

# NORDREGIO NEWS

#4.17 *Connecting the urban and the rural*

## NORDIC SUSTAINABLE CITIES

4

Co-operation – a Hallmark of Nordic Cities

6

A Key to Global Urbanization Challenges

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9

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS  
AT NORDREGIO FORUM

14

SMART SPECIALIZATION  
IN THE NORTH

16

A SITE-BASED APPROACH TOWARDS  
SUCCESSFUL RURAL DEVELOPMENT



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I used to say that the most crucial environmental factor for the sparsely populated areas of the Nordic Region is the private car. Without cars, people would not be able to live in such areas, and without people the open landscape would turn into an impenetrable jungle. Today, with increasing digitalization, the importance of physical distance is diminishing. The size of functional regions, i.e. the geographical areas in which many people both live and have their daily work and social life, is expanding beyond administrative borders.

The theme for this year's Nordregio Forum, which is being held for the fifth time and takes place in Oslo on 29–30 November, is 'Nordic Cities—Connecting the Urban and the Rural'. What opportunities are offered by better linkages between the urban and the rural areas? as discussed by Hallgeir Aalbu in this issue of Nordregio News. Or, is it utopian to believe that rural areas can develop and prosper in parallel with ongoing urbanization?

The development of larger functional regions provides opportunities for rural areas, especially for those with attractive landscapes. As pointed out by Finn Jorsal, the President of Friends of Cold Hawaii, new jobs in creative businesses flourish in and around the small village of Klitmøller, on the west coast of Jutland, thanks to the reef that gives extraordinary conditions for wind-surfing. A similar development took place 150 years ago, 200 km northwest of Klitmøller, when some of the most famous Nordic painters settled in Skagen, attracted by the scenic landscape and the intense bright light.

What could the rest of the world learn from the Nordic approach to sustainable small and medium-sized cities? The two articles by Hans Fridberg and Mitchell Reardon refer to Nordic Sustainable Cities, which is one of six flagship projects within the Nordic Prime Ministers' initiative for Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges.

After the Second World War, the Nordic Region became a model for urban planning. Practitioners and decision-makers from all over the world came to Vällingby, Albertslund and Tapiola to study how new suburbs could thrive as modern forms of urban life. Still, today, the Nordic urban model is highly cited in international courses. It offers high-quality solutions based on strengths such as good governance, public-private partnerships, design tradition, environmental and social consciousness as well as nature-based technological innovations.

Enjoy your reading! ■

This Nordregio Forum is dedicated to Nordic cities and the developing connections between urban and rural areas. The theme brings into play many of the wicked problems we all face when striving to advance sustainable development.

Earlier this year, the Norwegian Government presented a white paper on urban sustainability and rural strength. It pointed specifically to the need for a cross-sectoral approach to several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. This, however, is a challenge for public management and requires creative dialogue between stakeholders.

As Norway holds the presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers this year, we wanted to address some of these challenges from the perspective of small and medium-sized towns. While we have increasing knowledge of how larger cities can contribute to reducing climate emissions and decreasing social differences, we less often look for contributions from small and medium-sized towns. However, these remain the predominant urban forms in our Nordic countries, and they have extensive experience.

The goal of the presidency project is to prepare a joint Nordic strategy to make towns and their surrounding areas more attractive, through the development of vibrant and inclusive urban environments that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. Key objectives are environment- and climate-friendly solutions, social balance and equal opportunities for all, good social and public health services, inclusive cultural activities, vibrant town centres, historical-cultural objects and environments, good blue-green structures, attractive urban spaces and architecture, co-ordinated land use and transport solutions and diverse job opportunities.

A network of 18 small and medium-sized Nordic towns has been established, and together they are working on mapping, developing and implementing methods to measure urban qualities and sustainability. Nordic decision-makers, administrators and academic communities are sharing knowledge and contributing to strategies for handling complex decision-making challenges in urban regions.

For more information on the presidency project and the towns, please visit our website: [www.regjeringen.no/attractivebyer](http://www.regjeringen.no/attractivebyer). ■

# NORDIC SUSTAINABLE CITIES



A project to share Nordic know-how on how to make cities more sustainable has recently been launched. It is part of the Nordic Prime Minister's initiative on Nordic solutions to global challenges and aims to combine both public policy, academic analysis and a business outlook. An upcoming White Paper from the project presents a range of values, tools and practices on which Nordic Sustainable Cities are built. As such, it shows a path that is both tangible and scalable. It asks what makes a sustainable city and lists a number of factors crucial to consider in developing e.g. the Low Carbon City, the Compact Green City or the Circular Economy City. In the two following articles, Canadian urbanist **Mitchell Reardon** and **Hans Fridberg**, Senior Advisor at Nordic Innovation, discuss the model "Nordic city" from a co-operative regional and global market perspectives.





Photo: Benjamin Soumela/norden.org

# CO-OPERATION

## – A HALLMARK OF NORDIC CITIES

What is the model “Nordic city”? Could it be Copenhagen, Helsinki or Stockholm? Perhaps it’s Oslo, Reykjavik or even Kiruna? When seeking to identify THE defining Nordic city, the reader should be forgiven if the differences between these cities rather than the similarities leap to mind. Rather, I suggest that those in search of the archetypal Nordic city may as well be looking for Valhalla. The cities spread across the Nordic region do not fit into a single defining box. However, they do share a series of common features. And in my experience from across a range of Nordic urban regions, no feature better illustrates the Nordic city than that of cooperation.

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BY MITCHELL REARDON

### Success that can Spread

Contemporary Nordic cities are characterized by their commitment to environmental sustainability; focus on innovation; and accessibility to water and greenery. These features have supported the positive global perception of Nordic cities in recent years; however, they did not emerge out of nowhere. Long-term cooperation between national Nordic governments, intergovernmental authorities and urban regions has fostered shared values and tools that support a cohesive approach to sustainable urban development. Notably however, the story of cooperation in Nordic cities arises out of a regional context, but this does not limit its relevance to other cities beyond the Nordic region.

In an era of unprecedented cooperation between cities, illustrated by the rise of networks such as the Covenant of Mayors, C40 and 100 Resilient Cities, and faced with the dark shadow of national division, now is precisely the right time to spread the Nordic city message of cooperation worldwide. Beyond strengthening platforms for communication, knowledge exchange, and nurturing trust and commitment among actors, such cooperative initiatives can also generate synergies between different cities and sectors that result in new and inventive sustainable urban solutions. Such a proposal is not a theoretical exercise. It has been occurring in and among cities throughout the Nordic region for decades. This approach has supported the rise of eco-districts and a booming cleantech industry in Swedish cities, fostered innovative smart mobility initiatives in Helsinki, encouraged major R&D investment in Norway and shaped a thriving cross-border region around Copenhagen, to name a few key outcomes of cooperation.

### Diverse Actors, Common Goals

A range of actors, including civil society, Nordic governments from the municipal to national level, state and supra-national ministries, private firms and academia, have played roles in shaping the cooperative atmosphere that exists among Nordic cities today. Together, these actors are greater than the sum of their parts. They continue to reaffirm openness to new ideas and opinions, trust in each other and in leaders, and the need for sustainable management of the environment. They are the foundation on which sustainability in Nordic cities have developed. Importantly, these actors are not unique to Nordic countries and nor is their cooperation. By building relationships and broadening cooperation for societal good among these types of actors, regions the world over have the opportunity to harness their combined strengths to achieve sustainability goals – or essentially any socio-economic goals on which they are focused.

Cooperation across sectors and involving a diversity of actors, including the famed triple-helix approach of public-private-academic cooperation, has helped Nordic cities achieve some of the highest levels of health and wellbeing in the world. It has helped sustain ecologically rich and socially prized green and blue spaces. It has been vital to creating much needed housing and efficient mobility systems that not only strengthens environmental sustainability, but also supports social equity by enhancing regional connectivity and reducing the combined costs of housing and transportation. It has even spearheaded an

economic transformation towards a low-carbon economy that enables fiscal growth that is decoupled from environmental degradation.

### A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

Cooperation has not been initiated and continued by a multitude of public, private and academic actors, as well as range of groups from civil society, out of altruism, but rather because of the mutual benefits that result. This success is a powerful bond that maintains cohesion, even in the face of conflict, which inevitably occurs. Over time, institutional frameworks have been established to facilitate these arrangements, and guide resolution where needed. Beyond products and services, this organizational understanding is perhaps where Nordic firms, academics and institutions offer the greatest insight and value for regions who would like to adopt similar approaches to enhance their resilience and sustainability.

Sustainability, or the lack thereof, presents many challenges around the world today. By combining Nordic cooperation know-how with skills, products and ideas that are relevant to specific regions or contexts, there is a tremendous opportunity to unlock new solutions. In doing so, a healthier, greener and more prosperous future awaits. ■



### MITCHELL REARDON

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### INFO BOX

Three thematic groups have been established as part of the Nordic co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017-2020.

**The Thematic Group for Sustainable Cities and Urban Development** focuses on the conditions of planning and development for small and medium sized cities in the Nordic region.

The overarching objectives are: 1) to increase knowledge concerning the local urban qualities and socioeconomic conditions, and 2) to help improve governance practices for sustainable development of small and medium sized Nordic and Arctic cities, based on their local urban qualities and socioeconomic conditions, and 3) to deepen the understanding of linkages and external relations (regional, national, global) with particular focus on urban-rural relations.

Read more on [www.nordregio.se/AboutNordregio](http://www.nordregio.se/AboutNordregio)

# A key to global urbanization challenges

Urbanization is one of the most prevalent global trends today. By 2050, 66 per cent of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas. Meanwhile, in many parts of the world, populations continue their rapid growth. The scale of the trend is exemplified in the two most populous countries on the planet. By 2050, India is expected to add 404 million additional urban dwellers and China 292 million.<sup>1</sup>

BY HANS FRIDBERG



Photo: Rasmus Hjørtshøj/COAST



Photo: GHB Landskabsarkitekter/Achiam

The challenges that come with rapid urbanization are immense. Housing, transport infrastructure, freshwater supply, waste management and energy are just some of the services that cities need to provide for their new inhabitants. In India alone, it is estimated that a whole Chicago worth of infrastructure and services must be built every year until 2050 if Indian cities are to successfully supply the basic needs of their citizens.

At their best, cities can be efficient machines that produce contented populations through economic growth and better jobs while remaining socially and environmentally sustainable. The high density of population in cities can bring efficiency gains and technological innovations while reducing per capita resource and energy consumption. Thus, the urbanization megatrend represents a clear opportunity to achieve sustainable long-term development. That is also why the significance of cities has been specifically identified in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a separate sustainable development goal has been set for achieving sustainable cities and communities.

In June 2017, the Nordic prime ministers launched a new initiative, called Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges, to help in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Nordic Sustainable Cities is one of six flagship projects under this initiative and focuses specifically on Sus-

tainable Development Goal no. 11, the achievement of sustainable cities and communities.

The challenges that Nordic cities have faced, and are still facing, are not unique to the region, but are found all over the world. We have proposed solutions that could help others grasp the opportunity for sustainable development that comes with urbanization. The practices that Nordic cities are together using to pursue sustainable urban futures are workable, and Nordic cities, academic institutions and companies have the expertise that the world needs. That is

why the Nordic Sustainable Cities project is focused on joint efforts to export the best Nordic solutions for sustainable cities that our region has to offer.

The Nordic countries are already working hard to promote their respective solutions, Nordic Sustainable Cities will co-ordinate those activities and further promote our message through Nordic co-operation. This Nordic added value can be generated

in three distinct ways. First, through branding. The Nordic countries, both individually and as a region, are regarded as having some of the most sustainable, smart and livable cities in the world. By telling a common story, we can spread it further and reach the right people. Second, through economies of scale. By pooling resources, the Nordic countries are better positioned to promote Nordic solutions in far-flung regions of the world. We can do more, in more places, if we work together. Third, through economies of scope. Through Nordic co-operation, the



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## “THE URBANIZATION MEGATREND REPRESENTS A CLEAR OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT”

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> UN Statistics Division



Photo: Johan Gunséus/SYNK



Photo: Katrine Lunke/Wikimedia Commons

Nordic countries are able to offer a much greater variety of knowledge, products and services, and thus become more attractive for potential partners abroad.

Over the next two years, Nordic Sustainable Cities will work hard to build a joint Nordic export platform that will enable both public and private stakeholders to team up with their Nordic colleagues. Teamwork is part of the common success story of our Nordic cities and is among the special values and tools that Nordic cities have used to overcome their own challenges. Nordregio has produced a thorough, research-based white paper on Nordic Sustainable Cities that can both inspire those abroad and unite forces within the Nordic region around a common purpose. Furthermore, the Nordic foreign services have jointly identified 15 cities (five in China, five in India, five in USA/Canada) where Nordic solutions could make a difference and where Nordic companies could play a crucial role. Over the next two years, new partnerships with the selected cities will be formed and through innovative processes, Nordic solutions can be adapted to help solve these cities' most pressing challenges. ■

## “TEAMWORK IS PART OF THE COMMON SUCCESS STORY OF OUR NORDIC CITIES AND IS AMONG THE SPECIAL VALUES AND TOOLS THAT NORDIC CITIES HAVE USED TO OVERCOME THEIR OWN CHALLENGES”

### INFO BOX

■ Nordregio is a partner in the [SiEUGreen project](#) which aspires to enhance EU-China cooperation in promoting urban agriculture for food security, resource efficiency and smart resilient cities. Nordregio is leading the work package: “Support to Institutional and Social Structures for creating resilient cities with urban agriculture”, which examines work on community engagement and inclusion. Nordregio will apply an “inclusive innovation” model where it is recognized that different groups of actors are bringing knowledge, interests and ethical values into the learning process.

The project will analyse 5 cases in selected European and Chinese urban and peri-urban areas:

- a previous hospital site in Norway,
- community gardens in Denmark,
- previously unused municipal areas with dense refugee population in Turkey, and
- big urban community farms in Beijing and Central China.

Building on the model of zero-waste and circular economy, the project will demonstrate how technological and societal innovation in urban agriculture can have positive impacts on society and economy. This will be achieved by applying novel resource-efficient agricultural techniques in urban and peri-urban areas, developing innovative approaches for social engagement and empowerment and investigating the economic, environmental and social benefits of urban agriculture.

The SiEUGreen project will be led by Norwegian University of Life Sciences and run for a period of four years from 2018 to the end of 2021.



Photo: Kristoffer Marchi

# BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND ATTRACTIVENESS IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED NORDIC CITIES

The 'right to roam' or *Allemansrätten* has been enshrined in the Swedish way of life for longer than anyone can remember. The belief that everyone is equally entitled to appreciate and enjoy the land around them is a central principle in Sweden, which is also upheld at White Arkitekter. This principle of social equity and inclusivity forms the bedrock on which we plan buildings and cities in the Nordic region. By putting people first, our building projects become more socially and environmentally sustainable, which results in more attractive places to live.

BY MONICA VON SCHMALENSEE



## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Take the example of Kiruna. Due to erosion, this mining community is being moved in its entirety two miles to the east in a phased development over nearly 20 years. Before commencing our master planning for this new city, we spent a great deal of time talking with the people of Kiruna about making the new version of their town a better place to live, while retaining those elements that they cherished from the old city.

Their most consistent complaint was that Kiruna's current design does not encourage social interaction; i.e., it has no social or civic heart. In addition, the residents believe that there are not enough diversions to entice either individuals or families to put down roots, nor the kinds of facilities needed to encourage a good balance of people of different ages and genders.

In response to this, White Arkitekter suggests placing a new public square at the heart of the masterplan. Over time, it will become the civic, infrastructural and recreational heart of this evolving community, home to Kiruna's historic clock tower, plus a new travel centre facilitating movement between the old and new town. The square will also host a new town hall, library and swimming pool. Residential streets will emanate out from this civic square in 'urban fingers' fringed with nature, so that residents can embrace the outdoor lifestyles that they love while enjoying easy access to all of the city's facilities.

I believe that appreciation of one's surroundings should not end on reaching home. Quality of life is enhanced by creation of better connections between buildings and their settings. For example, the area called 'By the Woods' in Allerød, Denmark, is lucky enough to be located next to a lake and a forest. Instead of shutting people off from the landscape with brick walls, the 115 homes are clad in layered, light-weight facades composed of timber louvres and glass. Through careful placement of these elements, the inhabitants retain their privacy while enjoying a continuous connection to nature on their doorsteps and beyond. Furthermore, there is no abrupt cut-off between public and private spaces. There are attractive landscaped paths, courtyards and seating areas between the houses to encourage interaction and activity, which all boost health and community cohesion. Best of all, this is not some elite development of holiday homes for high earners: this is social housing.

When we design for people, we like to ensure that everyone is catered for, young and old, male and female, rich and poor. Research has shown that there is an abrupt cut-off, around the age of 7, when girls suddenly no longer feel as safe or as included in public recreation areas. The report 'Room for Girls' from White Arkitekter shows that 80% of leisure space in a city seems to be mainly for boys. Women and girls feel less secure in cities after dark, when badly lit parks can seem threatening. Is such a city designed for


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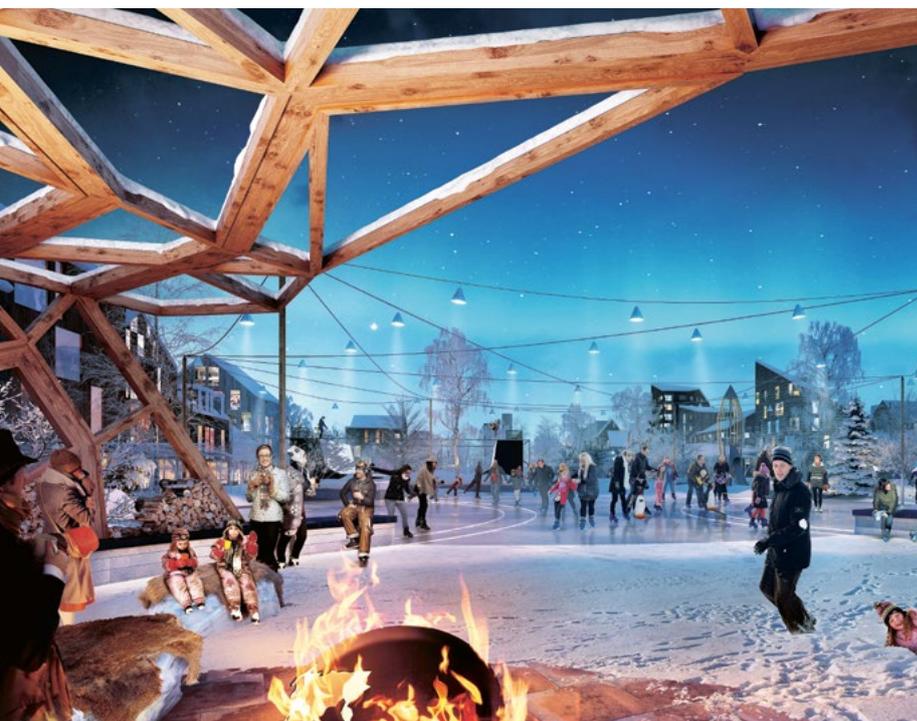
is interested in the changing landscape of the urban environment and the interplay between society and place.

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**"MANY CITIES ARE THROWING UP RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS IN HASTE, OFTEN TAKING OUT VALUABLE GREEN SPACE, WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT THE IMPACT ON EXISTING AND FUTURE INHABITANTS."**



**“QUALITY OF LIFE IS  
ENHANCED BY CREATION  
OF BETTER CONNECTIONS  
BETWEEN BUILDINGS  
AND THEIR SETTINGS.”**



everyone? Our research clearly shows that it is not. There are inequalities in planning that need to be identified and resolved. Many cities are throwing up residential blocks in haste, often taking out valuable green space, without thinking about the impact on existing and future inhabitants. If shared social civic spaces, like parks, benches, fountains and playgrounds, are removed, then the only meeting places left are commercially driven, i.e., cafes, restaurants and shopping centres. This increases income-based inequalities. If you cannot afford a coffee or a meal, then the absence of shared civic space reinforces isolation.

The whole world is struggling with economic difficulties, inequalities and resource depletion, but a happy, healthy and coherent community of citizens is the most important resource of all. When people feel respected and cared for, they are more likely to care for themselves, for each other and for the city around them. Can the way we design cities help? I think so. Our shared, Nordic understanding of the ‘right to roam’ is the key that can unlock this latent potential. ■

*Source: White Arkitekter. Previous page: By the Woods’, Allerød, Denmark. Opposite page: By the Woods’, Allerød, Denmark. Above: Kiruna town square. Left: Kiruna*

# HOW USEFUL IS THE CONCEPT OF AN URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE?

The urban and the rural are often regarded as contraries. This has had a significant impact on policy directions across the Nordic countries. However, the current concern is not to reduce any supposed urban–rural divide but to encourage specific territorial responses that bring stakeholders together, allowing cross-sectoral interventions to move beyond traditional policy divisions.

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BY HALLGEIR AALBU



Over the years, we have shared a tendency to associate rural policy with regional economic challenges, and urban policy with planning for land use and environmental sustainability.

Consequently, national public sectors have followed a similar structural divide. In Norway, planning policy moved to the Ministry of Environmental Affairs in the 1970s and has only recently returned to the Ministry of Local Government.

### Value-ridden contraries

As humans, we make sense of the world by categorising it. However, in doing so, we may allow personal values and implicit perceptions to go unchallenged and constrain public debate. However, traditional notions of the peripheral and the urban cannot be left uncontested. Peripheral is not a problem per se. There are a number of prosperous, rural communities along the coast of Norway, for example. Problems arise only when the consequences of being peripheral impact on general living conditions, such as the quality of public services, unemployment or result in scarcity of risk capital in the private sector. Similarly, urbanisation is not in itself a solution. The heralded benefits of urbanisation, such as the agglomeration of economic benefits and human capital, often coincide with congestion, higher housing costs, marked disparities in living conditions and a higher risk of crime. Moreover, there is no strict division between the urban and the rural. Urban areas both serve and rely on their vicinity and on stakeholders beyond local, regional and national borders.

### A flawed reflection of the Nordic map

The scale of a Nordic urban – rural divide is often exaggerated. The division is far less apparent in the Nordic countries. Firstly, the majority of Nordic cities would be considered small towns and hamlets by European or international standards. Indeed, Statistics Norway indicates that 80 percent of the Norwegian population are

urbanites, including hamlets as small as 200 inhabitants<sup>1</sup>. Under the EU definition this would drop to 60 percent of the population, and exclude towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, under the EU definition, Denmark is the least urbanised among the Nordic countries, while Iceland is the most urbanised.

Moreover, differences between urban and rural living are in general insignificant in the Nordic countries. The Nordic countries share high living standards and a high quality of life. They tend to dominate international rankings on happiness, living conditions and public trust. While disparities may be increasing, these no longer follow an urban–rural divide. There are both prosperous and struggling communities in rural areas. There are also marked differences in income, health and quality of life within urban areas. The political periphery, if democratic participation is a measure, is located within the larger cities rather than in rural areas.

### Moving beyond policy traditions and categories

Maintaining regional resilience and sustainable communities in both urban and rural areas requires multilevel commitment, combining instruments and bottom-up capacity building. One way forward is to encourage negotiated co-ordination between stakeholders as part of a spatially targeted intervention, based on local needs and challenges. Consequently, approaches such as city deals are increasing in popularity. They allow stakeholders to commit resources to shared, bespoke objectives within a specific territory. Similar models already exist in other policy areas, such as the Norwegian measures tailored towards economic restructuring in local labour markets facing industrial decline.

The return of planning as a policy tool for overall regional and local development has been a necessary move. The question now is how best to fill the toolbox with supportive measures, encouraging spatially targeted, cross-sectoral and multilevel solutions tailored to local needs, thus surpassing any urban–rural dichotomy. ■



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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Statistics Norway for more specific details of the definition.

<sup>2</sup> See DG Regio 2014. Based on a classification that distinguishes between cities/densely populated areas, towns, suburbs and rural areas.



Photo: pixabay.com



Photo: Nicolai Perjesi



Photo: Pixabay.com

# GOOD PRACTICES BEYOND MAJOR URBAN CENTRES IN THE NORTH

Smart specialization, developed as a response from European regions to rising global competition, is at the heart of current regional innovation policy in the European Union. It is a strategic approach to economic development through targeted support for research and innovation. The European regions are being encouraged to design their own smart specialization strategies to fully realize their potential. The concept of smart specialization is, however, intended not only to create competitive European regions but also to make the regions more sustainable and inclusive. Could this concept also be applied beyond the urban regions, for example, in rural and peripheral regions of the Nordic countries?

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BY JUKKA TERÄS

The recent introduction of smart specialization, as the basis for the EU programming period 2014–2020, has vitalized innovation processes in numerous regions through private-public development initiatives, engagement of regional actors in joint development and adoption of new ways to look outside the typical sectoral approach. Moreover, international smart specialization initiatives, including a joint European S3 Platform in Seville, Spain, have assisted the regions in their smart specialization efforts and led to the organization of peer-review events among regions.

There is an ongoing debate, however, on the applicability of the smart specialization concept outside the major urban innovation hubs with their concentrations of universities and firms. Rural, sparsely populated and more remote areas may not have the critical mass of relevant knowledge and actors needed to make the most of the smart specialization process. These areas, often with abundant natural resources, should not, however, be simply considered as lagging behind, but as areas with specific characteristics including unique challenges and opportunities.

In the Nordic countries, many regions outside the major urban centres have successfully adopted the smart specialization concept. Lapland, in northern Finland, was an early adopter, launching its Arctic Specialisation Strategy in 2013. The combination of the traditional cluster approach with smart specialization, through an intensive implementation phase, resulted in a smart cluster strategy. In 2015,

five local smart clusters, with significant cross-sectoral elements, were identified: Arctic Industry, Arctic Rural Networks, Arctic Design, Arctic Security and Arctic Development Infrastructure.

Värmland in Sweden has included smart specialization as an essential element of their regional branding. Värmland has also created the Academy of Smart Specialisation, a project intended to renew Värmland industry, the public sector and research at Karlstad University. The project

is expected to strengthen the research environments in the region and facilitate the use of research for the benefit of industry, the County Administration, the County Council and the municipalities of Värmland.

Nordland in northern Norway has prepared its own smart specialization strategy even though Norwegian regions, being within a non-EU Member

State, are not required to produce such strategies in order to receive European Structural and Investment Funds.

Nordregio has undertaken substantial research on smart specialization. A recent Nordregio study, published in 2015 by the EU Joint Research Centre, is an analysis of smart specialization implementation in sparsely populated areas including Lapland in Finland, Västerbotten in Sweden, Nordland in Norway, Highlands & Islands in Scotland, Aragon in Spain and Podlaskie in Poland. Furthermore, Nordregio is lead partner in the REGINA project, which is piloting local smart specialization strategies in remote municipalities with large-scale industries. The project is a part of the EU Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014–2020. ■

**“THE CONCEPT OF SMART SPECIALIZATION IS, HOWEVER, INTENDED NOT ONLY TO CREATE COMPETITIVE EUROPEAN REGIONS BUT ALSO TO MAKE THE REGIONS MORE SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE”**



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Photo: Pixabay.com

**INFO BOX**

Three thematic groups have been established as part for the Nordic co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017–2020.

**The thematic group for Innovative and Resilient Regions** aims to provide the Nordic regions with updated knowledge, applicable tools and good practices regarding future competitiveness and well-being. The group is particularly interested in the relations between the green transition, innovation and regional resilience.

It will focus on 1) defining regional resilience in a Nordic context, 2) Regional smart specialization strategies, 3) The role of digitalization in a Nordic context, 4) Skills policies – building capacities for resilient regions.

Read more on [www.nordregio.se/About-Nordregio](http://www.nordregio.se/About-Nordregio)

**READ MORE:**

Teräs J., Dubois A., Sörvik J. and Pertoldi M. (2015). *Implementing Smart Specialisation in Sparsely Populated Areas*. European Commission. Joint Research Centre. S3 Working Paper 10/2015.

Local Smart Specialisation: a strategy for remote communities with large-scale resource-based industries. REGINA Policy Brief 2107. <http://www.nordregio.se/Global/Research/REGINA/REGINA%20PB%202017-1.pdf>

# Cold Hawaii:

## A site-based approach towards successful rural development



About 400 years ago, Klitmøller, a small town in the northwest of Denmark, was known mostly to the naval traders between Denmark and southern Norway. The seaside used to be full of local merchants sailing corn and bullocks to Norway and bringing timber and iron back. In the 19th century, the trades began to decrease because of changes in both the area's natural conditions and naval technology. After a stagnation period, fishing again took the lead in Klitmøller. This continued more or less successfully for the next 150 years until 1967, when a large harbour was opened in Hanstholm, about 10 kilometres north of Klitmøller, to which all of the fishermen moved their boats. At that time, Klitmøller again fell into stagnation. However, German surfers discovered the area during the 1980s and since the 1990s, traders and fishermen have been completely replaced by thousands of surfers who come to the North Sea for the best waves in Europe, i.e., to surf what is now known as Cold Hawaii.



Photo:  
Timothy Heleniak

**>** Nordregio News asked Finn Jorsal, the President of the Friends of Cold Hawaii association to tell us about some of the major challenges and advantages of developing business in a rural area.

The secret to the success of Klitmøller and Cold Hawaii is primarily the reef, which stretches out to the north from Klitmøller Beach. It consists of flint and chalk, which is never affected by the changing weather conditions, unlike all the rest of the Danish North Sea coast, which consists of sand.

The attractiveness of the area is not only related to Klitmøller, but also to the coastal areas of Thy. Cold Hawaii in fact consists of 31 surfing spots from Agger in the south to Hamborg (a very small collection of houses to the northeast of Hanstholm) in the north. Those 31 spots, depending on wind direction and waves, are considered some of the best in Europe.

Cold Hawaii has now become a global brand because of the surfing possibilities, but the most interesting thing for me is what this has implied concerning Klitmøller.

Not only surfing, but also the emerging creative and innovative atmosphere, attracts especially young families with children from the bigger cities in Denmark and from abroad. Among the approximately 950 persons living in Klitmøller, 18 different nationalities are represented. The greatest challenge at the moment is to offer enough flats to rent, as some of these young families do not dare to buy a house from the start. The greatest advantage for developing businesses has been that the area has had very fast internet from the beginning, which helped us communicate with the world.

From the start of this development back in the 1990s, the worst challenge was to have the surfers, who were for the most part rather young, behave with respect towards the local people. But some of the locals, especially older fishermen and local surfers, took responsibility for the situation and established a better dialogue between the two groups, which has lasted until today.

What turned out to be the crucial step was a decision to make a so-called Cold Hawaii master plan for developing the Cold Hawaii brand. This was done during the winter of 2006/07, and this plan has now been fulfilled on all points.

We are currently negotiating with the Mayor of Thisted Municipality and her chief executive to produce a second master plan for the next 10–15 years.

## INTERVIEW



### FINN JORSAL

is President for the association Friends of Cold Hawaii (since 2013) and has previously worked as headmaster for Thisted Gymnasium & HF-Kursus (1993–2013).

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Photo: Johanna Feuk

*What potential did you see in the Klitmøller area around 30 years ago when establishing the surfing centre?*

At that time, we were not aware of what was going to happen. A surfing centre had never been established there before. Two to three surfing schools arose spontaneously as more and more tourists and people interested in surfing visited the place. As mentioned before, the master plan was made in an attempt to direct the development of the area. One of the essential points in the plan was to establish an annual surfing event with international significance. This was achieved in 2010 with the inaugural annual Professional Windsurfers Association World Cup for the surfing discipline called “wave performance”, in which the 32 best surfers in the world take part.

*What were the challenges and advantages of developing business in a rural area? Was it enough to use local resources or were some new sectors attracted to the area? In your lectures, you discuss the site-based potential approach that makes rural development successful. How does this approach work in practice and is it effective in a process of rapid urbanization?*

The businesses that have developed in the Cold Hawaii area, and especially in Klitmøller, were created by the people who lived here, or who have settled in the town. The only thing we do is try to avoid obstacles for the different kinds of businesses to emerge. The advantage is that almost all of the activities are “soft” and sustainable, for example, design, communication, IT and others. In our case, the site-based potential approach works well. The development has, so-to-say, created development.

*Many practitioners in regional development point to local specialisation and digitalisation as key to boosting local economies in remote areas. What is your take on that?*

Our local specialisation is, of course, connected to the surfing, for instance, the surfing schools, but a big part of the economy is connected to tourism in general. As mentioned above, digitalisation has been essential for most of the businesses, or we would not have had the luck to create more than 100 new jobs because of the development during the last 10–15 years.

*Cold Hawaii’s case is a rather exceptional case for its attractiveness to a target group, i.e., water sports fans. What do you think could be the general recipe for rural areas to remain attractive throughout the year? Would it be possible to transfer the model of Cold Hawaii to other places that do not have your specific target group?*

I admit that Cold Hawaii is an exceptional case and I’m often asked if I think that it is transferable to other places. I think that at least some aspects of it can be transferred. In the way that the Cold Hawaii brand has developed, it is not only attractive to water sports fans, but also to people who like rural life near the sea, the extended nature in the National Park Thy, which is close to Klitmøller and Cold Hawaii, and people who like a life that’s quieter than in cities and bigger towns.

What is necessary is to find and develop the site-based potential of the place, to make a master plan, and follow the visions of that plan. ■

## INFO BOX

Three thematic groups have been established as part of the Nordic co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017-2020.

**The thematic group for Sustainable Rural Development** aims to contribute to the development of policies and new solutions to the challenges that the Nordic countries face with regard to sustainable rural development.

The group will focus on among other things a project on “Rural Norden 2050: Demographic, economic and geographic futures”, on a new study of rural attractiveness as well as “A rural perspective on spatial disparities in education and employment outcomes”.

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