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A Lighthouse in the North. The BAR Artist-in-Residency Program and Tourism Development in Norway



Space Calendar Project by BAR residents J. G. Skjeldsøy and C. Hummelsund. Courtesy of Pikene På Broen

Overview

Pikene På Broen is an art organization based in Kirkenes, a small Norwegian town at the border with Russia. Its artist-in-residency program, BAR, has become a meeting platform for local residents, scientists and cultural professionals in the Arctic area. **Nina Dronova** from the **Arctic University of Norway (UiT)** analyzes Pikene På Broen's activity and the impact of the BAR program within a touristic context. The research results confirm how contemporary art and artist-in-residency programs can also serve as **powerful tools for tourism development**.

Research topic and results

The research is aimed at understanding what role does the art organization Pikene på Broen play in the tourism industry in Kirkenes, a small Norwegian town next to the Russian border. Among the various activities carried on by Pikene på Broen, the BAR artist-in-residency program and the Barents Spektakel art festival are the ones specifically considered in this research.

Recently, the BAR artist-in-residency program has become a meeting platform in the Arctic area for the Kirkenes and Barents region. Its programs are addressed to local residents, scientists and people drawn from a cultural sphere.

The research analyzes BAR within a touristic context and develops around four different themes. Firstly, it describes how the artist-in-residency program functions: how the selection process for residency happens and what is the main goal of the BAR program, and whether there is any similarity between the activity of the artist-in-residency program and tourism activity. The second theme focuses on how the organization cooperates with artists throughout BAR programs. It is then discussed whether resident artists can be described as tourists or not. The third theme is devoted to the organizational process and the way Pikene på Broen uses for its media strategies and works with the concept of *place*. The last theme considers the organization's future, challenges it faces, and new prospects.

The research results confirm that Pikene på Broen should be recognized as an important actor in the tourism industry in Kirkenes and that contemporary art plays a powerful tool in Arctic tourism. Tourism opens up a potential space for further development of the art production industry in Kirkenes and Northern Norway. Some examples of how this might occur relate to extending accommodation and transportation services.

Motivation for research

Norwegian nature is the most attractive thing for tourists visiting the country. The beauty of natural landscape sceneries and the possibilities of doing outdoor activities are central elements in Norwegian tourism. As a consequence, the cultural sector does not assume a leading role. In particular, cultural tourism has been promoted as well, but only little attention has been paid to the development of contemporary art attractions. The researcher strongly believes that culture is a flexible and renewable resource which should also be considered for tourism development purposes in the area.

Contribution to the field

The BAR residency program was analyzed within the framework of Pikene på Broen's activities to understand the notion of tourism from an original perspective. Most respondents involved in the research surveys did not recognize the program as a tourism activity. Respondents acknowledged that there were some similarities with tourism or that it may look like tourism from the outside. However, it could not be named as pure tourism. Most of them opined that there was no similarity between the art organization and a touristic agency. Artists under the BAR program are invited to undertake a residency and they do not pay for accommodation. Further, respondents pointed out they had never

thought about their activity as tourism. As noted previously, respondents repeatedly said that Pikene på Broen does not engage in tourism because the organization does not earn any money from its visitors. That being said, the organization as an institution attracts income to the tourism industry of Kirkenes and the Barents Region. While Pikene på Broen does not sell any tourist services or products by itself, as an organization, it provides conditions and an environment for other touristic institutions, such as hotels, restaurants, museums and so on. Thus, it can be said that the research highlights the ways residency programs contribute to tourism development within a specific geographic area.

Key learnings

Descending from the case analyzed, it is clear how organizations in the field of contemporary art could also serve to support tourism development by providing an alternative to natural attractions. Pikene på Broen does this in three ways. First, by continuously bringing artists to the area. Through BAR, the organization has hosted a number of Norwegian and international artists, who have visited Kirkenes and the Barents region. Second, by bringing visitors to festivals. The international art event Barents Spektakel attracts around 14,000 different groups of visitors to Kirkenes and the surrounding area. These visitors consist of locals and non-local visitors. The third way is by weaving place narratives through the local art production process as well as place branding.

Nina Dronova holds a Master's Degree in Tourism Studies, Faculty of Sports, Tourism and Social Work, from the Arctic University of Norway (UiT). The research paper described here was presented as Nina Dronova's Master's thesis under the title *A Lighthouse in the North. Pikene på Broen and the role of contemporary art in tourism development in Kirkenes* in November 2017.

Full dissertation paper is available [here](#)