

# BARENTS SPEKTAKEL

»Borders and Fences«

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## ❖ 1. INTRODUCTION

### BARENTS SPEKTAKEL -

#### UNITING THE REGION FROM AN OUTSIDER-PERSPECTIVE

The Barents Spectacle is a regional Festival which takes place in Kirkenes, in the North East of Norway on the border to Russia and Finland. The Spectakel »Pikene på Broen« was born in 1996 by five women of the Barents region. This year's festival theme was »borders and fences« to form a close union and collaboration between the northern countries and to exchange different cultural arts, attitudes and backgrounds. The aim is to powering the development of the local society and the cultural co-operation with the northern areas of the neighbouring countries.

The centre stage of the Kirkenes Barents Spektakel 2006 takes the transnational collaboration of the North. Several artists, cultural producers, investigators, musicians, athletes and economy employees from different countries are brought into contact here. They came together from the close-by cities of the Barents Sea as well as from other countries of the world.

## ❖ 2. FACTS

*Barents Spektakel February 2006 – »Borders and Fences«  
ACE (Art Community Environment) Project of the University  
of Lapland*

### 2.1 | HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After the cold war the border to Russia opened, which brought Kirkenes, as a small fishing city next to the Russian border in a centre of changing process. In this heart of the Barents region arose a melting pot of around 60 different nationalities and ethnical groups and immigrants from Russia. This was the starting impulse to bring local

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societies and current conditions together and explore the different ways of artistic views and productions. People considered fire always to stand for a warm and safe place to gather and met around the campfires. Stories and legends were told there and it gave the people a feeling of standing together and it strengthened their community and sociality.

### 2.2 | THE IDEA OF FIRE SCULPTING

The idea of firesculpting is to let students familiarize them with fire art, art in nature and community art idea. The students developed the idea of their constructions under the theme of borders and fences. Furthermore they realized their idea and built the real fire sculptures.



### 2.3 | FACTS AND GROUPS AT THE FESTIVAL

The Barents Spektakel 2006 is a group project consisting of team works from the Universities of Norway, Russia, Sweden and Finland. Students from these Universities gathered here and developed together the idea, performance and constructions of their projects.

The students of the fire sculpting project were mostly from Universities of Art and Design as well as local pupils from Kirkenes. The workshop had its grand final during a spec-

tacular outdoor arrangement with lightening the sculptures accompanied with poems, dance and the sound of African drums.

The project was financial and practical supported by Finnmark Fylkeskommune, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and Sør-Varanger municipality, situated at the Pikene office in Kirkenes. There were also many other special youth events arranged during the festival Barents Spektakel, like music groups, open air theatre, reading in the library, Films, radio show, Concerts and more. Many young people from Murmansk and eastern part of Finnmark had found their way to the event.

### 2.4 | TEACHING AND CONSTRUCTING THE FIRE SCULPTURES

In addition to the own three projects of the students there were held lectures and workshops in the primary school in Kikenes. The material they used there was straw, wood board, textile rags, lighter fluid, tar, wire and nails.

Four students of the University of Lapland held the lectures for the pupils in the primary school. First there were made brainstorming ideas and sketches on parchment. One idea was decided to realize. It was a sketch of three birds, which

should give the association of the three border countries. The sculptures were two dimensional and the basic form was given by a wooden constructor. The pupils worked in the art classrooms and hammered and sew themselves. Finally the wooden contraptures were wrapped with old rags and fabrics, which should be the main burning material. Besides that, there was the second work space in a dockyard hall at the harbour. Students from Russia, Sweden, Finland and pupils from Kirkenes built another three firesculptures.

First of all they also made a brainstorming and sketching to find an optimal idea to realize for the sculptures.

The first sculpture was based on a Graphic Design idea, consisted of a chicken wire-net between wooden slats, which formed several frames. In each frame there was a pictogram based on Sámi drawings. The pictograms were formed by old rags into the net. The final work had a size of approximately 6 x 4m.

The second sculpture was a solid and 3 dimensional structure. The shape of the structure should give the impression of a borderline and some got the association of an elk. The construction consisted of stabile wooden cubes filled with straw and wrapped with wire. The final work had a size of 6 x 2,5m.

The third sculpture stood under the idea »fence transforms into a river shape«. It was a free and open structure, made out of single wooden slats. Every half meter there stuck one slat in the ground and gave the impression of a normal garden fence. The wooden slats were connected on top of each with a wire. After a while of burning the wire was pulled and the slats fell in therefore designed blocks on the ground and formed a river shape. The final work had a size of 8 x 0,6m.

### 2.5 | OPENING CEREMONY

The Barents Spektakel proceeded one week. On the first evening there was an opening ceremony. It took place in the centre of Kikenes, surrounded by a snow tribune, fire places and candles. Candle lights gave the whole ceremony its special atmosphere.

Speeches were held to open and introduce the Festival. Furthermore there was a children chorus, a band and performance show and you could warm up with a hot glögg. Last but not least the students of the fire sculpting workshop lit there test burning sculptures to give the people a first impression, how a fire sculpture could look like. The test burning sculpture was an outcome of the idea of Sámi

tents. There were three of the tents to symbolize once more the corner between the three countries. The sculptures itself consisted of wooden beams, connected at the top and a burning circle hang in the middle of each tent.

### ❖ 3. APPROACH

#### 3.1 | PREPARATIONS AND PLANNING

Without further knowledge about the exact size of a sculpture it's quite hard to tell, how much material will be



needed to build the final constructions. After Jokivalkeat - the first firesculpting event for Michaela and me - we understood, that it's still possible to calculate the approximate consumption of wood, hay/straw, enflammable liquids and so forth. After drawing some sketches at the Lapin Yliopisto in Rovaniemi, to have a rough backbone for the further discussions with the students from the other countries, we calculated the amount of wood, which would be needed and bought it still in Lapland. At this moment we were planning for two sculptures, using two different methods: a »classical« wood/hay-construction and a second sculpture, built with fabrics and wires.

We decided to symbolize the theme (»borders and fences«) in a more abstract and graphical way and designed a first version of a quite wide and tall fire-fence, using diagonal woodconstructions (30x30cm with different heights). With these sketches we decided which tools and materials to take with us and loaded up a small trailer. Our toolboxes comprised besides hammers, saws and axes different kind of screws (we found it useful to have the possibility to fix the construction with this fast and easy way), drilling machines, wires, staplers, knives and so on. Our material-list contained among other things wood, fabric, hay, tar, enflammable fluids and canvas.

#### 3.2 | BRAINSTORMING AND SKETCHING

After we met, our teammates from Russia, Norway and Sweden in Kirkenes (NO), the whole team started to discuss the first ideas and tried to invent new drafts for the sculptures. Especially interesting for me seems the fact, that the other students - mostly the students from Norway, who were quite young - came up with a lot of ideas, which have been inspired by their ancestors culture. The group developed three more ideas for figures: A smaller fence, built by single sticks, which were supposed to break, fall and build a river while burning, a set of big panels, showing burning sami-drawings/symbols and a smaller sculptures, representing two tents for the festival-opening. Eventhough the different languages constituted a slight barrier in the beginning, the workflow became amazing fast very fluent and successful. The group divided itself in two subunits and Michaela as well as me got to explain the further proceeding. We decided, to built the tent-sculpture for the opening together - using the technical skills of the norwegian carpenter-students - first and continue the brainstorming about the other sculptures later after the first testburning and the experience of the opening-event.

#### 3.3 | TESTBURNING

The experience from Jokivalkeat 2006 taught us, that a testburning can be quite useful to learn about the weathercircumstances and the behaviour of the material in different surroundings. Since we knew, that the opening-



ceremony wouldn't contain a big fire-event and we ran out of time and material to construct a forth, separated sculpture just for the testburning, the group decided to use the opening itself to check the work. Besides some organizational problems everything went surprisingly well. Because of the low tem-

peratures (-25°C) none knew, what would happen to the burning fluids and the fabrics, the tent-sticks were coated with. That was the reason to use much more enflammable liquids than usual. In addition we covered the construction earlier with tar and wrapped it into a polythene sheet. That way, we were able to keep the chemicals longer from vaporizing and vanishing.

The result was a quick and big fire. The tents burned down much faster than anyone expected it, but the look of the sculptures during the burning was quite much as desired and the shape of the tents as well of the sun-circles in the center of each tent appeared in an appealing way,

#### 3.4 | CONSTRUCTION

The construction of the tents (opening ceremony) was a quite simple one, but we were planning a much bigger fire-show for the festival-saturday, when the firesculpting would mould a separated event. Therefore we decided to split the group again into three parts., which were working separately for the single sculptures.

...❖ **Part 1 - »From fence to river«:** In cooperation with a local primary school a couple of students started to build a quite abstract fence-structure, made by wooden sticks in different length, which were put in a quite acute angle into the ground. The length of these sticks was determined by the whole appearance and build a slight wave-shape - approximately one to one and a half meters above the floor. The wooden parts were wrapped in canvas and fabrics, covered with tar and burning liquids and connected by a metal-wire on the top.

After lighting the pretty low but wide construction, the sticks were supposed to break at the bottom-part and moved by a single tug into one certain direction to build a burning river on the ground. - The problem with this technique consisted in our lack of experience with moving/breaking sculptures. No one knew beforehand, if the fire would erupt sufficiently deep into the wood to weaken the sticks enough to break.

...❖ **Part 2 - »Fence«:** The most massive construction was also the best prepared one. We had planned the »fence« already in broad outline at the LAY in Rovaniemi and the students as well as the guiding teachers of course had enough experience with the used technique and materials. Mainly the carpenter-students from Norway planned a rough and abstract shape, which was supposed to look both at the same time: protective and aggressive. The sculpture was more than three meters high, five meters long and composed of vertical and crossing wood-pillars. The students built these pillars (footprint: 30x30cm) in

different lengths of square timbers, connected with screws and filled with hay (and more wood). The wide practical knowledge of the norwegian students proved at this very helpful. A construction in the ballpark of a sculpture we needed to build more than three days in Rovaniemi was set up in less than a day. The whole sculpture was planned to be transported in separate parts and put together at the place of the event itself.

...❖ **Part 3 - »Graphic symbols«:** The last sculpture represented again an experiment. The idea to burn two-dimensional graphic-structures was surely obvious, the implementation a real challenge. We bought chicken fence (wire fence) on site and started to construct quite large frames by square timbers, in which we spanned the wire like a transparent canvas. The biggest problem comprised thereby within the instability of the whole construction - in total about almost five meters high and ten meters long. We additionally clamped struts at the bottom-parts, to guarantee a highest possible visibility and braced the different-sized frames among each other.

After finishing the basic construction the russian team decided about the symbols itself and finally chose ancient Sami-drawings after discussions about some ethical issues. The shapes of the sketches, which were dealing with basic issues like hunting, fishing, sun, life and so forth, we started to weave the shapes with stripes of canvas into quite close meshed fences. After painting the frames white (for a better reflection of the light, which would be caused by the burning parts inbetween), planning the exact positioning of the single parts and inventing an idea how to set up the whole construction at the event place, we finally covered the shapes with tar. At the »First Lake« - the venue of the firesculpting event - we decided to drill holes into the ice (using a customarily ice-drill) and shore the construction with struttings up. Unfortunately the sculpture broke more than once and it took much longer than estimated to finish the work at the venue itself. Light-

ing the sculpture was again a quite difficult undertaking. Because of the really low temperatures (-30°C and below) nobody could forecast, what would happen to the inflammable liquids, we use to catalyse the burning process and get the fire started.

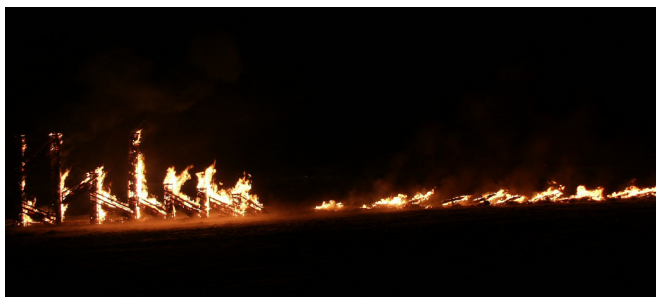
### 3.5 | PERFORMANCES

Additionally fireperformances were planned for both events - the opening ceremony and the main event. The russian team invented a dance-like prayer to the sun for the former happening, using multiple torches we had dwelled still in Lapland. Unfortunately most of the performance got lost in the shuffle. For the main event at the first lake an igniting-ceremony with the pupils of the local primary-school was set up. The kids pulled burning sledges across the lake and built a firechoreography like this. Afterwards the single sculptures were lit in a certain measure, following also the music and reading (poems) from the shore. The whole process passed off without any difficulties and built a round and smooth look.

## ❖ 4. OUTCOMES

### 4.1 | TEACHING AND LEARNING

According to the department of art-education which dispatched the most of the Finnish students and organised the trip, the whole festival-participation was guided by constant process of teaching and learning. We had the possibility to impart earlier gained knowledge to the Russian, Swedish and Norwegian fellow students as well as to the Norwegian pupils and achieve at the same time more knowledge about new firesculpting-techniques by experimenting and inventing new methods. This process made the trip much more than just a firesculpting-event and made it possible to attain important knowledge and experience.





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### 4.2 | STATEMENTS

...❖ **Skiperformance:** The performance of the schoolkids in the beginning, set the theme of the whole event: Burning parts of the fences were moved from one side of the venue to the other and built a burning line between two different places: A separator and key at the same time as well as an impressive start of the show.

...❖ **Graphical Symbols:** The burning sami-symbols contained of course some political problems, depending on the interpretation and point of view of the audience. But the arrangement of the figures was aside from that quite narrative. The different shapes were gathered around the center - the sun, telling about the old times, hunters and fishers and the rough life of the ancient Sami-culture. Angular Fence: The construction built clearly a fortress against unknown enemies - the massive pillars and the aggressive angles of the single parts spoke a clear language. But at the same time the process of burning the fence, destroying the barrier sets a statement in the opposite direction.

...❖ **Fence-River:** A fence becomes a river - the former symbol of estate becomes symbol for life (water) but stays a barrier at the same time. This sculpture also combined two conflictive elements in an interesting way: water and fire. Birds: The schoolkids' birds - three birds mounted onto one stick - are metaphor for three countries, getting together: Russia, Norway and Finland - and contradicts the fence-theme in a clear and graphical way.

### ...❖ PERSONAL RÉSUMÉ

...❖ **Michaela Müller:** My personal opinion about the workshop in Kirkenes is exceedingly positive. The only extreme experience for me was the icy cold weather when we finally assembled the sculptures on the lake, but it wouldn't have been the same without this extreme icy, but sunny weather.

I enjoyed very much working together with people from all over Scandinavia. In addition to that we could handle the work quite independent and free. Given that I already had experience with fire sculpting, I taught one of the groups how to construct and build the fire sculpture. Furthermore, it was a unique and interesting experience to teach pupils in a Norwegian school. We had much fun together and could receive a first hand impression how people in Kirkenes felt about the Barents Sperktakel.



...❖ **Florian Plank:** The excursion to Norway started as a nice interruption of our regular studies and involved itself soon into an interesting challenge. We had to solve different problems using the limited possibilities on site and deal with the difficult weather conditions. The project in Kirkenes offered the possibility to cooperate with students from different countries in a really interesting surrounding and get an insight in teaching-methods. During the whole stay we had to develop new sculpting-methods and busy ourselves intensively with the subject »fire«. Besides a great experience in teamwork and groupwork, the trip was a great possibility to learn about the country and the problems of the city firsthand.