

The image features a central graphic of several hands in various shades of blue and teal, reaching towards the center and holding a white banner. The banner is tilted and contains the title text. The background is a light gray with diagonal lines.

# AGREEMENT ON COOPERATION IN THE E12 REGION

*This agreement presents a vision of how effective and purposive cooperation in the E12 region can strengthen the region's position and increase growth. The agreement shall form a basis for further work, where a decision on the establishment of an EGTC in the region will be taken.*



EUROPEAN UNION

**Interreg**  
Botnia-Atlantica

European Regional Development Fund

# JOINT COOPERATION IN THE E12 REGION

## HISTORY TAKES US FORWARD

The E12 region has a long, shared history of cross-border cooperation. This type of cooperation helps in avoiding overlapping work and achieving goals that individual organisations could not reach by themselves.

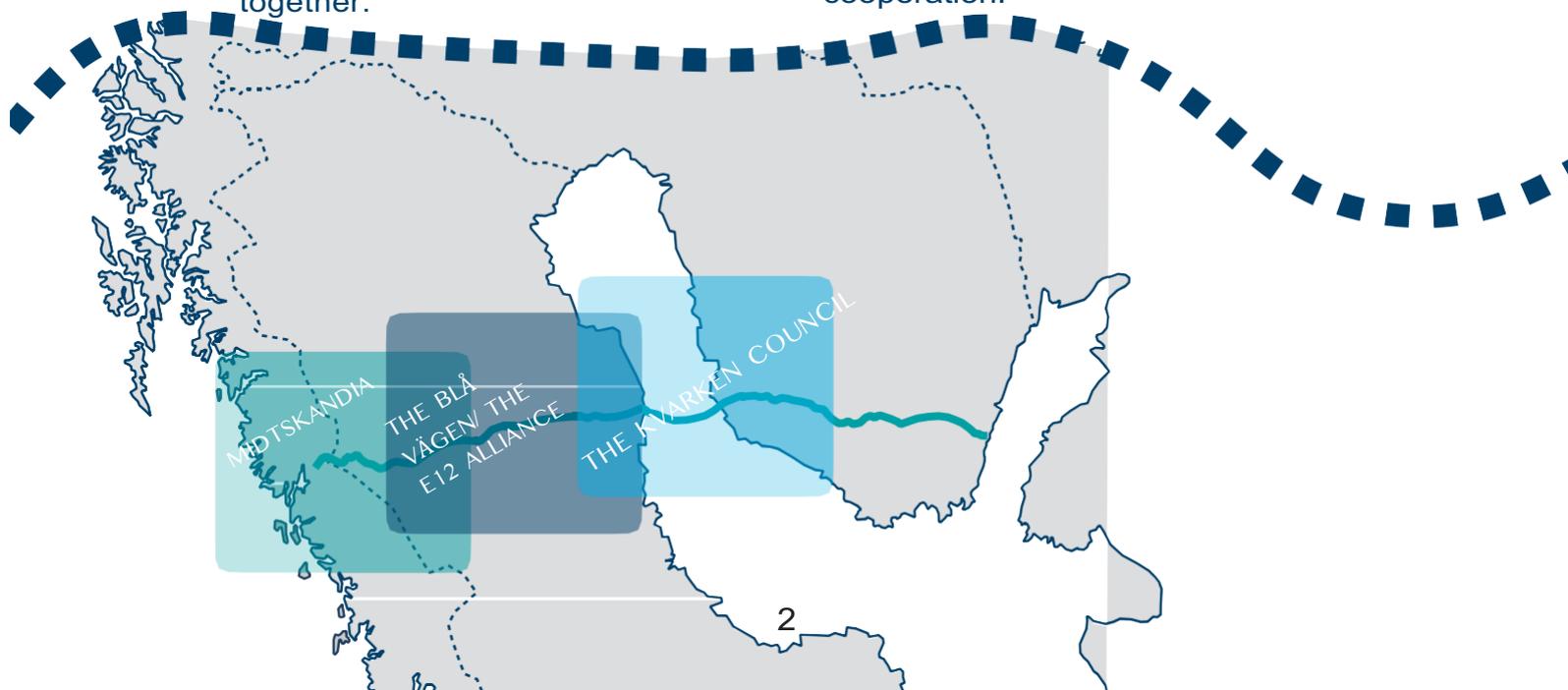
Cooperation in the E12 region is currently coordinated and led by the Kvarken Council, MidtSkandia and the Blå Vägen society. As one result of this collaboration, the E12 route and the Port of Umeå have attained the TEN-T Comprehensive classification.

Cooperation is these days highlighted in different contexts as a crucial key factor for success. Traditional planning and guidance no longer work as they used to in today's transparent and fluid reality. Our society is so complex and requires such an amount of flexibility and openness that the only way forward is by working together.

One example of this is that cooperation is now included even in the UN's global sustainability goals.

Several benefits arise from regional cooperation. For instance, it increases a region's ability to handle complex and long-term issues that range beyond the normal planning horizon. In other words, collaboration between different actors increases a region's capacity to effectively handle complex issues. The Kvarken region already has unique cooperation between the three Nordic countries of Finland, Sweden and Norway, and its economic life covers a wide range of industries.

Therefore, the work in the EU-funded E12 Atlantica Transport project has now resulted in an agreement on how to create even more successful and effective cooperation.



# VISION FOR COOPERATION

The vision “E12 – Borderless Cooperation” has been created to depict the kind of future cooperation that is targeted in the E12 region. This vision acts as a foundation for cooperation and forms the basis for the domains where increased cooperation is needed.

## E12 – BORDERLESS COOPERATION

*We are building an innovative region extending over three countries and creating new possibilities based on our shared history of long-lasting cooperation. We strive together for growth, well-being and quality of life in a region where everyone is welcome and feels at home.*

*Borderless cooperation allows us to position the region both nationally and internationally. The E12 transport corridor binds the region together across borders and enables top-of-the-line economic life, tourism industry, education and health care. Here you have all the possibilities within reach – whether you are in the city or in the countryside, at sea or on a fell.*



# DOMAINS OF COOPERATION

Cooperation in the E12 region can encompass various domains. The domains that are discussed in the project include the economic life, transport and infrastructure, the environment, marketing/lobbying, universities and regional development.



## ECONOMIC LIFE

Cooperation within the economic life can lead to significant advantages in terms of the utilisation of raw materials, digitalisation etc. There have been ideas to establish a joint development company and a meeting point, and to work with cleantech, circular economy, and joint trainee projects.



## JOINT MARKETING/ LOBBYING

Joint marketing of the E12 region is an obvious domain for cooperation. This helps create a more defined trademark that can be capitalised in various contexts, e.g. in the communication with the EU and also nationally in each of the three countries.



## TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

A joint traffic strategy has been drawn up in the EU-funded E12 Atlantica Transport project. This strategy provides a foundation for further work to strengthen the region's physical connections. Other measures may include the further development of the existing logistics work, better connections to the EU's transport corridors etc.



## UNIVERSITIES

The strengthening of the cross-border cooperation between the existing universities and polytechnics can produce benefits both to teaching and research. This work will be connected to several of the other domains of cooperation in order to create a Triple Helix.



## ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

It is necessary these days to take the environment and sustainability into account in all contexts. Here we have great opportunities to learn from each other and together develop projects and business operations. The region aspires to become a forerunner in these matters. One of the ideas is a green route alongside the Blue Highway.



## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Regional development and growth are the overarching aims of our cooperation. The proposal for cooperation that is presented here can be seen as a platform for this development.

# FORM OF COOPERATION

Actors in the E12 region have agreed that the best alternative for cooperation is an EGTC (European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation). An EGTC lends the region and regional work legitimacy, widespread political anchoring, and strong feasibility for the decisions that are made.

## EGTC

EGTC stands for European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation. It has functioned as an official form of cooperation since 2006, when a specific regulation was issued after many failed attempts to find suitable forms for organised cooperation between cities or regions in the different EU Member States. Around 50 EGTC organisations have been started since 2008.

The aim is to create a form of collaboration that allows cross-border cooperation between the Member States and adheres to the national law in the country where the EGTC has its registered office. An EGTC has the status of a legal person, which gives it a strong operational capacity and the possibility to make decisions.

An EGTC can consist of regional and local authorities and also national governments. In order to begin work, the parties must enter into an agreement and statutes must be established so as to regulate and simplify the work.

It is possible to involve partners from a non-member country, but this sets specific requirements for a cooperation agreement between the said non-member country and the EU Member States that participate in the cooperation.

## WHAT DOES AN EGTC MEAN FOR THE E12 REGION?

An EGTC sets a clear framework for cooperation via an established concept. It is a model for long-term collaboration and affords a strong operational capacity due to an EGTC's status of a legal person. Therefore, the cooperation is less dependent on a strong will or one or more enterprising persons in the region.

The region can become inspired by other regions via an "EGTC Platform" and receive opportunities for networking and support at the start of the cooperation. The platform also gives the region an opportunity to increase its visibility in Europe which, in turn, can lead to further possibilities.

An EGTC requires a major investment of time and money. In addition to the actual cooperation, the investment bears fruit even in terms of simplified opportunities for the application for EU-funding.

It is difficult to know what will happen to the existing organisations (MidtSkandia, Blå Vägen, Kvarken Council). Consequently, this issue needs further investigation.



# HOW TO REACH OUR GOALS

The establishment of an EGTC in the E12 region requires several measures before the process can begin.

- **Feasibility study:** The work must begin with a feasibility study on what the E12 EGTC could look like. The prioritised domains of cooperation, geographical boundaries, and drafts of statutes for cooperation will be produced in the first stage. The work will be carried out by E12 Atlantica Transport's WP3 workgroup.

- **Anchoring:** Anchoring must be implemented politically and in relevant organisations in order to describe and explain the aim of an EGTC as well as the benefits arising from such a form of cooperation.

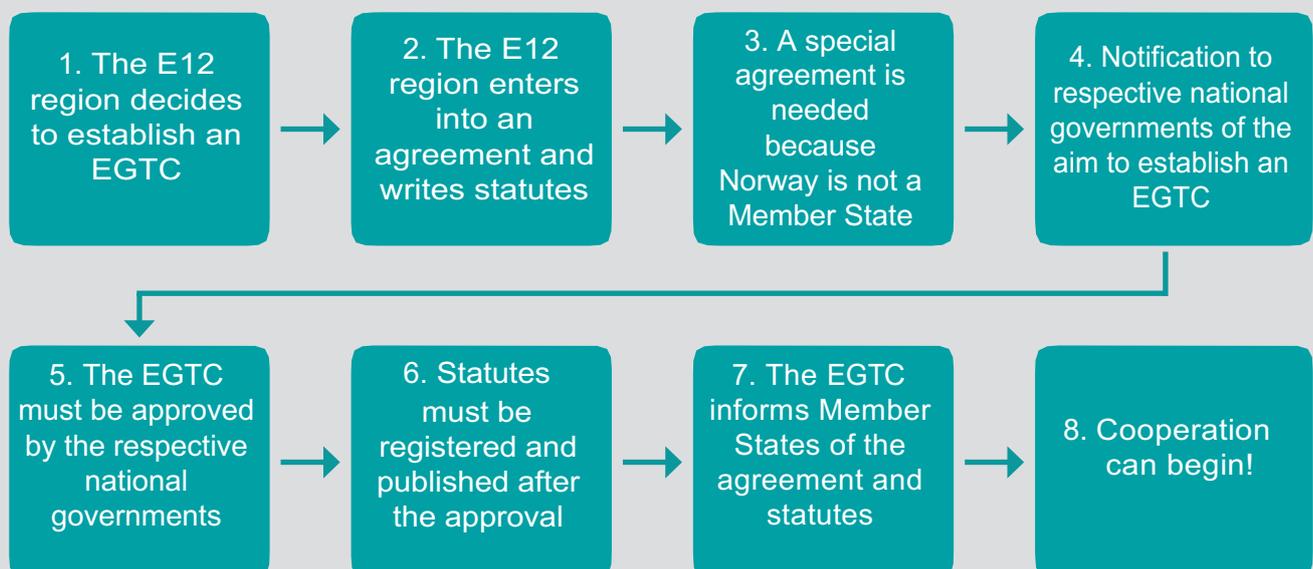
- **Decision:** The decision regarding the foundation of the EGTC and involvement in the cooperation must be taken by all the involved organisations,

in other words the Kvarken Council, Blå Vägen and MidtSkandia. These three organisations currently manage all collaboration efforts in the E12 region and can take this matter further.

The Kvarken Council's Board has made a lot of progress in this process and decided already in the winter of 2018 to begin preliminary planning for the reorganisation of the Council into an EGTC. This could act as a starting point for a larger EGTC spanning over all three countries in the long run, which must be taken into account when drafting statutes and agreements in this reorganisation process.

The formal process for establishing an EGTC, complete with eight obligatory steps, is shown below.

## Formal process for the establishment of an EGTC



# OUR PROGRESS SO FAR

## E12 ATLANTICA TRANSPORT

The E12 Atlantica Transport project creates tools for the future cooperation regarding transport and infrastructure development. The aim is to create a shared vision and objectives as well as to describe how to reach these together. The project consists of three parts, and this agreement is the result of the third part:

- **System analysis** Knowledge base that can be used to create understanding of the transport needs.
- **Traffic strategy:** Long-term prioritisations for the future transport system.
- **Cooperation:** Future cross-border forms of cooperation.

Previous collaboration has shown that the region should not compete internally; instead, it should work together so as to challenge larger competitors, both within the EU and globally.

Sources: EGTC: Directorate general for internal policies, Policy department B: Structural and cohesion policies, European grouping of territorial cooperation as an instrument for promotion and improvement of territorial cooperation in Europe (2015)

EGTS - European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, Nordregio, Lisa Hörnström, 2011

## WORKSHOP WITH STRONG INTEREST

Around 60 persons from the whole E12 region came to Vaasa, Finland, for a two-day workshop on October 25–26, 2017, in order to build a shared foundation for the cooperation. The interest and attendance from the three countries' officials, politicians and representatives of the economic life was considerable.

The workshop was based on the well-known "Future Search Workshop" method that relies on the research of cooperation. The idea is to represent the whole region with a wide range of actors. The same group stays together for the duration of the workshop and creates a shared foundation through discussions. Only after this is the topic of measures introduced, and finally a joint strategy is drafted for further work.



The E12 region has a long, shared history of cross-border cooperation. The Kvarken Council, the Blå Vägen society and MidtSkandia are the driving forces behind this cooperation, thus avoiding overlapping work and achieving goals that they could not reach individually. The EU-funded E12 Atlantica Transport project has researched the possible establishment of a new form of cooperation, an EGTC. Collaboration via an EGTC transforms the cooperation into a legal person, enabling major opportunities for financing and visibility in the outside world, both in terms of the European Union and globally. This agreement is the result of said work.



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