NORDREGIO NEWS

#2.17

20 years of regional development

18 POPULATION TRENDS IN THE NORDIC REGION

22 IMMIGRATION IS THE FUTURE FOR RURAL REGIONS

26 PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE: SUSTAINABLE NORDIC CITIES

EDITORIAL

KJELL NILSSON

Director, Nordregio (kjell.nilsson@nordregio.se)

Twenty years have passed since Nordregio was established by the Nordic Council of Ministers. It has been quite a ride for a small, but ambitious, institution. We have grown steadily, both in number of people and research projects. Our focus has also expanded. Competition is tough, and to be relevant for our stakeholders we are constantly evaluating our work, adjusting our focus and looking ahead.

With regional development and Nordic cooperation high on the political agenda, this is both an interesting and challenging time to be the director of Nordregio. We are witnessing new development trends at a global and European scale that are impacting regions here in the Nordics. One example is the rapidly-growing inequality between regions. Our research is often focused on problems and challenges but we also work together with regions to gather good examples and explore new possibilities.

I am looking forward to seeing the results of the new collaboration programme on Integration of refugees. Immigration is a hot topic everywhere, not the least here in the Nordic countries. Another exiting project on the horizon is the Prime Ministers' initiative for Sustainable cities– can Nordic cities provide solutions for smart and sustainable cities also in other parts of the world where they are struggling with rapid urbanisation? Both projects are presented later in this issue and I believe they have huge potential to make a difference in regions both within and outside the Nordic Region. Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General of Nordic Council of Ministers, shares my enthusiasm for these projects in his column. These projects also show the value collaboration between sectors and institutions within the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Nordregio will continue the work towards scientific excellence in collaboration with our stakeholders. In this jubilee issue you will get a glimpse of our current work, along with some reflections on regional development in years gone by and some positive projections for the future for the Nordic Region. ■

DAGFINN HØYBRÅTEN

Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers

The earliest days of Nordic collaboration are shrouded in mystery and only hinted at in the sagas. Yet by hitting the fast-forward button and making pit stops along the way, our common Nordic history begins to manifest clearly.

Since the end of the Second World War, the Nordic countries have formed a highly integrated region. We enjoy many cross-border rights and services and experience extensive co-operation in nearly all policy areas. Despite these benefits being taken for granted by those of us who live in the Nordic countries, the global community notices and celebrates the Nordics.

Nordic literature, film, and food are increasingly popular and there is growing interest in the Nordic model: a model that shows it is possible to combine work and family, tripartite co-operation, and ongoing focus on reform, growth, and sustainability. After his meeting with the Nordic Prime Ministers, an impressed President Obama asked if we couldn't just let these five countries rule the world for a while.

As a region, the Nordic countries not only represent the world's 12th largest economy, we also represent solutions and experience that can be applied in both European and global settings. This year, we launch a Nordic Prime Ministers' initiative, aiming to present Nordic solutions to global challenges. The key terms are 'green transition', 'Nordic food and nutrition', and 'gender equality in the workplace'.

Nordregio is involved in the Prime Ministers' initiative, focusing on green transition. It is also, among other things, involved in the highly prioritized programme for the integration of refugees and immigrants. In fact, Nordregio plays an important role in enabling Nordic co-operation to move forward in general. It does so by providing a critical knowledge base. By mapping and documenting information about the state of the Nordic region, Nordregio empowers Nordic local, regional, and national authorities to make informed decisions. Solid documentation of development trends, including similarities and differences within and between countries, is a necessary starting point for developing good policy. Furthermore, Nordregio's State of the Nordic Region is an important tool for disseminating information about our region to the rest of the world.

I am impressed by what Nordregio has achieved during its first 20 years and I look forward to following your progress in the next 20 years! ■

”BY MAPPING AND DOCUMENTING INFORMATION ABOUT THE STATE OF THE NORDIC REGION, NORDREGIO EMPOWERS NORDIC LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND NATIONAL AUTHORITIES TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS.”

CONTENT

NORDREGIO 20 YEARS

4 Nordregio after 20 years: Reaching excellency through continuity and constant renewal

6 Nordic thematic group on sustainable rural development

8 Nordic thematic group on innovative and resilient Nordic regions

10 Nordic thematic group on sustainable cities and urban development

13 Be relevant or die! The digital journey of Nordregio

15 Maps are our expertise: Making data and development trends come to life

16 Interview with Hallgeir Aalbu

17 The territorial dimension of Europe’s future – veni, vidi, …

NORDIC COUNTRIES 20 YEARS AGO, NOW, THE FUTURE

18 Population trends in the Nordic region

20 Measuring regional potential: Which regions are among the top climbers and which have dropped the most?

22 Immigration is the future for rural regions – but it takes more than a job to make people stay

26 Sustainable Nordic cities: Urbanization challenges

28 Arctic change is on the radar

NORDREGIO NEWS 2/2017

Each Nordregio News issue provides multiple perspectives on a specific theme of regional development. With Nordregio News you are also kept up to date with the interesting research results produced at Nordregio. Nordregio News is sent to our subscribers via email. You can also find each issue on our website.

FIND US
Website: www.nordregio.se
Twitter: @Nordregio
Facebook: Nordregio
Contact: pipsa.salolammi@nordregio.se

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KJELL NILSSON
DIRECTOR
(kjell.nilsson@nordregio.se)

KAREN REFSGAARD
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
(karen.refsgaard@nordregio.se)

NORDREGIO AFTER 20 YEARS:
REACHING EXCELLENCE THROUGH CONTINUITY AND CONSTANT RENEWAL

The Nordic Region is among the richest regions in the world, with vast natural resources, high levels of technological development and a prosperous welfare system built on social equity. But we are also facing serious challenges in many areas related to regional development. In recent years, regional development has been severely affected by the economic crisis, the impact of rapid demographic change driven by urbanisation, a shrinking and aging population in remote areas and increasing refugee immigration.

Nordregio's most important mission is to provide Nordic authorities with evidence-based knowledge that contributes to solutions to these and other sustainable development challenges. From Longyearbyen in the north to Rødby in the south, we are constantly learning from each other by Exchanging knowledge and experiences between the Nordic countries. Acting as an advisor and knowledge broker on Nordic regional policy, Nordregio provides professional and efficient support to the Nordic Council of Ministers and authorities at the national, regional and local levels.

Nordregio was established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997 through a merger of three institutions. The largest of these was Nordplan (Nordiska institutet för samhällsplanering). Originally a Swedish government institution established in 1968, it was co-funded by Denmark, Norway and Finland and established in 1981 as a Nordic institute. Nordplan, which arranged popular annual courses for practitioners from all Nordic countries, was located on Skeppsholmen in Stockholm, in the same building where Nordregio exists today.

In 1997, Skeppsholmen was also the location of the NordRefo (Nordisk institutt for regionalpolitisk forskning), a research institute for regional studies and policy development, which periodically rotated its office between the Nordic countries. NordRefo was established as a Nordic institution in 1980, but existed as a Nordic working group from 1966. The third party in the Nordregio amalgamation was NOGRAN, an analytic unit funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and located in Helsinki. NOGRAN was initiated in 1979 as a project that aimed to map and evaluate Nordic regional development to produce policy-relevant knowledge to support decision making.

Nordregio inherited valuable assets from all three of its predecessors. Although the renowned Nordplan courses were terminated by the end of the 20th century, the organisation's important networking function has formed the basis for the Nordic Cooperation Programme for Regional Development and Planning. Further, the extensive international research cooperation that currently happens at Nordregio builds on the foundations laid by NordRefo. Finally, the analytical approach that shapes publications like State of the Nordic Region carries on the traditions originally established by NOGRAN.

Nordregio's course has been steady over the past 20 years. During the first eight years, with Hallgeir Aalbu as the director, Nordregio developed a role as a professional advisor for EU, national and regional authorities regarding regional development, as well as playing an active role in the first ESPON 2006 programme. This development continued for the next eight years under Ole Damsgaard's leadership, when Nordregio became the largest single contributor to the ESPON 2013 programme. Furthermore, during this period Nordregio's active role in implementing the Nordic Cooperation Programme for Regional Policy was fixed. Over the past four years

this role has been emphasised, and Nordregio's analytical capacity has also received broader recognition within the Nordic Council of Ministers (e.g., through the Prime Ministers' initiative on Nordic Sustainable Cities and the Nordic Cooperation Programme for Integration of Refugees and Immigrants).

Nordregio's development is also characterised by constant change. We continuously adapt to changing priorities in national regional development policies and trends and keep seeking new research opportunities in European, Nordic and national programmes. We are also continuously renewing our competence profile by recruiting new people with different skills and tools. The thematic focal areas have shifted during Nordregio's 20 year's history. Based on Nordregio's strategy 2020, developed by the employees in close dialogue with Nordregio's Board, we now have four focal areas:

1) Regional Rural and Demographic Development
2) Urban Planning and Sustainable Development
3) Regional Innovation and Green Growth
4) Governance and Policy: Regional Reforms and Strategies

Nordregio strives for scientific excellence: As an internationally oriented research institution, it is crucial for Nordregio to aim for scientific excellence. We do this through three pillars using both qualitative and quantitative methods: A close dialogue with stakeholders in the field; solid quantitative/GIS data collection and comparison; and case studies analysed and compared using multidisciplinary techniques.

Nordregio works with people: Nordregio carries out both basic and applied social science research. Applied social science is carried out using evidence-based research, by analysing and developing policies based on a wide and diverse number of case studies within Nordic regions and municipalities. Research is grounded because it is conducted in collaboration with policymakers and stakeholders within various regions and municipalities, to create a thorough understanding of the context, build trust and draw on local knowledge.

Nordregio uses a multidisciplinary approach: To understand and carry out research on practical economic and social challenges and opportunities, as well as related policies in different Nordic areas, we need a broad base of expertise from across a range of social science disciplines. Furthermore, as language and cultural knowledge are keys to understanding, we emphasise a broad representation of researchers who focus on both rural and urban regions across the Nordic countries. This helps us meet the needs of our diverse communities as well as being able to approach research from different perspectives.

Nordregio produces advanced maps and analyses: Visualisation of key data and analyses of regional development (e.g., migration, bioresource potential and immigrant employment) are keys to developing rapid and thorough overviews and comparisons between the regional and municipal levels across Nordic countries. Statistical and econometric methods are used to identify key relationships across time and space.

The Nordic countries are blessed with vast natural resources, including forests, agricultural land and marine resources that are critical for transformation from a fossil to bio-based economy. When organised well, this transformation provides opportunities for the development of rural areas and offers space and opportunities for newcomers to the Nordic countries. This transformation also requires change and innovation within supporting institutions and technologies. Nordregio has taken this challenge seriously and has carried out studies within the circular economy and bioeconomy, as well as assessing the potential for integration of immigrants in rural areas. Finally, new sustainable cities and small towns are developing in all Nordic countries – and Nordregio is critically investigating how these cities and towns can develop, not only from an environmental perspective, but also from the perspective of social equity, considering all groups of people.

As an international research institution, Nordregio contributes to the wider international community by improving understanding with socially, economically and environmentally sustainable examples and policies that are grounded in regions and municipalities across the Nordic countries.

Nordregio is situated on the beautiful island ofSkeppsholmen in the heart of Stockholm. Photo: Johanna Feuk.

Mother and child in Iceland. Photo: Yadid Levy / Norden.org

NORDIC THEMATIC GROUP ON

SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable rural development is an important topic across the Nordic Region, as all geographic areas are affected by change. Changes and challenges are inevitable in the global world, so how can solutions be found and how can change be transformed into a factor for success in rural Nordic areas? The development of rural and peripheral areas is important not only for economic development as such, but also for coherent development throughout the Nordic region.

BY GUNNAR LINDBERG

GUNNAR LINDBERG
is a Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio and specialised in agricultural and regional policies, regional input-output models, agriculture and rural development, environmental economics and sustainable development.

You can reach Gunnar at
gunnar.lindberg@nordregio.se

In the Nordic region, there are increasing regional imbalances between urban and rural areas in terms of population change, economic development, access to services, and social outcomes. When we conducted the background work for the new Nordic collaboration program for the regional sector of the Nordic Council of Ministers, it was evident that rural development is a truly important topic that covers most of the core aspects for regional development today. For instance, the "State of the Nordic Region" report shows that the 30 largest urban regions in the Nordic region have absorbed more than 97 per cent of the region's total population growth over the past 20 years. However, looking at the big picture, there are national and regional differences – some municipalities have turned population decline into growth again – and much is accentuated today when it comes to migration and demography by large movements of people to and within the Nordic countries. But the potential of the rural Nordic areas varies widely depending on the concentration of the population, distance to major markets and cities, and natural and human resources. To put it mildly – many things are happening both nationally and regionally – and in recent years, local initiatives, social innovations, smart specialisation and new sectors such as the bioeconomy have entered the vocabulary in discussions on rural development.

Nordic collaboration as an asset

Nordic cooperation is generally considered to be extremely important and an asset when working with rural development. There are similarities that enable stakeholders to learn from each other when facing analogous challenges, and we now have a unique opportunity to compare how issues are dealt with in different ways at both the regional and national level. It is also important

On a small island in the Faroe Islands. Photo: Pipsa Salolammi

to bring this Nordic added value to the local level. As stated by one of the interviewees for the collaboration program, "Nordic regions are interested in and looking for the kind of information and results that exist in Nordic cooperation. We always need examples and inspiration, and the time is ripe to work more with the regions." Therefore, we are now working with a larger group of stakeholders in 2017–2020 and a thematic group comprising both national and regional representatives, as well as representatives from cross-border collaborations. Together we are covering many of the actors and associations in rural Norden.

The work of the 2017–2020 Nordic thematic group for Sustainable Rural Development is organized around four major themes. The first theme is demographic challenges, the second is social innovation, the third is competences and skills necessary to boost economic growth, and the fourth is strengthening cross-border cooperation. It is also clear that the thematic group will take on other issues, for instance, topics related to urban-rural interactions and issues related to attractiveness, regional innovation and economic development, to facilitate interaction with the other thematic groups. In addition, cross-cutting topics such as immigration, the Arctic and children and youth will have an influence on the project throughout this period. In 2018, the thematic group will also closely follow the Swedish chairmanship program, which will include an aspect of sustainable rural development. Sweden has recently conducted a parliamentary investigation into rural development and will soon launch a new political agenda related to this topic, which will bring about interesting reflection and discussion among all regions and countries.

The objective of the Nordic thematic group for Sustainable Rural Development is not only to contribute to policy development and new solutions, but also to make sure that knowledge, tools and policy advice find their way to practitioners and policy makers. Therefore, projects and activities shall contribute to the continued development of knowledge by highlighting concrete examples, statistics and policy-relevant conclusions. It is equally important to highlight organizational and structural aspects of regional policy implementation and to contribute to an understanding of how results can be utilized in practice. The thematic group activities and results are not only the meetings and projects conducted by the group, but also the projects conducted by the organizations represented in the group, new projects initiated because of individuals collaborating in the group (for instance, Interreg or cross-border projects) and seminars and events organized with other regional and national actors. The goal is to produce knowledge, to stimulate and facilitate knowledge production and to make sure that we contribute to development processes and policy development throughout the Nordics. Thematic group's work and projects can be followed on Nordregio's website. ■

COLUMN by the Chair

SIGURÐUR ÁRNASON
Specialist at the Development Division of the Icelandic Regional Development Institute (Byggðastofnun) and co-chair of the Nordic thematic group for Sustainable Rural Development. Fields and interest/specialization: data analysis along with rural planning.

You can reach Sigurður at
sigurdur@byggdastofnun.is

SUSTAINABLE: SOCIALLY, ECONOMICALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY

Sustainability is an important goal for the future of rural, remote and sparsely populated areas in the Nordic region. However, it is highly probable that depopulation will continue in the upcoming years, resulting in increased challenges to delivering services and reduced prospects for economic growth.

The Nordic thematic group for Sustainable Rural Development focuses on social, economic and environmental sustainability in remote and sparsely populated areas of Nordic countries. Over the next four years, the group's work will be divided into four main themes: 1) demographic challenges, 2) social services, 3) economic growth and 4) cross-border cooperation.

First, demographic challenges will be analysed in relation to declining and ageing populations, as well as gender imbalance caused by higher female out-migration. Second, focus will be placed on the need to find new ways to deliver social services and cope with demographic structure changes. The third objective will be supplying necessary skills to boost economic growth and increase labour force participation, especially among young people and immigrants. Finally, the thematic group will discuss how increasing cross-border cooperation could leverage pooled services to address issues common among remote and peripheral rural regions.

Time never stands still. Circumstances in the Nordic Region will change according to the other global regions. Therefore, adapting to demographic changes will be a long-term challenge. Sustainable rural development, and the ways in which it may be achieved, will be the primary topics of discussion in the upcoming years. ■

NORDIC THEMATIC GROUP ON

INNOVATIVE AND RESILIENT NORDIC REGIONS

The Nordic thematic group on innovative and resilient regions 2017-2020 aims to provide the Nordic regions with updated knowledge, applicable tools, and good practices regarding future competitiveness and well-being. Innovation has been the focus of regional development for decades in the Nordic regions. Increased economic turbulence, especially the global financial and economic crisis that affected most of the Nordic regions in 2008-2010, has caused resilience to emerge as an important concept in regional development. Regional resilience is about not only reacting to crises, but also proactively building up regional competences to meet the forthcoming changes and challenges.

BY JUKKA TERÄS

JUKKA TERÄS

Is a Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio specialised in regional development, innovation environments, innovation & promotion, technology transfer, issues related to non-metropolitan regions.

You can reach Jukka at
jukka.teras@nordregio.se

The Nordic working group on green growth – innovation and entrepreneurship 2013-2016 paving the way

The newly established Nordic thematic group on innovative and resilient regions was preceded by the Nordic working group on green growth – innovation and entrepreneurship. In 2013-2016, the working group focused on the Nordic bioeconomy, cleantech, the circular economy and industrial symbiosis from the regional viewpoint. The working group identified and analysed Nordic green innovations, companies, projects, and good practices in both urban and rural Nordic regions. Moreover, the working group tackled issues such as digitalisation as ways of opening additional opportunities for green growth in the Nordic countries and regions. Green growth and green transition remain important elements of the new thematic group as well. The thematic group is interested in the relations between green transition, innovation and regional resilience in the Nordic regions.

Fishery in Iceland by Yadid Levy / Norden.org

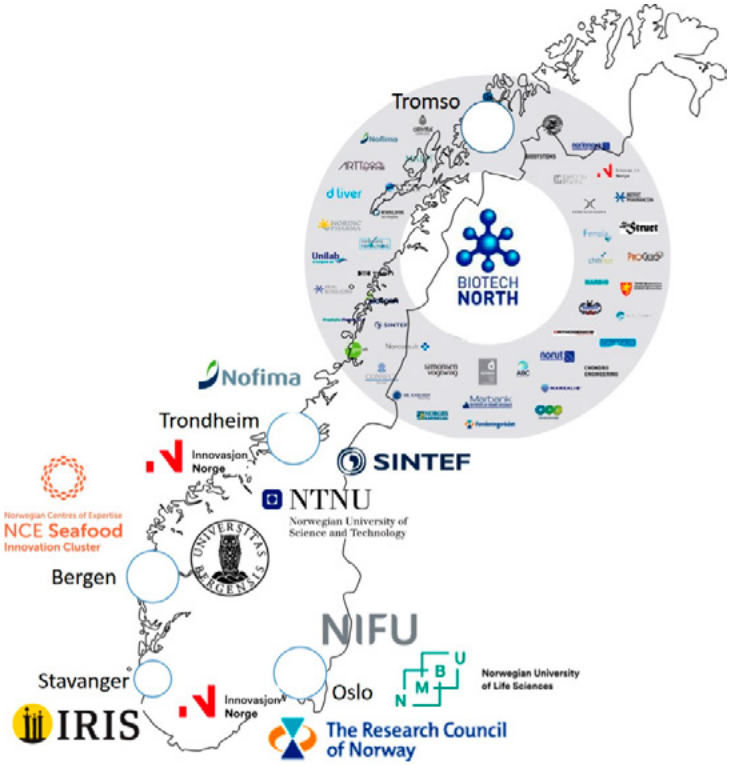
Key research themes 2017-2020

The new thematic group shall implement three partly interrelated, in-depth Nordic studies on resilience, smart specialisation and digitalisation. Why these themes?

Resilience is one of the guiding concepts for the Nordic thematic group on innovative and resilient regions. Resilience refers to the ability to leap back or rebound following a disturbance or disruption. For regions, the ability to anticipate and prepare for forthcoming crises is equally important. During the kick-off event of the Nordic thematic group in February 2017, the participants identified a need to further discuss and elaborate on the term 'resilience' and its implications for Nordic regional development, especially from the viewpoint of economic resilience.

Smart specialisation is the basis of the current regional innovation policy in the European Union. The smart specialisation concept was developed to address the gap between Europe and other global competitors, especially the USA and Japan, in research and development investments. The Research and Innovation strategy for Smart Specialisation at the regional level is a conditionality to be addressed toward the EU regions in order to receive funding from the European Regional and Development Funds. But what is, in fact, smart specialisation in practice in the Nordics? Is there something new with smart specialisation compared to e.g. regional clusters? Interestingly, some Nordic regions outside of the EU, such as Nordland in North Norway, have adopted the smart specialisation concept. Are there differences in applying the smart specialisation concept in regions outside compared with inside the EU?

Digitalisation: Nordic regions are frequently seen as forerunners in digital transformation in the EU context. There has been, however, little common learning and value derived from potential synergies across Nordic countries and regions. This in-depth study focuses on digitalisation in Nordic regional development, both in urban and in rural regions. The focus is on the ways digitalisation has been included in regional development strategies and how it is



Biotech North is an example of Nordic innovation and bioeconomy cooperation.

promoted and adopted. We are interested in how Nordic regions implement their digitalisation strategies in practice. What are the challenges and opportunities that regions face when working with digitalisation? Where are the good practices of digitalisation in Nordic regions to be found?

An important part of the thematic group work is to provide recommendations and relevant information regarding policy implications to Nordic decision makers. Each in-depth study will be complemented by a Policy Brief that summarises the major relevant results and recommendations.

New thematic group and Nordic added value

Nordic added value plays an important role in this work. The selected research themes provide possibilities to joint Nordic learning and benchmarking. Moreover, the thematic group of 2017-2020 includes representatives from all of the Nordic countries and covers national, regional and cross-border levels. A significant part of the activities will be directed toward information and communication events in the Nordic countries and regions to broadly disseminate the research results. ■

Coming up with project ideas at the kick off in February. Photo: Jukka Teräs

COLUMN by the Chair

MIKKO HUUSKONEN
Ministerial Counsellor, Chair of the Nordic thematic group on innovative and resilient regions.

You can reach Mikko at
mikko.huuskonen@tem.fi

IS THE NORDIC MODEL RESILIENT?

The thematic group for innovative and resilient regions is making headway. After two meetings, three project drafts are taking shape relating to resilience, smart specialisation and digitalisation as the main tools for regional development. All projects require conceptual definitions; sometimes we can use existing ones but we may also have to apply Nordic creativity in interpreting what these three terms mean in our specific Nordic context.

Smart specialisation: there is currently no overview of how the Nordic regions adapt and apply the smart specialisation concept to their strategies or how they are monitored or evaluated, let alone overviews of the differences in concepts. Consequently, there is significant potential for joint Nordic learning and comparisons in this area.

Digitalisation is high on the Nordic agenda: Nordic ministers signed a declaration on April 25 that sets ambitious goals for developing the Nordics into a pioneering region for new and innovative digital solutions. It is very likely that digitalisation will add new elements especially to regional policies, given that distance is no longer an obstacle in many services.

Resilience: what does it mean in the Nordic context? Is the Nordic model resilient? Is it more (or less) resilient than in other types of societies? The definition of resilience in the Nordic context is the first challenge for the thematic group to tackle and discussions have been intense. Since we have not excluded humour in these discussions, we have also had our share of laughs along the way. Above all, we are looking forward to an intellectual adventure where we can learn new ideas from each other, the Nordics, and not least from ourselves.■

YADID LEVY

City life in Copenhagen by Yadid Levy / Norden.org

NORDIC THEMATIC GROUP ON

SMALL, URBAN AND SUSTAINABLE

Globalisation and urbanisation, climate change and new demographics have profound consequences – not just for large cities and metropolitan areas that often receive the most attention – but also for small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities. In the coming years, the Nordic thematic group on sustainable cities and urban development will explore the specificities of small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities, and how they can be made more sustainable. The first question to be investigated will be: what are the activities currently ongoing in small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities? In addition, we will analyse what small- and medium-sized cities are and how they may be defined in a Nordic context. Can small, urban and sustainable be a winning combination?

BY LUKAS SMAS

LUKAS SMAS
Is a Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio specialised in urban and regional planning.

You can reach Lukas at
lukas.smas@nordregio.se

The challenges and potential for governing large Nordic city-regions and developing them toward greater sustainability were key concerns for the previous Nordic Working Group for Green Growth: Sustainable urban regions, which was active during 2013–2016. In the synthesis report, Towards Sustainable Nordic City-Regions (2016), some of the key challenges are highlighted; this report also indicates the potential for developing more sustainable urban regions through spatial planning and policy-making. Sustainability (social, economic and environmental) will continue to be a key issue for the new thematic group on sustainable cities and urban development. However, the main geographical focus will shift to small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities and their characteristics, in-line with the Nordic Cooperation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017–2020.

Policy and research themes

Many cities, irrespective of their size or location, struggle with facilitating economic growth while simultaneously trying to reduce their environmental impact, countering segregation, and creating attractive, inclusive urban environments. However, there are also unique challenges and potentials within small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities because of their local urban characteristics and socioeconomic conditions. These will be of key concern for the new thematic group, which will investigate this issue through different activities and projects over the next four years.

Some activities and projects will focus directly on the social aspects of sustainability, which implies placing strategies for integration, housing, gender equality and quality of life at the core of urban development. Other projects will focus on the practical challenges of developing urban policies that contribute to attractive and

PHOTOS: YADID LEVY NORDEN.ORG

sustainable urban environments in small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities. In the context of globalisation and urbanisation, there is also a need to ask fundamental questions about how urban and rural environments relate to one another, both as discursive categories and through material flow of people, goods, etc. The thematic group will also examine power relations in spatial planning; tensions between legitimacy and efficiency, where the challenge of combining democratically well-anchored inclusive planning processes with flexible market-oriented strategic planning processes are a key issue for further investigation.

Nordic added value

By focusing on social sustainability and spatial planning within small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities, the thematic group will contribute to the implementation of the cooperation programme. The objective of this programme is to increase knowledge about urban characteristics and socioeconomic conditions within small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities; it will also help improve governance practices for sustainable development in these cities based on their local urban characteristics and socioeconomic conditions. Furthermore, the group's projects and activities will deepen our understanding of the linkages and external relations (regional, national and global) of small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities, with a focus on urban-rural relations.

Implementing these projects at a Nordic policy-level, rather than a within a national context, clearly creates added value. The most explicit policy objective of the thematic group is to learn and spread knowledge about the characteristics of small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities. This approach will provide added value for members of the thematic group and Nordregio, as well as for our target groups: policy makers and civil servants in the Nordic region working with urban planning and regional development at local, regional and national authorities. Through an analysis of the local urban characteristics, socioeconomic conditions and external relations of small- and medium-sized Nordic and Arctic cities, the thematic group will also contribute to both planning and urban theory, as well as international urban planning practices. ■

PHOTO BY YADID LEVY

COLUMN by the Chair

UP FRONT WITH SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED NORDIC TOWNS

Increased knowledge about the urban characteristics and socio-economic conditions in small- and medium-sized towns in the Nordic region is needed. This knowledge will facilitate the improvement of governance practices for sustainable development and lead to a deeper understanding of the relations between urban and rural areas. Thus, the new four-year thematic group for sustainable towns and urban development will focus on these issues.

The Nordic region, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland, share factors that drive change, as well as opportunities and challenges. Economically, the Nordic region is performing well and growth is strong in several large urban areas. However, demographical change is a challenge. Society is ageing, and the age dependency ratio is increasing. In addition, we face the consequences of climate change, which encourage us to reduce CO2 emissions and adapt to new weather conditions. In small- and medium-sized Nordic towns, there is a need to resist segregation, create inclusive and resilient environments, leverage the potential of digitalisation toward developing smart cities, and overcome the divisions between towns and the surrounding countryside. Nordic countries have historically experienced similar urban development patterns and have similar planning and management strategies. However, there are also key differences both between and within Nordic countries, and lessons to be learned about urban and regional development.

Planning for smart growth in small- and medium-sized towns includes all aspects of sustainability (i.e., social, economic and environmental). To nourish natural and human resources across the Nordic countries, we need to create liveable and attractive small- and medium-sized cities that will benefit the entire region. ■

GURO VOSS GABRIELSEN
is Head of Analysis and Evaluation in the Department for Planning, Ministry of local government and modernisation, Norway.

You can reach Guro at
Guro-Voss.Gabrielsen@kmd.dep.no

PETER MOLTESEN
The Ministry of Business and Growth, The Danish Business Authority.

You can reach Peter at
PetMol@erst.dk

"THERE IS ALSO A GROWING DEMAND FOR RESEARCHERS TO BE COMMUNICATIVE AND BENEFICIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY. "

Photos from Nordregio Forum 2015 and 2016.

BE RELEVANT OR DIE! THE DIGITAL JOURNEY OF NORDREGIO

In 2009, Twitter was three years old and had roughly 20 million global users - compared to nearly 350 million today. This is just one example of the rapidly evolving digital age, which has impacted on how Nordregio communicates its work, and even how we do research. It takes more time and effort now, to feed all relevant channels and contribute to important stakeholder networks. But it also pays off as we have become more relevant for our target groups and have gotten more projects.

RYAN WEBER AND ÅSA STRÖM HILDESTRAND

Eight years ago, Nordregio's communication approach was very different from today. We produced a Journal of Nordregio, available quarterly and in print only – via snail mail. Our research results were mainly communicated in one of three ways: long reports and working papers, maps, and conferences or seminar presentations. These were, and still are, tried and tested approaches to communication – especially for academic audiences. But due to the growth of digital media, with an ever-increasing information flow, the evolving competition for peoples' valuable time and attention has meant that our communication work has had to evolve as well.

About five years ago, Nordregio began producing policy briefs. These summarize our project work and present results and policy implications for our main target audience - Nordic practitioners working in urban and regional policy and planning. Around the same time, the Journal of Nordregio was replaced by the online-based Nordregio News, which is distributed four times per year to over 2,000 recipients – in a more reader friendly format. Not that all recipients open it but we keep in touch – and readers can choose articles of interest.

Our digital efforts took us into a new dimension of mapping when we launched NordMap in early 2015. NordMap provides a digital collection of our maps and the ability for users to see e.g. demographic changes occur on screen in time play, find comparable regions or municipalities across the Nordics, and create customized maps for downloading or sharing on social media. Usability was a big challenge and still is as we now work on the 3.0 version.

We have also learned that maps go viral if they are topically timely. On April 28th, 2015 Nordregio made its first tweet. 641 tweets later we have 704 followers, and our "Maps of the moment" have inspired some lively Twitter discussions. As the adage goes, better late than never!

There is no doubt that digital forms of communication such as social media will continue to advance and influence our work in the future. There is also a growing demand for researchers to be communicative and beneficial to the development of society. We will work more to ensure that our research results can be spread through multiple communication mediums simultaneously. For example, we are currently developing a catalogue of good practices about the greening of social housing throughout Europe and globally. As a means of communicating the content by making the catalogue itself as visual as possible, we are using more image-based infographics that can be simultaneously shared via Twitter. These visuals allow us to get detailed messages across within the modern limit of 140 characters or less.

Still, digital communication lacks flesh and blood. It has its limitations when it comes to engaging with stakeholders and facilitating Nordic knowledge exchange and mutual learning – another important Nordregio objective. Hence, we developed a new, annual meeting place for our target groups, Nordregio Forum, in collaboration with the country chairing the Nordic Council of Ministers. It sure takes some stamina to pull it off every year, but we believe it pays off. It is an exercise in providing tangible take-aways for our audience based on knowledge, inspiration and Nordic and international contacts and examples. And we learn and improve the content and outline year by year.

Besides Nordregio Forum, we have increased our presence at recurrent meetings for regional actors, policy-makers and planners across the Nordics, on topics spanning from green growth and smart specialization to rural development, integration and social innovation. This is much supported by our Board. We simply need to be out there and be relevant for these target groups. Improving our presentation skills and workshop facilitation abilities has been part of the plan of becoming more confident hosts or co-host of events, with a broad range of partners: ministries, agencies, other Nordic organizations, NGOs and academia.

We are still researchers, just a bit more communicative. Our broad field of regional studies appears to be somewhat clearer now – as well as our brand and the grand principle of Nordic added value. ■

ÅSA STRÖM HILDESTRAND

Is a Head of Communications and Outreach at Nordregio specialised in regional development, networking and interactive meetings. Åsa is also a member of the Editorial Board of Nordregio News.

You can reach Åsa at
asa.hildestrand@nordregio.se

RYAN WEBER

Is a Senior Research Advisor at Nordregio specialised in territorial aspects of green growth policy, implementation of resource efficiency for metropolitan regions, urban environmental governance and analysis of patterns in land use and land use change in Europe. Ryan is also a member of the Editorial Board of Nordregio News

You can reach Ryan at
ryan.weber@nordregio.se

MAPS ARE OUR EXPERTISE:
MAKING DATA AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS COME TO LIFE

Fully aware of the development paths and the latest trends across the Nordic Region, Nordregio leads the way in mapping. Nordregio specialises in comparative statistical analysis of socio-economic indicators in three primary domains: demography, labour force and the economy. Demography encompasses data on general population structure, natural population change and net migration. Labour force statistics include data on the number of employed, unemployed and economically active persons, distinguished by both gender and age group, as well as data on educational attainment. In relation to the economy, gross regional product, R&D investments, bankruptcies and overnight stays are key regional indicators.

BY JULIEN GRUNFELDER

A large part of Nordregio's work in data gathering and analysis focuses on harmonising geodata published by national statistical institutes and making them comparable between municipalities and regions in the Nordic countries and beyond. Data gathering is the first stage in the mapping process and Nordregio is experienced in ensuring compatibility between multiple sources of data and developing indicators from these. The resultant harmonised thematic maps help regional planners to identify similarities, differences, threats and positive development paths across the Nordic regions. Visualisation of the geodata is achieved using two main cartographic techniques, namely traditional static maps and the more recently launched online web-mapping tool NordMap.

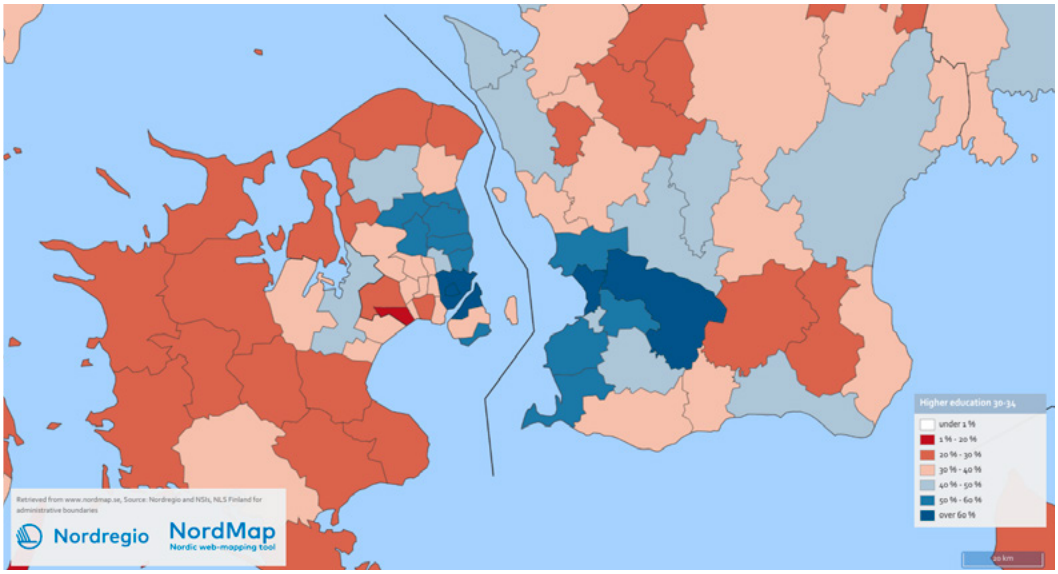
From data and static maps to an online mapping tool

Since the establishment of Nordregio in 1997, static maps have been the main means of illustrating and representing socio-economic indicators for the entire Nordic Region. These static maps are characterised by a fixed layout that includes all municipalities and regions of the Nordic Region. The number and boundaries of these change with each administrative reform. For example, in 1997, there were about 1,600 municipalities, but just 1,211 in 2017 (NB: sýsla for the Faroe Islands, corresponding to a regional level, instead of municipalities for comparison purposes). These changes require annual adjustments in Nordregio's database by adapting the data to the current administrative context.

Since 2015, Nordregio has complemented this traditional approach with NordMap, which gives users the opportunity to generate their own maps of the Nordic Region. First developed as an interactive monitoring tool for welfare and demography in the Nordic Region, NordMap now accommodates additional sets of indicators and has enhanced usability.

This interactive tool has its own website (www.nordmap.se), where anyone can produce a map highlighting a particular socio-economic indicator throughout the Nordic Region. NordMap offers an engaging, interactive user experience, thereby making our spatial data and research results more accessible and policy relevant. It includes a user-friendly, minimalist and responsive design that is accessible through many types of viewing devices. Furthermore, among other features, the tool allows the user to see changes over time, and classify municipalities and regions according to their value on the selected indicator. Another added value of NordMap is the opportunity to create, save and share a map with harmonised data of a chosen section of the Nordic Region. For instance, it is possible to create a map of the Öresund region and its surroundings by zooming in to this specific area. As an example, the map below shows the proportion of people aged 30–34 with higher education in the region. In creating such a map, the user can be confident that it is presenting harmonised data, that is, the definition of the indicator shown on the map is the same on both sides of the Öresund strait and is for the same year.

NordMap is constantly being updated on the basis of user experience and feedback, and will provide showcase maps for the State of the Nordic Region 2018 report to be launched in February 2018. ■



Map of the Öresund region showing the proportion of people aged 30–34 with higher education.

JULIEN GRUNFELDER
Senior Cartographer/GIS Analyst at Nordregio, specialised in GIS, cartography, traffic analysis and regional planning.

You can reach Julien at
julien.grunfelder@nordregio.se

NORDREGIO 20 YEARS

HALLGEIR AALBU

Interview with Hallgeir Aalbu, Director of Nordregio 1997–2005, currently Director-General at the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation

You were Nordregio's first director. What was your background?
I had previously worked for the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and within research and research administration in Norway and Scotland, including seven years as Managing Director for the research institute Nordlandsforskning in Bodø. The family moved to Stockholm from Glasgow, where I was Visiting Professor at the European Policies Research Centre at Strathclyde University.

How do you remember the first years of Nordregio? What was its vision back then?
Nordregio's vision was to be a leading Nordic institute for applied research on regional development and planning. Our specific profile was comparative studies, initially with a Nordic focus and later increasingly European.

The first task was to establish the way this new institute should work with respect to both the topics (regional development and planning) and the activities (educational courses, applied research, dissemination/publications). Nordregio was to work with the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) as an owner and also as a client. After a couple of years, about two-thirds of the income came from other clients in Europe and the Nordics. All the work was organised in projects, including that part funded by the NCM. We established routines for project and economic management, including systems for time registration at project level and how to invoice clients.

The most important initial task was of course to develop a way to work and to recruit staff who were interested in European comparative research in our field. Luckily, a significant number of staff members from the three predecessors joined, despite the offices in Helsinki and Copenhagen closing down. We built upon the statistical database and the mapping skills from Helsinki, and Nordregio was already producing a journal from the start. Moreover, we could soon benefit from new staff members from other Nordic countries and elsewhere.

Which projects were the most memorable for you and why?
We started working in 1997. Soon after that, we successfully won the contract to manage the pilot phase of ESPON (the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion), now part of the objective of European Territorial Cooperation. It was in a pilot phase for almost two years, during which we established a European network of researchers and consultants.

The ESPON pilot project was probably the single most important event that had the largest impact later. It provided insight into European regional policy and spatial planning, and fostered excellent relations with the European Commission as well as with researchers in all European countries. The networks we established in 1988–1999 gave Nordregio a competitive advantage when ESPON was set up, and also when we tendered for other European contracts. It was also through this work that we experienced the need for language skills and research experience from countries other than the Nordics.

From the start of ESPON, Nordregio was one of the largest participants, both at Lead Partner and as Partner in projects managed by others. I believe that our unique set-up – as a public-sector institute but still small enough to be efficiently managed – made Nordregio an attractive partner to co-operate with.

The biggest contract in these early years was with DG Regio in the European Commission, concerning a mountain policy for Europe. At that time, Romania and Bulgaria had been accepted as applicants to become members of the EU, and were to be included in the project. Naturally, DG Regio commissioned a study of only EU members and applicants. But a mountain study without Switzerland, Norway and Iceland would be incomplete, so we got additional contracts with these three countries. As part of this work, for the first time in Europe, we collected municipal-level data from 128,000 municipalities. The contract was worth about 1 million euros, which is a lot of man-hours to be delivered in a very short time. I informed the Nordregio Board of Directors about our successful bid at their next meeting, and I was met by a question I didn't anticipate: "how do you manage the risks of taking on such a large project?" I had never thought about that, since I had confidence in the skills of our own staff and our partners. And the project was a success, which is of course also the best risk management.

Have you noticed what kind of impact and to what extent Nordregio's recommendations have had on regional policy-making over the years in the Nordic countries?
Policy development is usually a lengthy process, and there is a range of different inputs. Policies build upon a narrative, a story that describes the challenges and points the way forward. Comparative studies are valuable in this context, since they may sometimes change the way we look at the challenges. They may also contribute to the discussion of possible solutions by highlighting how other countries have dealt with similar issues.

It is always difficult to trace the path from research to policy, and to identify the impact of a single report or piece of evidence. But international studies – both Nordic and European – are becoming more important over time.

However, there is a conflicting tendency operating in parallel; policy development is increasingly concerned with politics and less about empirical evidence. Political handicraft is of course a combination of ideology and compromise, and research will not necessarily play any significant role in the decision-making.

How do you wish to see Nordregio develop in the next few years?
I hope Nordregio can continue their excellent analyses of regional development. Nordregio's maps are very visible and a trademark for the institute, and are found in almost every presentation of regional development; I see them everywhere.

The more difficult task is to analyse and characterise the policies of different countries. This is always challenging for researchers, even in a domestic context, and of course even more so when it comes to comparative studies. This is a field where it may be possible to develop unique knowledge and a competitive edge.

I would also like to see Nordregio competing more often for contracts within Norway and the other Nordic countries, as this will improve the usefulness of the valuable work done at Skeppsholmen and in your international networks. ■

THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION OF EUROPE'S FUTURE – VENI, VIDI, …

KAI BÖHME
is director of Spatial Foresight GmbH. He specialises in European regional and territorial research and policies, international comparative studies in the fields of regional development policies, spatial planning, and in the territorial impacts of sector policies.

You can reach Kai at
kai.boehme@spatialforesight.eu

ERIK GLØERSEN
is a senior consultant and director of the Paris located subsidiary Spatial Foresight France. His work focuses on European territorial policies and the analysis of social and economic trends at the regional and local scales.

You can reach Erik at erik.gloersen@spatialforesight.eu

MARIA TOPTSIDOU
is a junior consultant at Spatial Foresight GmbH since spring 2013. She has in-depth knowledge of European spatial planning, territorial cooperation and macro-regional strategies.

You can reach Maria at
maria.toptsidou@spatialforesight.eu

Building up from scratch

The development of Nordregio is closely interlinked with the development of a territorial policy for Europe. Indeed, the first publication by Nordregio in 1998 was 'The Progress of European Spatial Planning (1998:1)' (Bengs and Böhme, 1998) and related to the first conference organised by Nordregio on that topic. Shortly afterwards, Nordregio won its first EU contract. It involved co-ordination of the Study Programme on European Spatial Planning, the test phase of which is known today as ESPON. This was the glorious beginning and many more Nordregio conferences, projects and publications on European spatial planning and European territorial development were to follow.

These were not only the first steps of Nordregio. It was also the time when European spatial planning and territorial policies emerged and developed. The first milestones were the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) published in 1999 and the setting up of ESPON. It may be difficult to believe, but major European policy documents, which today contain detailed maps of the situation in Europe and analysis at regional level as standard, did not do so back then. Indeed, knowledge of the European territory and its development was at best fragmented. In the process of drafting the ESDP, large gaps were discovered in the availability and comparability of spatially relevant data, and the need for more knowledge and information on territorial issues at European level was repeatedly felt (see Nordregio, 2000: 3).

Together with partners and clients across Europe, Nordregio has worked hard to make the territorial dimension come alive. The fruits of this work can still be seen in the strong position of ESPON and the widespread use of comparable European territorial information and maps in various policy debates from the regional to the European level.

Moving towards a non-territorial future for the EU?

Despite the efforts to create territorial policies during the 1990s, it seems that the 'Territorial Matters! Movement' has recently been losing momentum, and the importance of the European context and the territorial dimension has been pushed aside. This can be observed most prominently in the EU Commission White Paper on the future of the EU (European Commission, 2017), which lacks any kind of territorial consideration, although the scenarios discussed in the White Paper have substantial territorial implications.

We need a debate about complementing the five scenarios outlined in the EU White Paper with coherent territorial scenarios to allow us to talk about the future that we want. The territorial balance within Europe and the development challenges and opportunities of regions and cities differ between the scenarios.

All five scenarios have different territorial implications. In the first scenario ('Carrying On'), territorial imbalances are likely to remain the way we know them now. They may even deepen as metropolitan areas thrive. In scenario 2 ('Nothing but the Single Market'), disparities between EU Member States will increase. They are also likely to develop between regions, at least in less affluent Member States. These increasing disparities are not only of an economic and social nature, but also involve environmental concerns. In scenario 3 ('Those Who Want More, Do More'), it seems that we will have a multi-speed Europe based on different functional geographies. Disparities will increase between EU core areas with shared rules, e.g., in the social and environmental fields, and one or several EU fringes defining their own norms. In scenario 4 ('Doing Less, More Efficiently'), we may see decreasing socio-economic disparities between Member States. However, within countries, disparities between regions may decrease or increase depending on national policies. Finally, in scenario 5 ('Doing Much More Together'), high levels of cohesion between Member States are accompanied by the risk of increasing disparities between regions. Those who have the best European connections will take advantage of enhanced integration. The effects of these five scenarios are discussed in further detail in the Spatial Foresight brief, 'The Future of Europe and its Territories' (Böhme and Toptsidou, 2017).

We need to consider the possible impacts of European futures on economic, social and territorial cohesion. Territorial impact assessments of each scenario are therefore indispensable ingredients in a meaningful debate. To have a coherent debate on the future and to understand better the social and political dimensions of Europe, the visions for the EU should reflect both institutional and territorial futures. Forthcoming discussions and policy debates on the White Paper and its scenarios ought to include territorial impact assessments at EU level. It is clear that there is a need for further research and dedicated use of the available pan-European territorial knowledge and indicators.

Keep up the hard work

Nordregio has done great pioneering work in supporting the establishment of European spatial planning and analysis during the past two decades. However, this is no time to sit back and relax. As the leading Nordic and European research centre for regional development and planning, Nordregio needs to continue its good work and support forward-looking policies in acknowledging the territorial dimension and making best use of it. In short, more spatial foresight is needed in territorial policy design. ■

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POPULATION TRENDS IN THE NORDIC REGION

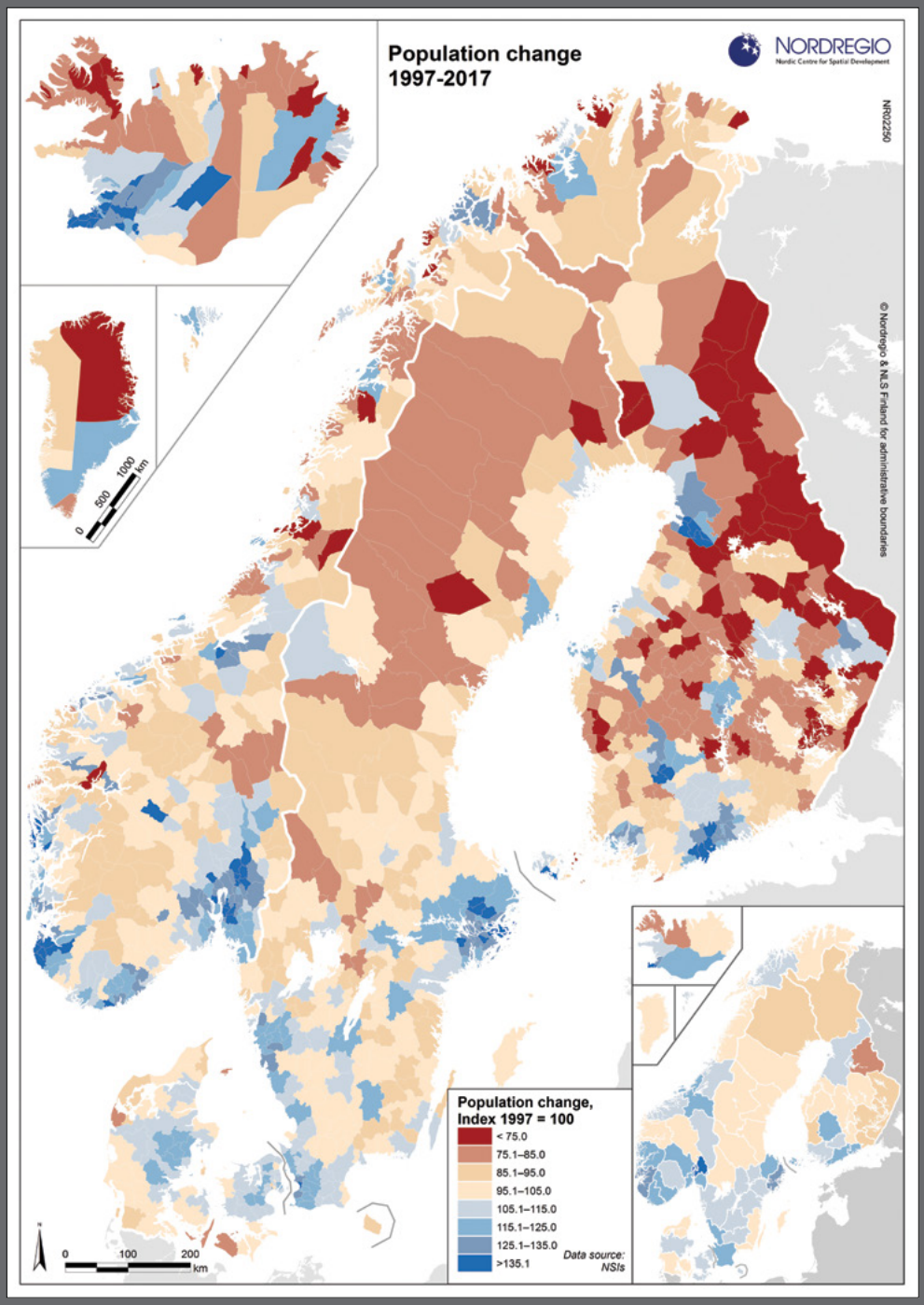
During the last two decades, the Nordic Region has experienced significant regional- and local-level demographic changes due to international and domestic migration. Nordregio analyses of the major trends and challenges resulting from these phenomena are illustrated with a map showing 20 years of change.

BY JULIEN GRUNFELDER

The Nordic Region population increased by three million inhabitants between 1997 and 2007, from 24 million to nearly 27 million. The map shows indexed population change between 1997 and 2017 in municipalities (main map) and regions (map inset, lower-right corner). Observed unbalanced population change is of particular interest in the context of regional and municipal development. The different rates of population change between urban and rural areas present a challenge to maintaining services and quality of life in both growing and declining regions. ■

With an index of 100 during 1997 (i.e. using this year as reference), the Nordic region population reached an index value of 112 in 2017. In comparison, the 2017 index value for the European Union was 106, highlighting the relatively significant Nordic region demographic growth within the European context. However, this demographic trend is not uniform across the Nordic region; both regional and municipal patterns can be identified.

Red and blue represent directions of population change; red indicates decrease and blue indicates increase in the total number of inhabitants in each municipality and region between 1997 and 2017 (again, using 1997 as the index value). Light beige represents the municipalities and regions with a stable population level during these 20 years, with index values varying from 95 to 105.



JULIEN GRUNFELDER

Senior Cartographer/GIS Analyst at Nordregio, specialised in GIS, cartography, traffic analysis and regional planning.

You can reach Julien at
julien.grunfelder@nordregio.se

THE MAP CLEARLY SHOWS TWO SPATIAL PATTERNS OF POPULATION CHANGE

The first spatial pattern is at the regional level and shows opposite trends between the south and north. The southern regions are characterised by population increase between 1997 and 2017 (with the exceptions of two regions in Denmark and three in Sweden). In contrast, the northern regions are characterised by population decrease. Note that Iceland has a regional spatial pattern similar to that of the general Nordic Region, with positive trends in the south-west and negative in the north-east.

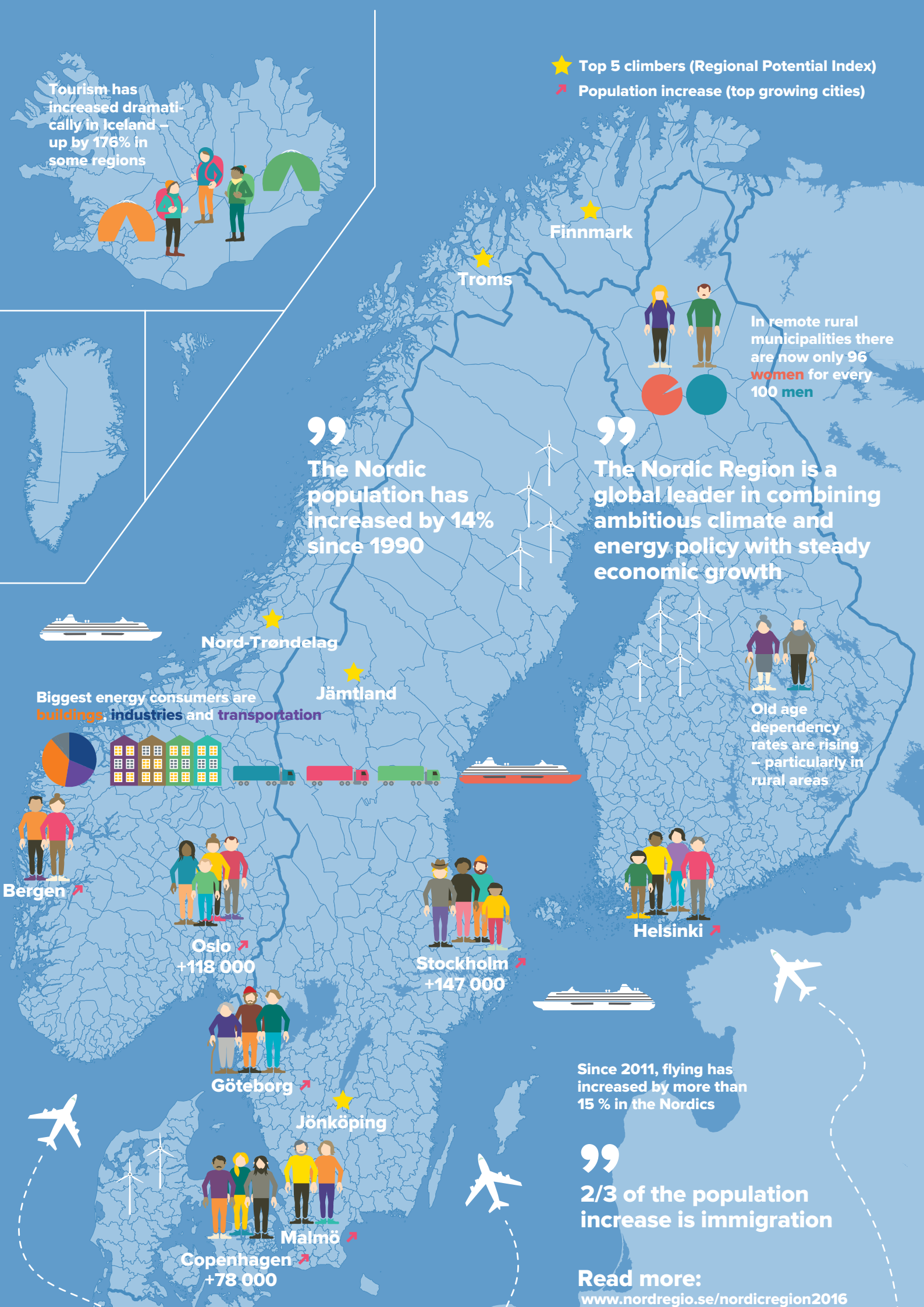
DIFFERENCES AT MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

The second spatial pattern is at the municipal level. The Nordic regions with the highest increases are the capital cities of Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Suðurnes, southeast of Reykjavik, Iceland, is growing the most rapidly: from 15,655 inhabitants in 1997 to 23,993 in 2017. The municipalities with the most significant increases are the capital city areas of Iceland, Norway, and Finland. The municipality with the highest growth index is Mosfellsbær, near Reykjavik, and Ullensaker, a Norwegian municipality 40 km north of Oslo.

The regions with the most significant population index decreases are in Iceland and Finland. Vestfirðir, Iceland, lost the largest share of its population compared with other Nordic regions, decreasing from 8,759 inhabitants in 1997 to 6,870 in 2017. The municipalities with the largest population decreases are in Iceland and Finland (except for Kommuneqarfiit avataanni in Greenland). The municipality of Árneshreppur in Iceland had the most marked population decrease; it is also the site of the largest decrease compared with other Nordic municipalities.

These patterns of higher population growth in larger, urban areas across the Nordic Region can be explained by these locations' higher economic and labour market growth, greater educational opportunities, and other urban life attractions. Urbanisation patterns taking place in the Nordic Region are similar to those in most developed and developing regions around the world.

Methodological considerations: Faroe Islands data is from 2016. ■


Top 5 climbers (Regional Potential Index)
Population increase (top growing cities)
Tourism has increased dramatically in Iceland – up by 176% in some regions
Finnmark
Troms
In remote rural municipalities there are now only 96 women for every 100 men
The Nordic population has increased by 14% since 1990
The Nordic Region is a global leader in combining ambitious climate and energy policy with steady economic growth
Nord-Trøndelag
Jämtland
Biggest energy consumers are buildings, industries and transportation
Old age dependency rates are rising – particularly in rural areas
Bergen
Oslo
+118 000
Stockholm
+147 000
Helsinki
Göteborg
Jönköping
Since 2011, flying has increased by more than 15 % in the Nordics
2/3 of the population increase is immigration
Malmö
Copenhagen
+78 000
Read more:
www.nordregio.se/nordicregion2016

Some of the findings of the Regional Potential Index illustrated by Suomidesign.

MEASURING REGIONAL POTENTIAL:

WHICH REGIONS ARE AMONG THE TOP CLIMBERS AND WHICH HAVE DROPPED THE MOST?

Every other year, Nordregio produces a comprehensive report: State of the Nordic Region, to draw on the latest development trends at the national, regional and municipal level. It presents an analysis of demographic changes, labour market trends, education, economic performance, and developments in themes such as digitalisation and the bioeconomy based on the latest available statistics. For the first time in 2016, State of the Nordic Region included a Regional Potential Index, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the 74 Nordic Regions in relation to one another, and identifying the regions with the strongest growth potential. The Regional Potential Index spread widely in the media, sparking interest in the analysis behind the data: Why is a certain region performing so well when a neighbouring region might be sinking in the ranking?

Oslo emerged as the winner of the ranking, followed by the other capital regions. We also witnessed some promising development outside the obvious urban areas, for example, the thriving city of Tromsø in Northern Norway.

The aim of Nordregio's Regional Potential Index is to show the current performance of Nordic regions, to highlight regions with high potential for future development and to identify regions in need of further support. The index is also helpful in pinpointing common denominators of regions that are doing well and determining the focus of policy measures to strengthen the potential of regions facing challenges. So, what makes a region successful?

Some of the regions succeeded in the index due to their adaptiveness to new labour markets, by staying appealing to young people and offering jobs and education. Others have seen declines in their gross regional product and working age population due, at least in part, to structural changes in the industry. Some particularly strong results can be seen from regions with industries, businesses and services related to oil and gas extraction. Denmark and Iceland have a large proportion of regions with high regional growth potential. In Sweden and Finland the domestic variation between the strongest and weakest regions is greater. In the south-east of Sweden, most regions scored relatively poorly. In Finland, the eastern and northern regions received the lowest rankings. All the maps showing the regional changes by themes are available at NordMap, which also displays the change over time when using time play feature (www.nordmap.se). ■

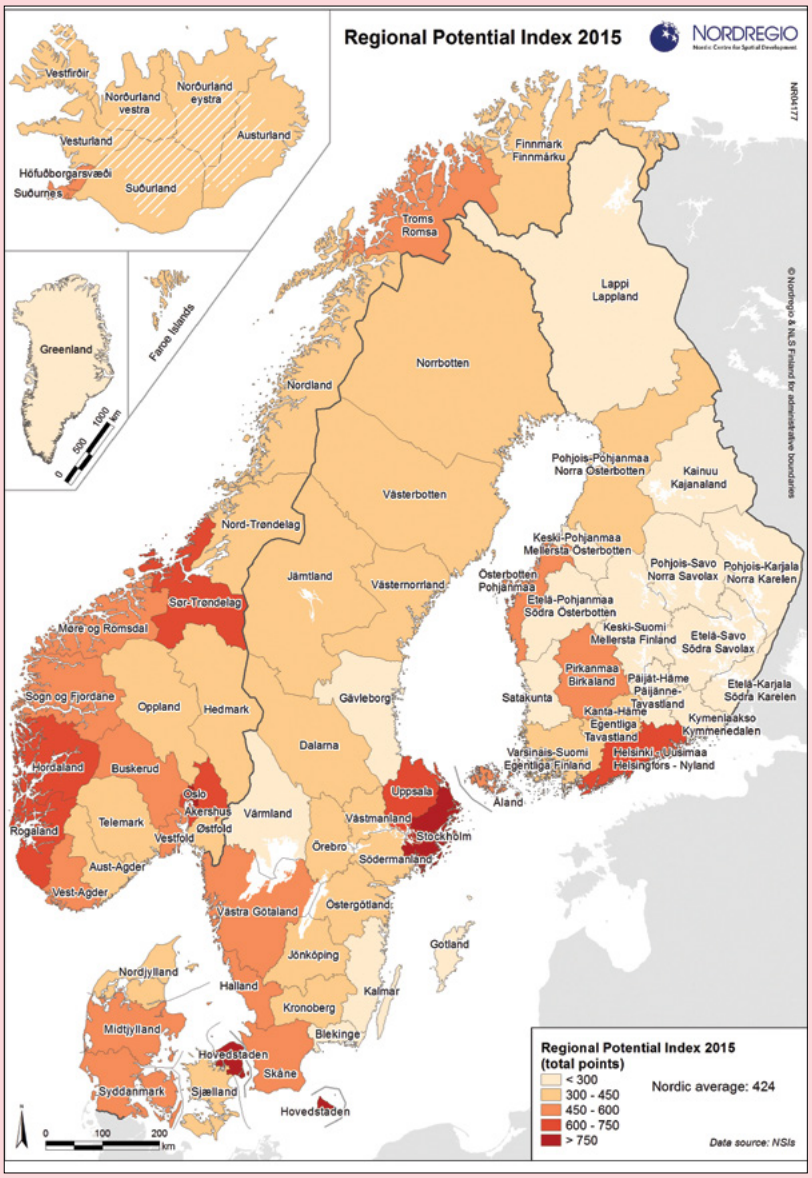
PIPSA SALOLAMMI

Is working as Senior Communication Advisor at Nordregio, with a special focus on easy access, understandable and visualized information.

You can reach Pipsa
pipsa.salolammi@nordregio.se

REGIONAL POTENTIAL INDEX 2015 -WINNERS AND LOSERS

The Regional Potential Index is made of 9 indicators covering demographic potential (population density, net migration rate, demography dependency rate and female ratio), labour market potential (employment rate, share of the age group 25-64 with high education degree, youth unemployment rate) and economic potential (GRP/capita and total R&D investments).



The ranking is available at the Nordregio website: www.nordregio.se/nordicregion2016 and in NordMap. The next State of the Nordic Region will be launched in February 2018, so stay tuned to find out how your region is performing in the next ranking!

INTEGRATION COLLABORATION PROGRAMME

IMMIGRATION IS THE FUTURE FOR RURAL REGIONS

– BUT IT TAKES MORE THAN A JOB TO MAKE PEOPLE STAY

HELENA LAGERCRANTZ AND ÅSA STRÖM HILDESTRAND

PHOTO BY ODDRUN MIDTBØ.

PHOTOS OF EMILA AND AMINU BY NANCY APONNO AND JONAS MODIN.

”WHERE I LIVE IS LESS IMPORTANT, I HAVE TWO HANDS AND TWO FEET AND I AM HEALTHY SO I WANT TO WORK.”

AMINU IS A 41-YEAR-OLD FRENCH-LANGUAGE TEACHER FROM GHANA WHO IMMIGRATED TO SWEDEN IN 2010.

The successful integration of immigrants has become one of the top current issues for Nordic policymakers, partly because of recent refugee flows, but also since many Nordic regions need more inhabitants to fill labour market needs and contribute to the tax base. Nordregio is analysing these population trends, with an increased focus on integration as a strategy for regional growth. In practical terms, the question is how can local authorities ensure that newcomers feel welcome and meaningful enough that they want to stay? There are several evident responses to this. For example, being seen and appreciated as a person – at work and in the community – is a basic human need; this is true whether you are a native or a refugee. Yet the meaning of the concept of “integration” is debated, and is often elusive and sometimes contradictory. “Integration” is based on “us and them” even though we share basic human needs.

Between 2011 and 2016, 40 per cent of Nordic municipalities experienced a population decrease. This means that politicians in these predominantly rural municipalities face a dilemma: How are they able to offer citizens good municipal services with consistent quality on a decreasing tax base? Many municipalities already struggle to recruit workers in health care, schools and welfare. Since those who leave are often of working and child-raising age, this challenge accumulates over time. In addition to the fact that the municipality’s economy is constrained, the negative population development also means increasing difficulties for local businesses to find qualified labour, which in turn hampers their growth potential. To meet these challenges, municipalities need immigrants such as Aminu, Yvonne and Emila, who are willing to live and work in smaller communities, if they get the additional language skills and training required – and if they get included in the local social networks. Statistics reveal the potential: Between 2011 and 2016, 26 per cent of Nordic municipalities grew thanks to international immigration.

From Malmö to Kalix to get a first job

Aminu is a 41-year-old French-language teacher from Ghana who immigrated to Sweden in 2010. He lived for a while in Malmö, but chose to move to Kalix. Why did he move? Aminu says that the most important factor for him was a job. ”Where I live is less important, I have two hands and two feet and I am healthy so I want to work.”

In Kalix, he had the opportunity to attend a nursing education programme for individuals wanting to work in health care but who do not have Swedish as a first language. “One of the strengths of the programme was that I could improve my Swedish skills while I got the vocational training, which in turn made it easier for me to find a job afterwards,” Aminu explains.

Aminu’s story is consistent with current research showing that municipalities that view new arrivals as resources, and in which there is good co-operation between responsible local actors, see more newcomers remain in their community. In practice, these municipalities often employ a co-ordinator as a link

between newcomers and employment services, education resources, employers, businesses and civil society, thereby shortening the path to employment.

Networks and friends build a sense of belonging

Yvonne is a 41-year-old who fled to Norway from Burundi in 2007. Today she lives with her two children in Vestlandet. Her life story includes many fears and concerns, but in recent years, she has added joy and pride: joy with the friends in her village and pride about her job as a high-level executive officer in a business department.

"To participate in society, contribute and not least make Norwegian friends, that's what makes me feel at home here in northern Norway," Yvonne says. She is a member of the local Red Cross chapter and enjoys going on mountain trips with her friends. "I'm obviously on my way to becoming a proper Norwegian," she says laughing.

Yvonne says she felt welcome in the municipality from the start, thanks in large part to the local civil society. Her involvement in the Red Cross quickly gave her a sense of community and a meaningful everyday life. Recent Nordic studies show that civil society plays a key role, not only socially, but it is also an effective way of providing new arrivals with a path to employment. Up to 70 per cent of all jobs are communicated through personal contacts. Immigrants who have native friends and participate in local organisations often have higher rates of employment than those lacking a social network.

Working is just one piece of the integration puzzle

Language skills and social networks are key factors to accessing the Nordic labour market. A third success factor is creating a good match between newcomer competencies and local labour market needs. However, having a job does not mean that newcomers automatically learn the language or gain access to the local community.

Emila is a 29 year-old who came from Bosnia to Närpes, Finland as a labour migrant in 2008. She is married and has three children. After a few years working at a plant nursery, Emila had to quit because she had allergies. In 2015, she began studying Swedish, and then began a course to become a Certified Nurse Assistant. "It was my youngest boy who influenced me to become a nurse assistant. He was born with cleft lip and palate, so I was with him at the hospital all the time, through several surgeries," explains Emila.

Although Emila and her husband both found jobs, it was not as easy to integrate into the native social net-

Yvonne and her children. Photo: Oddrun Midtbø.

HELENA LAGERCRANTZ

Is Communications Generalist and Project Manager in the Integration Programme. She is specialised in disability rights and mental health among young people.

You can reach Helena at
helena.lagercrantz@nordregio.se

ÅSA STRÖM HILDESTRAND

Is a Head of Communications and Outreach at Nordregio specialised in regional development, integration, networking and interactive meetings. Åsa is also a member of the Editorial Board of Nordregio News.

You can reach Åsa at
asa.hildestrand@nordregio.se

FROM MIGRANTS TO WORKERS, NORDREGIO WORKING PAPER 2017:5
http://www.nordregio.se/en/Publications/

TEMAHEFTE: INNVANDRING, INKLUDERING, SYSSELSETTING OG LOKAL UTVIKLING, DISTRIKTSSENTERET:
https://distriktssenteret.no/2017/02/17/temahefte-innvandring-inkludering-sysselsetting-lokal-utvikling/

works of the community. "It is easier to hang out with fellow migrants. But then you don't learn the language and you make very few native friends. The municipality offers language classes, but they are often in the evening and many people are so tired after the long working days that they drop out."

"IT WAS MY YOUNGEST BOY WHO INFLUENCED ME TO BECOME A NURSE ASSISTANT. HE WAS BORN WITH CLEFT LIP AND PALATE, SO I WAS WITH HIM AT THE HOSPITAL ALL THE TIME, THROUGH SEVERAL SURGERIES"

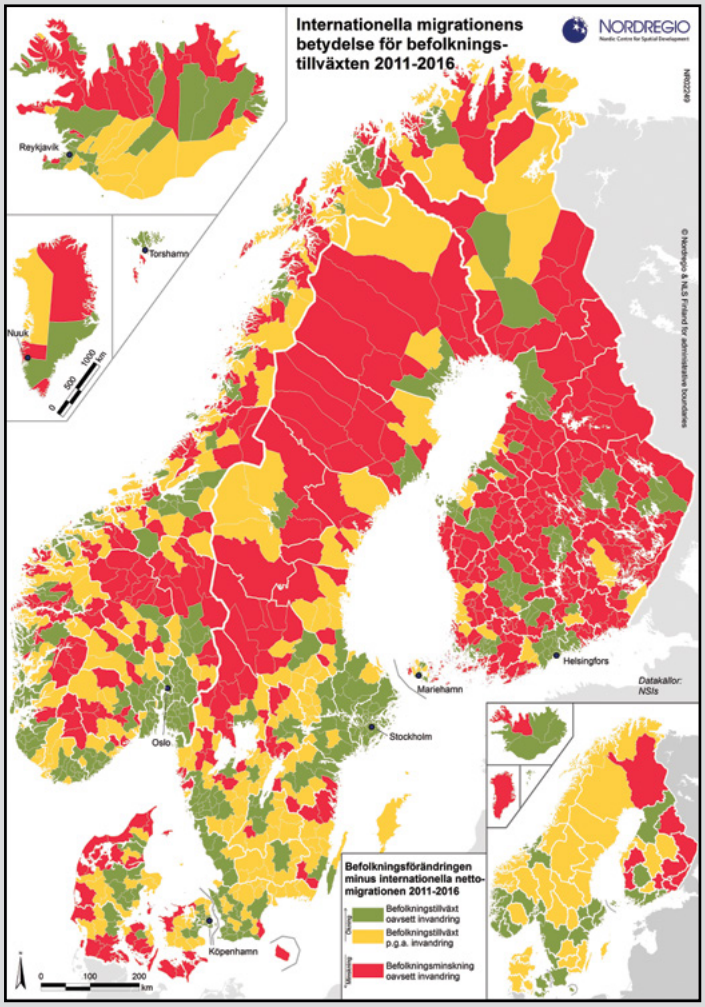
EXPLAINS EMILA

Emila thus highlights what is a significant challenge for many communities in the Nordic region that receive labour migrants. If social integration is not improved by stimulating labour migrants to learn the local language and become part of social networks and civil society organisations, permanent exclusion may result.

When differences become similarities

As stated above, statistics show that ongoing immigration is needed to sustain the ageing Nordic population. We need more people, especially in our rural regions, to make up the football teams, take care of the elderly, act in amateur theatres, build houses, teach children and give birth to new Nordics. For this to happen, we need to listen to and learn from Aminu, Yvonne, Emila and other immigrants. Although at first we may tend to focus on differences between "them" and "us", after a few years, differences can turn into similarities, which is when we realise that the everyday pleasures and difficulties are the same here as there. That is when we come to see that our basic human needs – to be seen and needed – are indeed human and universal. ■

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TO POPULATION GROWTH 2011-2016



In June 2016, the Ministers for Nordic Collaboration established a new collaboration programme for the effective integration and inclusion of refugees and immigrants into Nordic countries. The programme is run by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Welfare Centre through 2018 and aims to increase the efficiency of Nordic integration practices. Nordregio's role is to develop and present current data, comparative analyses, maps and examples of "good practice" from Nordic regions and municipalities on a new website managed by the Nordic Welfare Centre: www.integrationnorden.org

The interviews in this article were taken from the report Röster från immigranter i Norden – om att bli en del av samhället (Voices from immigrants in the Nordic region – On becoming part of society). A total of 26 people were interviewed in February–March 2017 with the goal of collecting and learning from examples about integration efforts that, from the immigrants' perspective, had a bearing on their becoming established in their respective Nordic countries. In addition to the report, a selection of movie clips from the interviewees' stories is available at www.integrationNorden.org. ■

SUSTAINABLE NORDIC CITIES URBANIZATION CHALLENGES

Worldwide, cities are growing rapidly; half the global population now lives in cities and 66% is projected to live in urban areas by 2050 (UN, DESA, 2015). Between 2014 and 2050, a population growth of 2.5 billion urban dwellers is expected, with approximately 90% of it taking place in Asian and African cities (UN, DESA, 2015). While cities have proven to be powerful drivers of economic growth, they have also become sources of problems.

BY LUCIANE AGUIAR BORGES

LUCIANE AGUIAR BORGES

is a Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio with a PhD in Planning and Decision Analysis with specialization in Urban and Regional Studies.

You can reach Luciane at
luciane.aguiar.borges@nordregio.se

Seventy-five per cent of natural resources are consumed in cities, which also account for 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions (UN, 2011). In addition, crime, homelessness, youth unemployment, social unrest and segregation of vulnerable groups are challenges that generally occur in urban environments. Thus, rapid urban growth is accompanied by patterns that cannot be sustained into the future. One of the most significant challenges – from a global perspective – is to create sustainable environments for a rapidly expanding urban population. This means shifting our understanding of cities as mere consequences of growth, to thinking of them as opportunities for responding to and resolving environmental and social challenges.

Nordregio and Nordic Innovation oversee the task of investigating Nordic solutions to urban problems. While Nordregio is responsible for telling stories about sustainable initiatives in Nordic cities, Nordic Innovation will explore the potential for exporting Nordic solutions to other markets.

Waiting for the bus in Copenhagen. Photo: Yadid Levy / Norden.org

Cities in the Nordic region

Despite the problems and challenges within Nordic cities, they perform well in many aspects of urban sustainability. What positive examples can Nordic cities provide? One is Copenhagen, which has established ambitious targets for becoming carbon neutral in the near future (Copenhagen Climate Plan,2009). Another is Oslo, which will have a car-free city centre by 2019, as a strategy for slashing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, new building codes, product requirements, and eco product labelling, as well as innovative tax and incentive schemes, have been created and implemented in the Nordic region. These efforts set high standards for energy efficiency and push technological developments, increasing social awareness and leading to alternative solutions to various urban challenges.

Efforts towards sustainable urban futures have also been mirrored in policies at different levels. Supporting a shared story about Nordic Sustainable City, the Nordic Council of Ministers has brought together those with expertise in sustainable solutions to urban environments from across the Nordic countries and territories. Beyond creating a communication platform, exchanging knowledge, sharing norms and values, and developing trust and commitment between various actors, this initiative may also generate synergies between sectors and influence the development of innovative sustainable urban solutions.

The strong tradition of co-operation in the Nordic region extends to other levels. Cross-sectorial, triple-helix collaborations have been firmly established for many years in Nordic countries. Creative solutions and the ability to link different actors involved in specific processes are major characteristics that have enabled the Nordic region to become an innovation leader. For example, Citybusiness in Finland is a partnership that led to six major cities enabling companies' use of public data to develop digital interfaces that advance competences in various fields (e.g. public participation, urban mobility, and services exchange). This has created opportunities for companies to innovate, develop, and test new products, while the public sector and communities benefit from solutions that facilitate everyday life and make cities more efficient.

Community gardening in Helsinki. Photo by Benjamin Suomela / Norden.org

Symbiosis between individual behaviour and environmental consciousness is supported by urban policies and initiatives that enable sustainable solutions. In Copenhagen, for example, cycling is encouraged by providing bike paths that stretch long distances in different directions, and in Helsinki, platforms for collaborative consumption and efficient mobility are becoming popular.

Thus, Nordic cities are developing a set of initiatives, policies, tools, and instruments that hold the potential to offer solutions to sustainability challenges. In telling a common urban story, communicating good practices, and sharing experiences, Nordic cities may contribute to UN Sustainable Development Goal 11: 'Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'.

Exporting co-created knowledge

The standards achieved by some Nordic cities are the result of long-standing processes. Fifteen years ago, Copenhagen Harbour posed public health risks due to environmental degradation. Political willingness, environmental awareness, and technology were the driving forces behind transforming this area from a polluted industrial port to a vibrant public space where people enjoy nature in the city centre. Despite having overcome challenges, Nordic cities will probably face many others in the near future, especially in relation to a changing climate and demography.

Thus, the process of exporting Nordic solutions is a remarkable opportunity to co-create knowledge about sustainability with and in different socio-economic and political contexts. Exploring the viability of implementing Nordic solutions in different circumstances will probably require negotiation and adjustments of the 'Nordic way', which should be done to account for other cultures' distinct social practices, institutional settings, and informal values. Understanding different urban realities will also inform and help Nordic cities prepare for future uncertainties.

Despite challenges, exporting Nordic solutions may be an enlightening process, in which cities with different preconditions can learn from each other, while attempting to minimize urban environmental and social problems. Such exchange and knowledge adaptation comprise a fundamental requirement for achieving more sustainable global urban futures.

Currently, 14 researchers from Nordregio with interdisciplinary expertise (e.g. in mobility, bio-economy, innovation, planning, digitalization, circular economy, and climate change adaptation) are investigating sustainable practices now used in Nordic cities. The story of the Nordic Sustainable City will be launched on 26–28 September during a conference at the Nordic Edge Expo 2017 in Stavanger, Norway. ■

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ARCTIC CHANGE **IS ON THE RADAR**

The Nordic countries comprise five of the eight Arctic nations, and the development of the Nordic Arctic region is an important inspiration for many of the other regions in the Circumpolar Arctic. Over the past 20 years, there has been increased Nordic co-operation in the attention paid to these areas, and it is likely that the rapid changes now becoming the norm in Arctic societies will foster a continued focus on their development.

BY LENEISJA JUNGSBERG AND ANNA KARLSDOTTÌR

Life on an island in the Faroe Islands. Photo by Pipsa Salolammi

Nordic actions are important for the Arctic

In 2002, the Advisory Expert Committee was established, consisting of members of the Arctic Council and representatives from the autonomous territories. The Arctic Expert Committee functions as an advisory unit to the Ministers for Co-operation and assists on matters related to the Arctic.

The Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) has supported Arctic co-operation since 1996 and in 2009 Nordregio became the administrator of the Nordic Arctic Co-operation Programme on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In 2013, the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R) put the Arctic on its agenda by establishing a working group for sustainable regional development in the Arctic. The primary aim of this working group was to initiate a thorough study that would provide input to the regional planners and policy makers in the Nordic Arctic. The researchers were assigned to collect, process and analyse the existing information, and to evaluate various assumptions concerning the future. Among the conclusions of the work carried out is the projected impact of future demographic changes by 2040 is such that future population composition in smaller and larger towns will determine future business and occupational development. The proportion of youth in the population plays an especially important role because the active age group in the workforce (19–65 years) is likely to shrink, with only a few regional exceptions.

Migration creates growth

More regions in the Nordic Arctic have experienced population stability because of positive net migration, rather than natural growth based on birth and death rates. This underlines the importance of newcomers from foreign countries, who could potentially join the labour force. An important part of this immigration trend is to continue to strengthen social cohesion by building social capital to utilize the opportunities of the bioeconomy and the sustainable extraction of natural resources.

A theme emphasized by those 12 communities that took part in the Foresight Analysis was the need to ensure a more diversified labour market and to reduce dependency on a single economic sector. Value creation in the Nordic Arctic countries is mostly based on the extraction of natural resources, which often dominates other occupations, but opportunities for knowledge-, service- and creativity-based industries could blossom. New financial instruments are evolving with increased awareness that multifunctionality needs to thrive in the north, and that there are exciting opportunities to develop emerging from the Arctic. They have been initiated by private investors such as Guggenheim Partners, the World Economic Forum Arctic Investment Protocol, the European Investment Bank, and by public development programmes by the EU, Nordic countries, Nordic Co-operation and other international networks. Their effect on the Arctic stage remains to be seen.

”MORE REGIONS IN THE NORDIC ARCTIC HAVE EXPERIENCED POPULATION STABILITY BECAUSE OF POSITIVE NET MIGRATION, RATHER THAN NATURAL GROWTH BASED ON BIRTH AND DEATH RATES. ”

An example of a recent initiative funded by EU Interreg and the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme, is the REGINA project (Regional Innovation in the Nordic Arctic and Scotland with a Special Focus on Regions with Large-Scale Projects),. The project supports the development of local smart specialization by introducing the regional concept of smart specialization to local authorities that deal with large companies extracting natural resources. The aim is to mitigate negative demographic development, manage land-use conflicts and foster entrepreneurship, innovation and green growth in the local area.

Increased interest in Arctic research

Since 1996, the NCM's Arctic Co-operation Programme has funded several hundred projects, artistic activities and political initiatives on topics ranging from climate change, nature, the environment and sustainable development to health, culture and skills enhancement. These initiatives share one common goal, namely sustainable development that respects nature and safeguards the welfare of Arctic people. The Arctic Co-operation Programme supplements other NCM programmes, strategies and initiatives that address issues relevant to the Arctic.

So far in 2017, there have been more applications than in previous years, with 82 applications with a total value of 34.6 million DKK on the thematic priorities of environment, climate and nature, economy and business development, population and education, and skills enhancement. However, despite the number of interesting project applications in 2017, the capacity of the programme only allows for 6.5 million DKK to fund new and ongoing projects.

Another indication that changes and development in the Arctic are on the radar is that the ICASS (International Circumpolar Arctic Social Science) conference is to be held in Umeå in June 2017, and has received approximately 900 paper abstracts, more abstracts and paper submissions than ever before. Nordregio will be present at several sessions and hosting a side event.

Arctic development by the people in the Arctic

Nordregio as an institute has a legacy in Arctic research through its personnel, who have worked on issues and regional development in this region over several years. Its interdisciplinary co-operation makes it particularly interesting to work with, and the strength of interdisciplinary co-operation in the Arctic includes environmental, economic and social aspects that provide a solid basis for analysis.

However, this requires the natural scientists, economists and social scientists to co-operate by informing and updating each other, although this does not always occur as we would wish. It is demanding to gain local and regional knowledge from within, but the experience from our Foresight study on sustainable regional development in the Arctic provided an important and profound lesson on participatory research where science meets practice.

Along with the increasing global focus on climate change over the last 20 years, the Arctic regions have gained more attention than ever before from international politicians. As an example, the former President of Iceland and founder of the Arctic Circle, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, described the strong interest of the leading economies in the Arctic territories, and Chinese interest in co-operation is one proof of this. In his view, expressed at the Nordic Arctic Working Group final seminar in January in Copenhagen, the Nordic Arctic represents a much larger area for future potential wealth of natural resources than the populated capital regions of the Nordic countries. Anne Husebekk, Rector of the Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, stressed that we need to keep value creation in the Nordic region, and not ship raw materials to other countries for further processing and added value. She emphasized the need to explore all the possibilities that the bioeconomy and bioprospecting can offer to regional business development. An ongoing challenge for regions with dominant business structures characterized by small and medium-sized companies is gaining venture capital for the long term.

The results of the Nordic Working Group for Sustainable Regional Development in the Arctic (2013–2016) have been integrated and taken into consideration in the new Thematic Group for Sustainable Rural Development (2017–2020), and you can follow the work through projects and publications published on our website. ■

LENEISJA JUNGSBERG
is a Research Fellow at Nordregio specializing in regional development, including the impacts of large-scale industries, local business diversification, participatory methods, community development, rural social innovation initiatives, socio-economic assessments and Arctic co-operation and sustainability.

You can reach Leneisja at
leneisja.jungsberg@nordregio.se

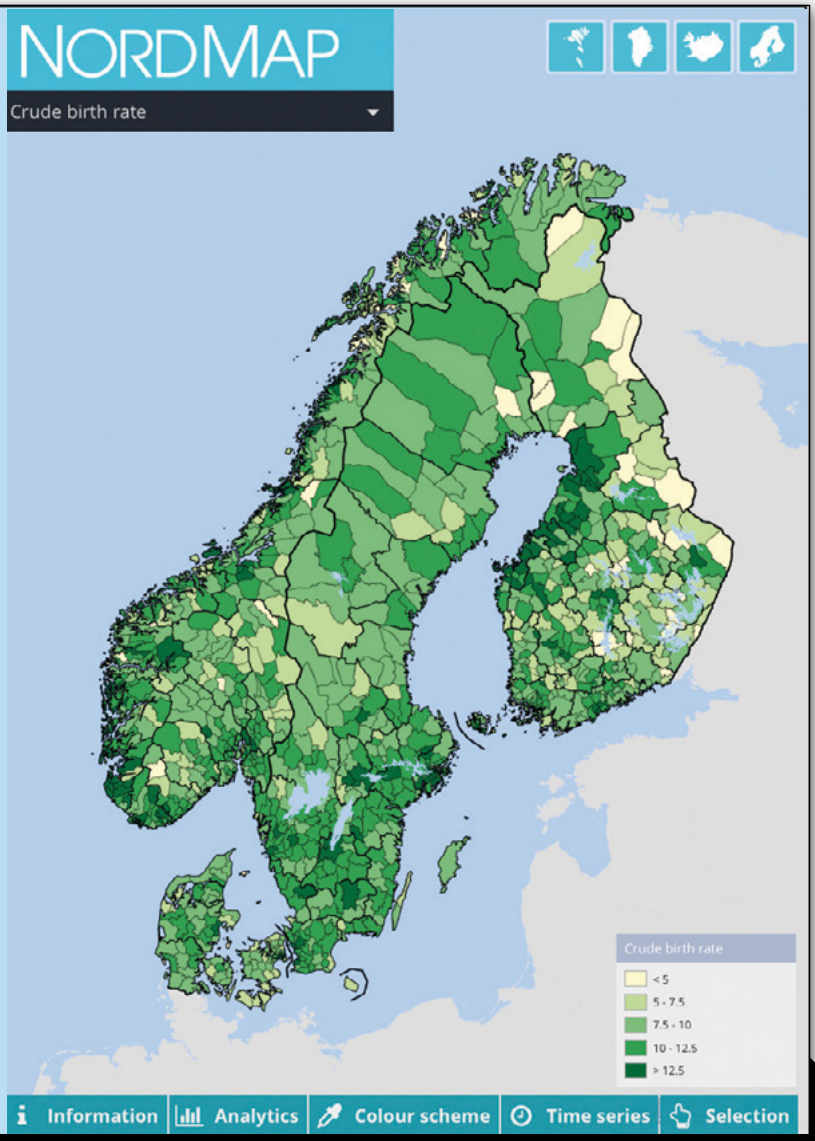
ANNA KARLSDOTTÌR
is a Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio, specializing in coastal areas, rural and urban areas, the Arctic, international affairs, societal and occupational changes across sectors such as tourism, primary industries (fisheries and agriculture), mega-industries and creative industries. She is interested in gender issues, youth, labour market, cultural and mobility aspects of geography, planning and spatial development.

You can reach Anna at
anna.karlsdottir@nordregio.se

ANNA KARLSDOTTIR

NordMap.se

A new, easy and free to use web-mapping tool is here! Are you working with regional planning in the Nordic Region? Or perhaps just interested in regional and municipal differences between Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland when it comes to ageing population, labour force or even gender ratio? With NordMap you can create maps with data harmonised by Nordregio and adjust them to your needs with just a few clicks – share it, save it and use it any way you like! NordMap is easy to use and you don't need any previous mapping experience.



CONTACT NORDREGIO

Nordregio is situated on beautiful Skeppsholmen, an island in the heart of Stockholm, Sweden.

NORDREGIO

Nordregio is an international research centre for regional development and planning – established by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Holmamiralens Väg 10,
Skeppsholmen, Stockholm
Sweden

Phone +46 8 463 54 00

More information at
www.nordregio.se

Welcome to Nordregio Forum 29-30 November in Oslo:

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Nordregio Forum is also an arena for discussion and networking during parallel sessions and roundtables. The results will feed directly into the new thematic group on Sustainable cities and urban development, established by the Nordic Council of Ministers – and the Norwegian chairmanship programme "Attractive Nordic Cities".

Nordregio Forum is the annual meeting place for professionals and policymakers working with urban planning and regional development in the Nordic countries. It is a forum for exchange of ideas and trends, for sharing new knowledge, examples and experience, and for pushing national and regional policy agendas by learning from each other.

We hope to see you in Oslo 29-30 November!
More information can be found on
www.nordregio.se/forum2017