORKING

- need for mutual projects and events to enhance the cooperation
- the need for an areal “driver”
- decisions about the continuity of cooperation is key (across different projects)
- active participation in events despite the possible language barriers
- concrete actions: *“picking up the low-hanging fruits”*

KEY TARGET GROUPS, JOINT MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

- need for in-depth analysis of the area’s target groups
→ clarification of marketing channels etc.
- developing joint products would ease marketing
- need for developing a circular tour around Bothnian Bay
- need of gathering joint stories
- need for joint platform
- point out the unique selling points
- need for comparable data

RESOURCES

- the seasons are short nowadays and the resources at their limit
- constant lack of resources slows down/kills cooperation
- economic profitability as an incentive for entrepreneurs to cooperate
- developing infrastructure and accessibility
- joint financing (f.ex. mutual projects)

“Joint projects in the region would be a good way to initiate and promote cooperation. However, setting up projects requires finding the right partners. That’s why networking events and opportunities are of paramount importance.”

“Investing in communication.”

“Include as many entrepreneurs as possible!”

“Gathering the wooden towns string of pearls on both sides of the coasts. Already at the moment, a lot of people travel around the wooden towns on the coasts, but the route is not built, productized and marketed. Huge potential.”

“Let’s take concrete actions now, picking up those low-hanging fruits. Concreteness gets things started and credibility increases.”

“Let’s do more concrete things together and get to know the border neighbour and its actors.”

C

STEPS TOWARDS COHERENCE

Potential

The **cultural history** of the region is especially emphasized as a unifying factor and a special feature of the Bothnian Bay. **The history of seafaring and trade, fishing culture and small wooden towns and fishing villages** come up when stakeholders describe the culture and history of the region.

The Bothnian Bay **archipelago** and the surrounding **sea** make the area distinctive without forgetting its unique nature.

The **visibility of the seasons** in the area also make it unique, especially the nightless nights in summer and the snow and frozen sea in winter.

RICH HISTORY

Towns, villages
lighthouses & shipwrecks
tar

EXPERIENCEFUL

Sea, ice, northern lights &
nightless night

CULTURE

Events & lifestyle
Museums

SEA

Long beaches, archipelago
calming & peaceful

“ The coast of post-glacial rebound, history of tar export, sea that freezes in winter, sea of nightless night and light in summer, parts of the wooden towns in the coastal cities, UNESCO World Heritage sites (Struve chain, Luleå’s old town and under planning hydropower plant construction), history of spirit bootlegging. “

”The history of living from the sea, i.e. maritime history, trade, crafts, fishing. Small old wooden towns. International connections and traditions of cooperation across borders.”

” Sea, islands, cities, post-glacial rebound as phenomenon, maritime history”

”The world's northernmost brackish water archipelago, frozen sea, one sea - two countries, two languages, changing coastal area and archipelago due to post-glacial rebound.”

”Unbelievably many beautiful islands.”

”Open, bright, uncrowded and versatile nature.”

” A fine, clean and peaceful archipelago.”

”Unique nature, clear summer nights versus dark winter nights, ice in winter, archipelago, fishing culture.”

” Water element and cultural history.”

” The brightness of summer and winter enables a lot. Sun in summer, snow and ice in winter.”

Combining characteristics in Bothnian Bay



Common interests and business benefits

The benefits of deeper cooperation identified in the Bothnian Bay

Reaching new markets

the unique experience of Bothian Bay attracts new customer groups and boosts the international sales

Representation of border region interests

laws and regulations, comparable data, travel chains

All-year destination

area includes common characteristics and popular destinations to different seasons which can benefit from each other



Recognizing the added value is the activating factor

Improving the business processes

- Joint marketing to have better input-output ratio
- Shared resources as one of the answers to scarcity of resources (lack of seasonal and trained staff, sales resources, etc.)
- Learning from each other, sharing the best practises
- Improving the quality of services

Essentials

WE NEED

- Defining common target groups
- 3-5 USPs
- Common goal that everyone can commit to

PREREQUISITES

- Key factors that unite the both sides of Bothnian Bay
- Common marketing based on common knowledge of each other
- Open dialogue and shared market view

COORDINATION

- The willingness to cooperate exists
- We lack shared decisions
- Synthesis of projects

DESIRED OUTPUTS

- New international markets
- Cross-selling solutions
- Campaigns, materials, manuals, imagebank
- FAM / media trips

Unique selling points of Bothnian Bay

The unique characters or themes to use for joint cooperation



Ideas about possible target customer groups

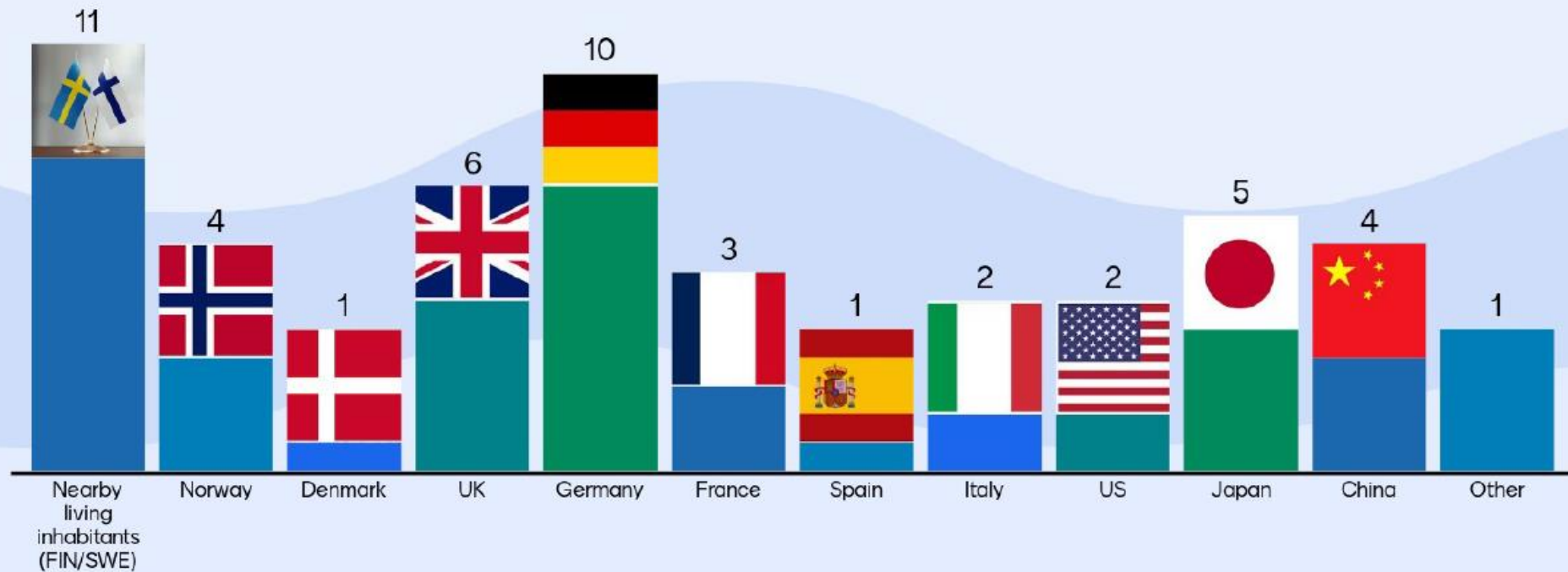
Who are the most potential target customers for Bothnian Bay, based on their travel motives? 



* A short survey about potential main customers in Bothnian Bay has been done interrelated to the workshop n°4, "Cross-border products". **In total 13 tourism stakeholders answered to the survey.**

Ideas about possible target customer groups

Which are the main geographical customer groups to be jointly focused on Bothnian Bay?



* A short survey about potential main customers in Bothnian Bay has been done interrelated to the workshop n°4, "Cross-border products". **In total 13 tourism stakeholders answered to the survey.**

D

BENCHMARKING COOPERATION MODELS

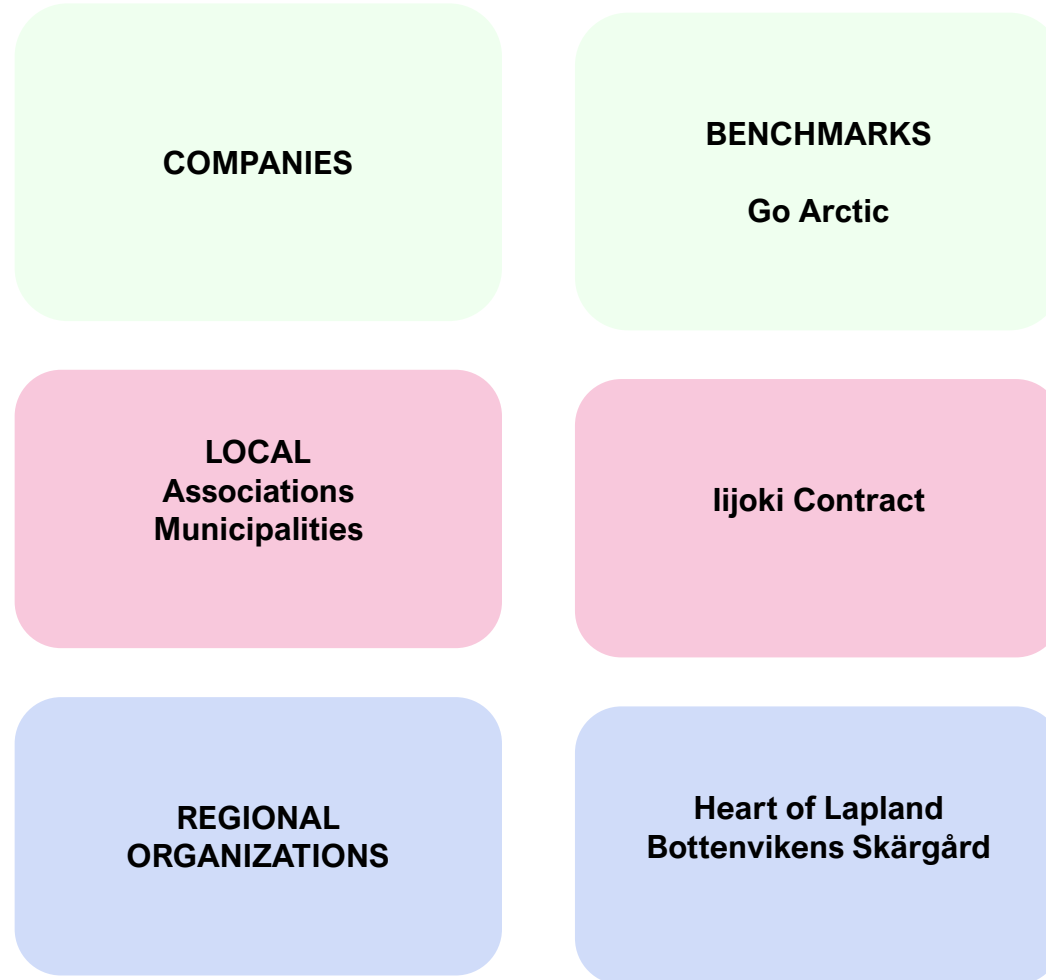
Examples from associations & businesses

Cooperation models

All actors have their important roles in creating deeper cooperation in the Bothnian Bay. To gain benefits from the cooperation, it is essential to find the good partners and the cooperation method that supports one's own goals.

The cooperation model of cross-border cooperation in Bothnian Bay is not only a one fixed form of cooperation. Instead, there are many different ways of cooperation and on different levels. Some cooperation forms might be more formal, some of them more need-based and business-oriented. There is room and need for many different form of cooperation!

As benchmarks, some inspiring examples of cooperation in practise in different parts of the Bothnian Bay is presented next. The benchmarks are divided to company level, local level including associations, municipalities and other local actors, as well as regional level including institutions, organizations or networks covering larger parts of the Bothnian Bay.



COMPANY: GO ARCTIC LTD

BUSINESS CASE: ARCTIC CRUISE PORTS

Arctic Cruise Ports is company's trademark for arctic cruise excursions and services in shores of northern Baltic Sea.

Project in 2019-2020:

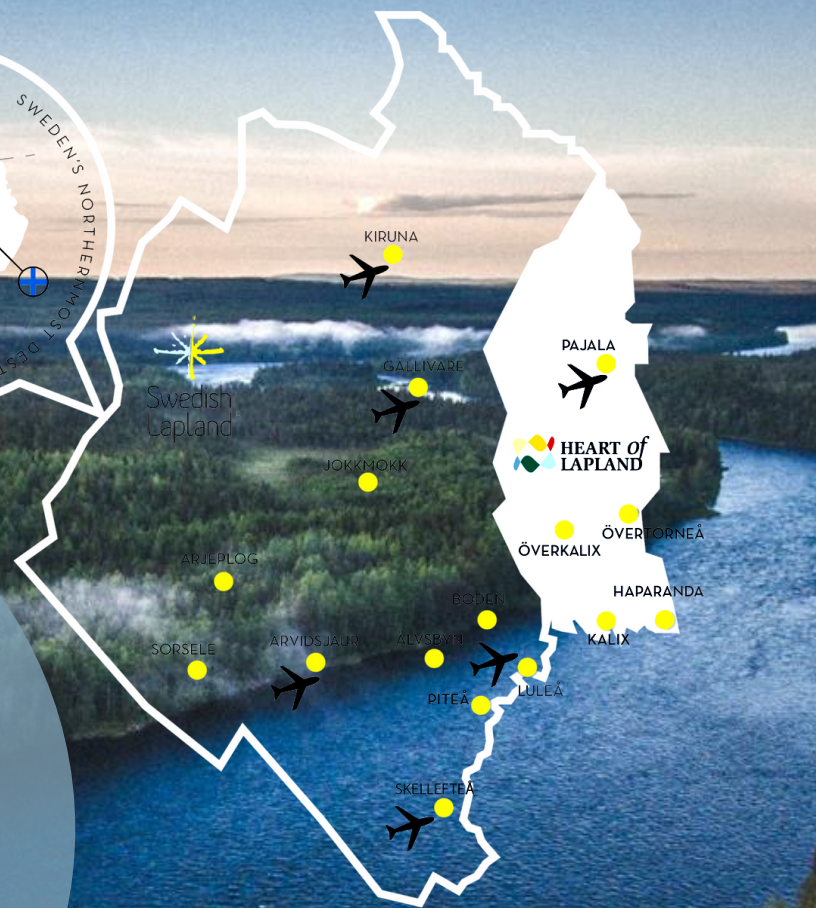
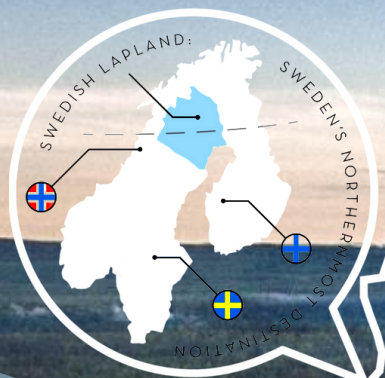
- Go Arctic Ltd is a strong northern tour operator offering travel and program services in northern Finland, based in Oulu region
- Serving cruise customers with the partners for a decade.
- Owners Kirsi Eskola and Sipe Åqvist
- Other fields of business; event management, three cafes/restaurants, hotel, activity services and PCO-services, artist booking agency (cross-boarder co-operation)

- To create the Arctic Cruise Ports brand and for ACP product development in Oulu, Raahе and Kalajoki
- Building networks; subcontractors, buyers, other ports etc.
- Building and training a guide network for cruise ship guidings
- Web page, marketing material

Future opportunities in cross-border network for cruise travel

- Bothnian Bay is still quite small cruise ship destination
- Cross-border network would give us more power when marketing the Gulf of Bothnia for the cruise industry
- Russia is off the cruise maps, opens a new momentum for Bothnian Bay
- Unique nordic ports, boutique expedition shore excursions
- Small, clean and safe – welcoming the new environmentally friendly ships
- Branding as a two country cruise port network
- Developing a joint marketing brand for 6-7 unique port destinations
- Making it easy for clients to buy, all excursions and productions from one office

Regional cooperation: Heart of Lapland



Why cross-border co-operation?

- Location
- Market demand and attraction
- Larger supply
- Take advantage of the common culture
- Shared knowledge and resources

Easternmost part of Swedish Lapland
Haparanda, Kalix, Pajala, Överkalix &
Övertorneå municipalities.

Economic association owned by its
members

Financed by the municipalities, ERDF,
Tillväxtverket, Sparbanken Nord

One of the owners of Swedish
Lapland Visitors Board.

Cross-border co-operation in practice

- Regular meetings with Visit Sea Lapland, Original Lapland, Discover Muonio, Business Tornio and more. - Identify common USP:s, sharing yearly plans, workshop participation, etc.
- Co-operation regarding transport and infrastructure - common marketing material for Haparandabanan for example.
- Joint actions regarding FAM-trips and sales workshops.
- Looking to establish long-term platform for co-operation: Torne Valley Tourism Council



LOCAL: IJOKI CONTRACT

The region of Iijoki River, which covers the municipalities of Ii, Oulu, Pudasjärvi and Taivalkoski, has an own co-operation model called Iijoki-Contract. Micropolis is the coordinator and the co-operation is funded by the municipalities and a handful of companies.

The common interest in cooperation started on restoring the river, but the co-operation has broadened to other themes, like business development and nature tourism.

The co-operation is mainly based on trust on each other. The governance is very light and the decision process is very informal. The municipalities have agreed to reserve funding in their budget also for upcoming years, which makes the long-term planning easier.

Thanks to the base-funding, there are resources to project application preparation and to the self-financing share. This makes it possible to also react quickly when suitable fundings are open. The cooperation model is very agile, which makes it interesting to benchmark for other regions as well.

Read more:
<https://micropolis.fi/en/ijoki-river-agreement/>

REGIONAL: BOTTENVIKENS SKÄRGÅRD

For those who live, visit and work at the coast and in the archipelago

The Bothnian Bay coastal inter-municipal cooperation is a collaboration that extends across both municipal and county boundaries and includes Haparanda, Kalix, Luleå, Piteå and Skellefteå municipalities. The collaboration was initiated by the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, which together with the five municipalities, Region Västerbotten and Swedish Lapland laid the foundation for a development of the area.

Based on common municipal resources and goals, BS develop the coast and archipelago in aim to create opportunities for outdoor life and unique experiences. The efforts also benefit the tourist companies active in the archipelago. Working together creates many synergy effects and coordination gains.

Since 2014, the collaboration has been organized on the basis of a collaboration agreement between the municipalities. A common strategy is the starting point for the work where the first strategy was adopted in 2008 and revised in 2014. Since 2021, the work is based on a strategy that applies until 2030.

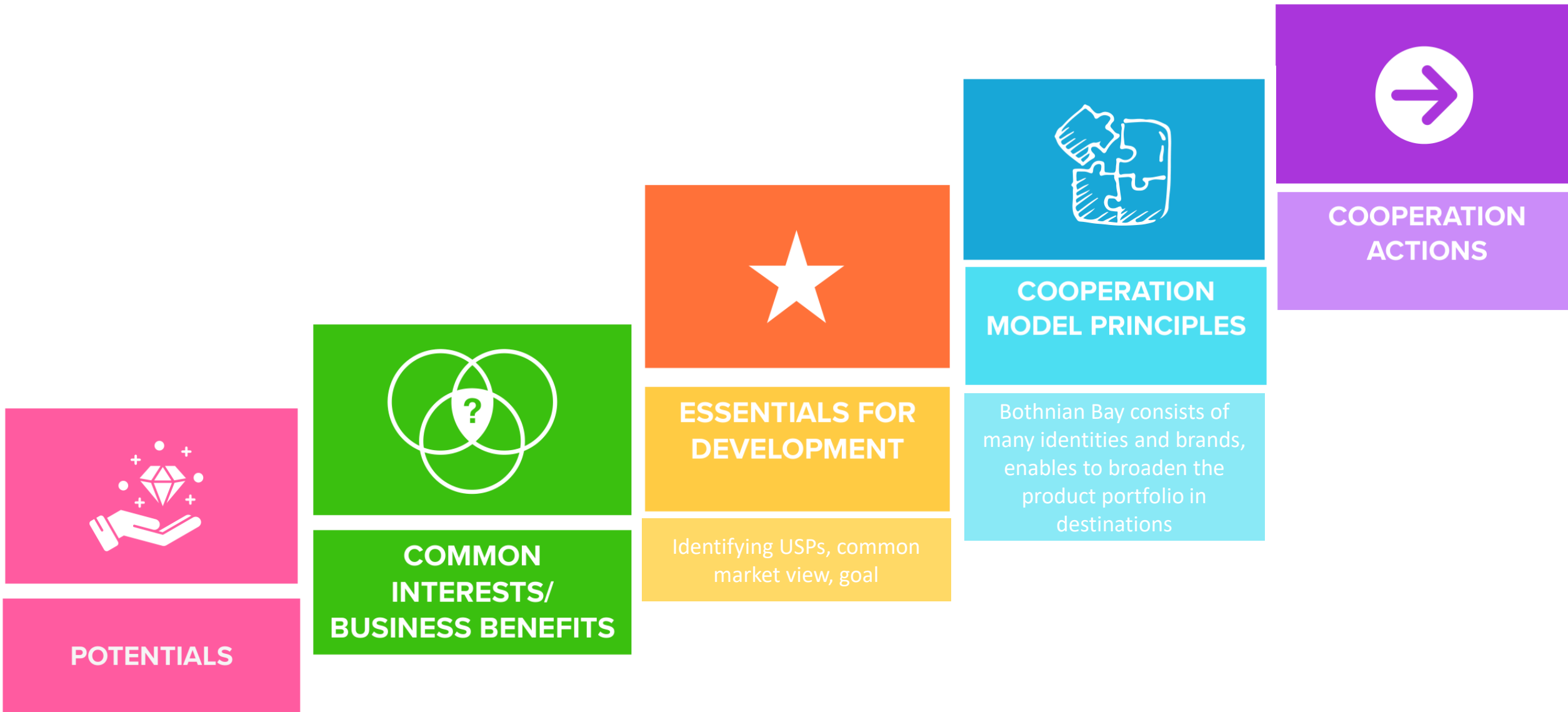


Read more:
<https://www.bottenvikensskargard.se/en/>

E

CO-OPERATION MODEL

Building blocks of Bothnian Bay cooperation model



The principles of Bothnian Bay cooperation model



Core elements

- The tourism business in the Bothnian Bay see many **potentials and benefits** to deeper the cross-border cooperation
- The cooperation will be based on **the uniqueness of the Bothnian Bay in respectful and responsible way**

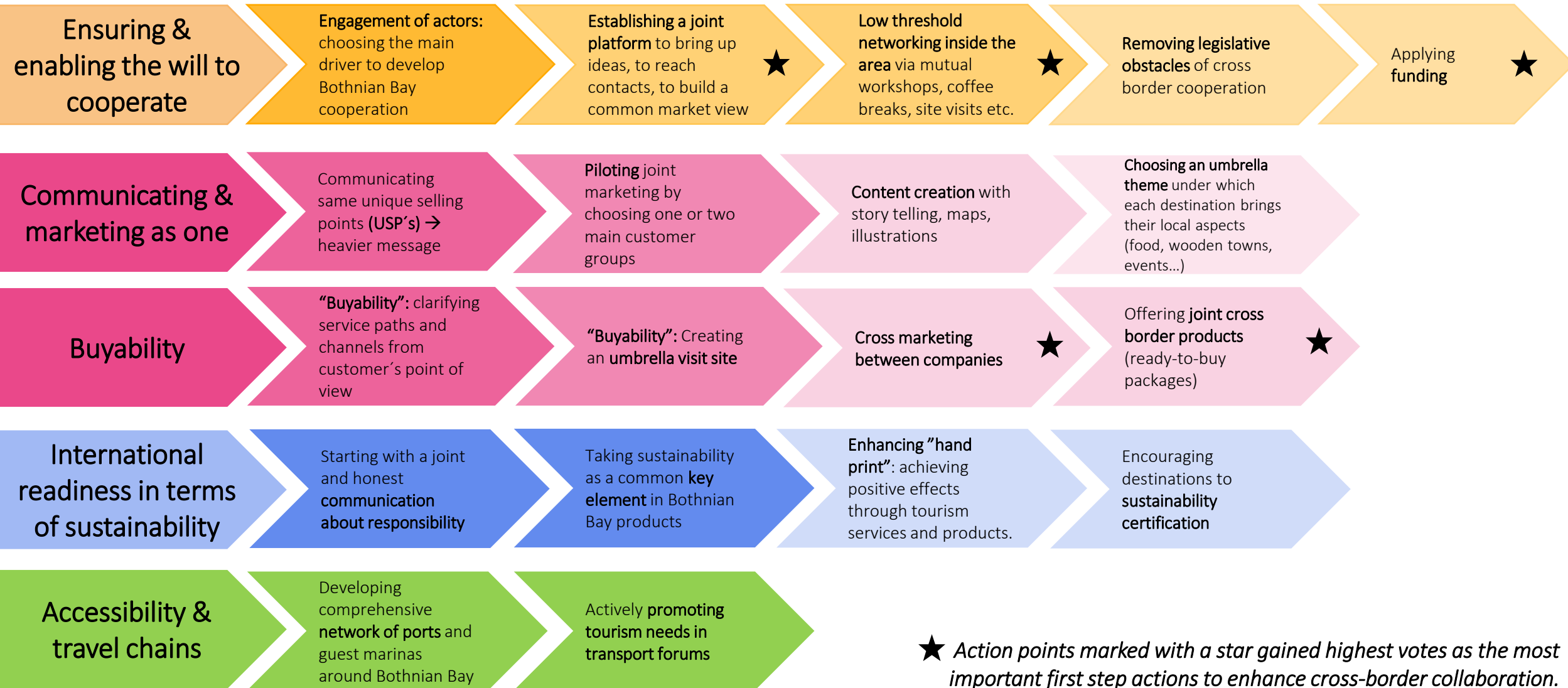
Positioning

- Each of the destinations can have **their own brands and identities**, those together will create the Bothnian Bay
- The local and regional destinations can use Bothnian Bay as one of their products, to **broaden their product portfolio** and gain more attraction

Collaboration

- The key to activate the cooperation is **knowing each other** better
- **Each of us** is entitled to take the initiative!

Action points



★ Action points marked with a star gained highest votes as the most important first step actions to enhance cross-border collaboration. The results are based on a tourism stakeholder questionnaire for BusinessOulu by Eeva Sohlo (conducted in May 2023, as part of a thesis work).

Vision ideas

“Visiting two countries with one trip”

“Bothnian Bay: a string of pearls”

“The most integrated border region of the world in 2030”

“Borderless destination”

**Vision ideas are ordered based on the questionnaire results from the final seminar held 11.5.2023, where participants voted their favorite vision for Bothnian Bay’s tourism development.*

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