**STATE OF
THE NORDIC REGION**

2018

AN INTRODUCTION

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Shared Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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Preface

A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE NORDIC MODEL

This is an introduction; please find the full text (202 pages):

<http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1180241&dswid=4052> (in English only)

The Nordic Region as such comprises the 12th largest economy in the world, with a population that is growing faster than the EU average, a labour market that receives global praise and a welfare system that has proved resilient both in times of boom and bust.

But the countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden along with Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland also make out a macro-region of very different internal regions, both geographically and administratively.

It is an area spanning from the endless acres of farmland in Denmark and the vast forests in Sweden, over the thousand lakes of Finland and the mythical fjords of Norway to the Arctic splendour of Iceland and Greenland. Indeed, even the island communities of the Faroe Islands and Åland have their own characteristics, both when it comes to nature and culture, economy and population.

The Nordics often are at the top of the list when the UN or other international bodies rank nations on various parameters. And despite some bumps on the road, we are also rated as some of the most suited to fulfill the aim of the 2030 Agenda to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In fact, a recent publication from the Nordic Council of Ministers point to the almost unlikely success of the Nordic region in a global perspective. But what is the picture behind the national figures and how do the various regions within the Nordic countries interact, both internally and across borders?

That question is addressed by this publication, the State of the Nordic Region 2018 that gives a unique look behind the scenes of the world's most integrated region.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has contributed with Nordic statistics for more than 50 years through e.g. the Nordic Statistical Yearbook, and Nordregio – our research institution for regional development and planning – has published regional statistics since its establishment in 1997.

Now we are gearing up even more with a newly established Analytical and Statistical Unit at the Nordic Council of Ministers. In the same spirit, two other Nordic actors – the Nordic Welfare Centre and Nordic Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis – have contributed along with Nordregio to the current edition of the State of the Nordic Region, which is now published as a joint venture for the entire Nordic Council of Ministers' network.

By mapping and documenting information about the state of the Nordic region(s), Nordregio provides a very important knowledge base that empowers local, regional and national authorities in the Nordic countries to make informed decisions. Solid documentation of development trends is a necessary starting point for developing good policy.

At the same time, the State of the Nordic Region 2018 is also a treasure trove of information for the Nordic population at large, as well as a must read for international actors who want to learn about the Nordics and maybe even get inspired by the Nordic model, however differently it may be played out in the various regions and areas.

I hope the many interesting facts, figures and stories embodied in this impressive work will find a large audience and reach high and wide, just as the Nordic countries themselves seem to be doing.

Dagfinn Høybråten
The Secretary General,
Nordic Council of Ministers

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Nordics

What is the Nordic Region?

The Nordic Region consists of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as well as Faroe Islands and Greenland (both part of the Kingdom of Denmark) and Åland (part of the Republic of Finland). State of the Nordic Region is based on a suite of statistics covering all Nordic municipalities and administrative regions. It is however worth noting here that several Nordic territories, e.g. Svalbard (Norway), Christiansø (Denmark) and Northeast Greenland National Park (Avannaarsuani Tunumilu Nuna Allannngutsaaliugaq), are not part of the national administrative systems. Nevertheless, though not strictly included in the administrative systems, these territories are included in the report where data is available.

State of the Nordic Region displays data using national, regional and municipal administrative divisions (this edition according to the 2017 boundaries). Large differences exist both in terms of the size and population of the various administrative units at the regional and municipal levels across the Nordic Region. The four largest municipalities are all Greenlandic, with Qaasuitsup being the world's largest municipality with its 660,000 km² (however, split into two municipalities in 2018). Even the smallest Greenlandic municipality, Kujalleq, at 32,000 km² significantly exceeds the largest Nordic municipalities outside Greenland, i.e. Kiruna and Jokkmokk in northern Sweden with approximately 20,000 km² each. Excluding Greenland and the Faroe Islands, the average size of a Nordic municipality is 1,065 km². The smallest are less than 10 km² and are either insular municipalities (e.g. Kvitsøy in Norway or Seltjarnarnes near Reykjavík) or within the greater capital areas (e.g. Sundbyberg near Stockholm, Frederiksberg surrounded by the municipality

of Copenhagen, or Kauniainen surrounded by the municipality of Espoo near Helsinki).

The average area of a Nordic region is 17,548 km². The smallest is Oslo (455 km²), followed by two Icelandic regions, Suðurnes (884 km²) and Hövuðborgarsvæði (1,106 km²). The largest region is Norrbotten in Northern Sweden (106,211 km²), followed by Lappi in Northern Finland (just under 100,000 km²). The average population density of a Nordic region is 66 inhabitants per km² with densities ranging from 1 inhab./km² (Austurland, Vestfirðir, Norðurland vestra, and Norðurland eystra – all in Iceland) to 1,469 inhab./km² (Oslo region). Other high-density regions include the Capital region of Denmark Hovedstaden (706 inhab./km²) and Stockholm (335 inhab./km²).

Among the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland (including Åland) and Sweden, are Member States of the European Union (EU), although only Finland is part of the Euro-zone. Iceland and Norway are members of EFTA (European Free Trade Association) consisting of four countries, which either through EFTA, or bilaterally, have agreements with the EU to participate in its Internal Market. The Faroe Islands and Greenland are not members of any of these economic cooperation organisations. These differences in supranational affiliation have an impact on which data that is available for this report. For example, Eurostat, the statistical office of the EU, only provides data for EU, EFTA and EU candidate states, thus excluding the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Whenever possible, data for these regions has been supplemented from other sources.

In the regular register data of Eurostat and the National Statistics Institutes (NSIs), which are the two prime data sources for this report, commuters to neighbouring countries are not included in the Nordic countries. This results in incomplete information (i.e. underestimations) regarding employment, incomes and salaries for regions and municipalities

located close to national borders, where a substantial share of the population commutes for work to the neighbouring country. Estimates have been produced in some cases and included in this report. In 2016, the Finnish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers launched a project to develop statistics on cross-border movement in the Nordic countries. There is however still no up-to-date and no harmonised Nordic cross-border statistical data available, other than that provided by some regional authorities.

The Nordics in the world

With its 3,425,804 km², the total area of the Nordic Region would form the 7th largest nation in the world. However, uninhabitable icecaps and glaciers comprise about half of this area, mostly in Greenland. In January 2017, the Region had a population of around 27 million people. More relevant is the fact that put together, the Nordic economy is the 12th largest economy in the world (Haagensen et al., 2017).

The power of the Nordic economy was acknowledged in the light of its general handling of the economic crisis of 2007–08 (Wooldridge, 2013). What particularly impressed e.g. the journalists at the magazine *The Economist*, that published a special edition on the Nordics, was the ability of the Nordic countries to combine a generous tax-funded welfare system with efficient public administration and a competitive business sector.

As such, the locational aspects of the Nordic Region are noted in this edition of the State of the Nordic Region, where relevant and when reliable data is available. In addition, European developments generally and specifically those pertaining to the EU level are also addressed.

EU 2020 targets

The Europe 2020 strategy was designed in 2010 with the aim of guiding the Member States through the global financial crisis towards recovery. Three drivers of economic growth were identified as crucial: (i) smart growth based on knowledge and innovation, (ii) sustainable growth for a more efficient, greener and competitive economy, and (iii) inclusive growth capable of delivering employment, social and territorial cohesion.

Targets to be achieved include increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20–64 from 69% to 75%, investing at least 3% of the EU's GDP on research and development, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared to 1990, increasing the share of renewable energy sources in final energy consumption to 20%, reducing the proportion of early school leavers from 15% to below 10%, ensuring that at least 40% of 30–34 years old should have completed tertiary or equivalent education and, finally, reducing poverty by lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The European Commission expected that each Member State would translate these targets into national targets and trajectories. According to Eurostat's headline indicators scoreboard only one target, i.e. the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, has thus far been reached. Two targets, those regarding early school leavers and tertiary educational attainment, are less than one percentage unit from fulfilment. The target on reduced poverty is also close to being attained, in 2015 18.5 million people have been lifted out of poverty since 2012. The employment rate had risen to 71% in 2016, but is still less than half way to the target while the R&D investments are even further away from their specified target.

Figure 1.1 Sustainable Development Goals.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations adopted Resolution A/RES/70/1 which contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets to be achieved over the next 15 years. The 17 goals (figure 1.1) are:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
4. Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning;
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
6. Ensure access to water and sanitation for all;
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
8. Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all;
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries;
11. Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources;

15. Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss;
16. Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies;
17. Revitalize the global partnership for a sustainable development.

The Nordic countries are performing well. In an overall assessment of OECD countries, Sweden is given the highest score followed by Denmark, Finland and Norway (Sachs et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the Nordic countries continue to face significant challenges in terms of reaching all the identified targets by 2030. The Nordic Council of Ministers has chosen goal number 12, to "ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns", as its prioritised action field. But there are additional goals where a certain amount of effort is still required, such as the greening of the region's agricultural systems (SDG 2), reducing the high levels of CO₂ emissions per capita (SDG 7 and 13), and improving ecosystem conservation (SDG 14 and 15) (Larsen & Alsland-Lanthén, 2017).

The Nordics – a regional approach

Regional and administrative reforms

Administrative reforms provide a series of seemingly never-ending stories across the Nordic political systems. Today, the need for reforms and for the

Figure 1.2 Urban rural typology of the Nordic regions.

reallocation of tasks between the national, regional and municipal levels can be derived from two major challenges facing the Nordic countries (Harbo, 2015). Firstly, increased pressure on the Nordic welfare system caused by an ageing population which increases demand for public services while simultaneously shrinking the tax base. Secondly, enlargement of the regions due to widening labour markets caused by changing mobility and commuting patterns moves the functional borders of regions beyond their traditional administrative limitations. Finally, there is a common belief among professionals and decision makers that fewer and larger units are more efficient when it comes to service provision and public administration. On the other hand, concerns remain over the merging of administrative units especially at the municipal level due to the increased distance this potentially creates between citizens and the local political authority.

Thus far, the Danish experience provides the best Nordic example of a completed reform process as it is now a decade since the process took place and where the number of municipalities was reduced from 270 to 98. The reform as such was decided by the government, but the practical implementation, i.e. which municipalities should merge, was delegated to the municipalities themselves. At the same time, 1 January 2007, the 13 counties (amt) were abolished and replaced by five regions. The reform increased the political weight of the municipalities in society while the importance of the regions decreased. The regions are led by elected politicians, which reinforces their legitimacy, but they lack the power to tax and the freedom to undertake tasks in addition to their statutory responsibilities. In addition to healthcare, which is the region's main area of work, they are participating in regional public transport companies and in the setting up of growth forums (which decide on the allocation of EU Structural Funds). Hence, there are no official regional development plans except for the capital region, the so-called Finger Plan, which is prepared by the state.

After having failed, for the second time since the turn of the millennium, to try to implement a major reform of the Finnish municipalities, the government decided on 19 August 2015 that the municipalities would no longer be required to investigate the possibility of amalgamation (Sandberg, 2015). The government still wants to encourage municipal mergers, but they should be done on an entirely voluntary basis. Since 2000, the number of municipalities has voluntarily decreased from 452 to 311, but

the size of Finnish municipalities is still on average below 7,000 inhabitants. After failing with their municipal reform, the government decided instead to turn its attention to the regional level and to plan for a comprehensive expansion of the regions'

responsibilities. The plan is for the 18 regions (maakuntaliitto – landskapsförbund) to take over the main health care system from the municipalities. They will also assume responsibility for regional development, e.g. business and transport policy. The regions will have a directly elected political leadership, but the right to tax will remain with the municipalities which will, however, lose more than half of their budget (Sandberg, 2017).

Åland is not included in the above-mentioned administrative reform of the Finnish regions. There, responsibility for health care is already centralised to the Government of Åland. Åland has 16 municipalities, some of them with less than 500 inhabitants and one, Sottunga municipality, with even less than 100. At the same time as several investigations into voluntary municipal mergers are in progress, the current government is also preparing a bill to be introduced to the Åland Parliament, the Lagtinget, on reducing the number of municipalities to four.

More than 50 years since the last municipal reform, on 8 June 2017, the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) decided on an administrative reform that reduces the number of regions (fylkeskommuner) from 18 to 11 and the number of municipalities from 428 to 354. The basic goal of the reform, which should be fully implemented by 1 January 2020, is to transfer resources and responsibilities to local and regional authorities that are more robust than they are currently (Kaldager, 2015). In Norway, the health care system is organised by the state, while the regions are, among other things, responsible for planning, transportation and regional development. The reform is based on the tasks that the regions currently have, but the government has appointed an expert group to review opportunities to strengthen the regions' role as developer and their capacity to provide better service to the citizens. The regions are led by directly elected politicians, they have a formal – but in practice no – right to tax and they are free to undertake other than statutory tasks.

In Sweden, the last municipal reform took place in 1974 when the number was reduced from slightly more than 1,000 to 278. The latest merger of Swedish municipalities took place in 1977. In the period since, the number has slightly increased to 290 due

	DK	FI	IS	NO	SE	FO	GL
Regional levels		Manner-Suomi/ Fasta Finland; Ahvenanmaa/ Åland 2			Landsdel 3		
	Region 5	Suuralue; Storområde 5		Landsdel 7	Riksområde 8		
	Landsdel 11	Maakunta; Landskap 19	Hag-skýrslu-svæði 2	Fylke 19 (18)	Län 21		
Local levels	Kommune 98		Landsvæði 8	Økonomisk region 89		Sýsla 6	
	Sogn 2165	Kunta; Kommun 311	Sveitarfélög 74	Kommune 426 (422)	Kommune 290	Kommune 30	Kommune 4 (5)

Table 1.1 Administrative structures in the Nordic Region on 1 January 2017 (diverging number on 1 January 2018 in brackets).

¹ Grey frames represent the regional levels presented in most regional maps in this report, comparable from a Nordic perspective, while dark gray frames show the local units represented in the majority of our municipal level maps.

Data sources: NSIs, Eurostat, ESPON.

to the dissipation of existing municipalities. Instead of pushing further municipal mergers, the Swedish government has instead focused on the regions in recent years. In March 2016, a committee presented a new map dividing Sweden into six new major regions. The map raised such strong opposition however that the government chose not to proceed with the proposal. When the map turned out to be a distortion of reality, instead of adjusting the map at regional level, the government decided to change the reality at local level. Thus, a new parliamentary committee was set up to develop a strategy for strengthening the municipalities' capacity, focusing more on cooperation and the allocation and execution of tasks than on administrative boundaries.

In common with the Faroe Islands and Greenland, Iceland has only two administrative levels: national and local. In recent times, Iceland has carried through two large reform processes – in 1993 and again in 2005. On both occasions, consultative referendums were held and on both occasions, a majority voted against the suggested mergers. Despite the outcomes of the referendums the reforms resulted in a reduction in the number of municipalities from 196 in 1993 to 89 in 2006. In recent years,

the number of municipalities has been further reduced to 74 on a voluntary basis though the government has, for its part, decided not to push for further aggregations. Instead, the idea of interregional municipal cooperation has been put on the agenda (Traustadóttir, 2015). This idea is aimed at strengthening the local level through the decentralisation of tasks from the government, but without the merging of municipalities.

The Faroe Islands and Greenland both sought to reduce the number of municipalities through administrative reform processes. The Faroese reform process started in 2000 with a new piece of municipal legislation. The government wanted to encourage municipal mergers, but they should be done on an entirely voluntary basis. Since 2000, the number of municipalities has voluntarily decreased from 49 to 29. In a 2012 referendum on municipal mergers, the majority in almost every municipality said no to more mergers.

By far the most radical change took place in Greenland in 2009, where the administrative set up changed from 18 to four municipalities. The idea behind the change which was supported by most of the political parties, was to delegate political deci-

sions and economic resources from the central administration to the municipalities (Hansen, 2015). In reality, only a few administrative areas have at least thus far been transferred, but major areas will be transferred to the municipalities in 2018 and 2019. Widespread dissatisfaction with the new municipal structure especially in Qaasuitsup Kommunia, the largest municipality in the world in terms of square kilometres, led to a political decision to divide Qaasuitsup Kommunia into two municipalities by 1 January 2018.

Background

Since 1981, Nordregio and its predecessor organisations have produced the report *State of the Nordic Region*. The report is published every two years, describing ongoing developments over time in the Nordic Region at the municipal and regional levels. This report is the 15th volume in the series “Regional Development in the Nordic countries”, which has supplied policymakers and practitioners with comprehensive data and analyses on Nordic regional development for many years.

The report is based on the latest statistics on demographic change, labour markets, education, economic development, etc. The analyses are based on a broad range of indicators covering the above mentioned areas. Since 2016, *State of the Nordic Region* has also included a Regional Development Potential Index which highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the 74 Nordic regions in relation to one another and identifies the regions with the strongest development potentials. The maps contained within the report can also be accessed through Nordregio's online map gallery, and NordMap, an interactive map tool dealing with demographic, labour market and accessibility issues in the Nordic countries.

From 2018, publication of *State of the Nordic Region* has been directly overseen by the Nordic Council of Ministers centrally. The ambition here is to make the report a flagship project for the Nordic Council of Ministers, enhancing its analytical capacity and its ability to collaborate across sectors and institutions. *State of the Nordic Region* strengthens Nordic identity and community. It is deeply illustrative thanks to its rich map material and is therefore suitable for the international marketing of the Nordic Region. Thanks to the Nordic Region's strong performance in international comparisons it can

also contribute to the strengthening of Nordic influence and competitiveness within Europe as well as globally.

Given its focus on scale, *State of the Nordic Region* builds on the collection and use of Nordic statistics at the local and regional levels. The advantage of following an administrative division is that it co-incides with political responsibilities and thus becomes more relevant to politicians and other decisionmakers for whom access to comparable and reliable statistical information is vital. The report itself should not however be viewed as being politically guided or seen as containing political pointers or recommendations. Maintaining integrity and independence is important for the credibility and, ultimately, for how the *State of the Nordic Region* is received and used. When the inclusion of an international benchmarking approach makes sense, the Nordic focused material is supplemented with statistics and maps addressing the pan-European level.

The concept of *State of the Nordic Region* can be both scaled up and down. An example of the former is the ESPON BSR-TeMo project (2014) and its follow-up TeMoRi (Rispling & Grunfelder, 2016), conducted by Nordregio on behalf of the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, with both projects focusing on the development of a territorial monitoring approach for the Baltic Sea Region (ESPON, 2014; Rispling & Grunfelder, 2016). Examples of scaling down include various assignments that Nordregio has implemented for individual regions such as Jämtland, Värmland, and Lappi. The potentials for extending the implementation of *State of the Nordic Region* are therefore immense if awareness increases due to its broader launch profile.

Further reading

The report consists of two parts; the first, consisting of three thematic areas which have remained constant over the years of this publication (demography, labour market and economy) and are summarised in the Regional Development Potential Index (chapter 15).

Demography (chapters 2–4): Describes and analyses population development in terms of natural increase or decline, migration, urbanisation and age distribution.

Labour market (chapters 5–7). Describes and analyses employment, unemployment and economically-inactive groups, especially among young people and foreign born, as well as education.

Economy (chapters 8–10): Describes and analyses GDP, income levels, innovation capacity, research and development and foreign direct investment (FDI).

The second part consists of four thematic focus areas. The chosen areas for the 2018 edition are:

Bioeconomy (chapter 11): Focuses on land use and land ownership, forestry, biogas, fisheries and aquaculture.

Digitalisation (chapter 12): Focuses on the broadband coverage and use of Internet to interact with the public sector.

Health and welfare (chapter 13): Focuses on public health issues and the territorial dimensions of life expectancy and accessibility to healthcare.

Culture and arts (chapter 14): Focuses on newly produced data at municipal and regional levels on cinemas, libraries and museums.

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State of the Nordic Region and a range of other publications are a result of the Nordic Council of Ministers placing greater emphasis on providing and sharing knowledge and insight with decision makers throughout the Region.

State of the Nordic Region compiles knowledge and information that provides a holistic perspective on developments in the Region and helps decision-makers to draw up new policies. It highlights our successes and sheds light on the challenges we face in key areas of society.

State of the Nordic Region is produced by Nordregio, the Nordic Council of Ministers' research centre for regional development and planning, which has produced similar reports for a number of years but has now embarked on a series of more ambitious ones. As well as demographics, the economy and the labour market, State of the Nordic Region contains chapters on digitalisation, bio-economics, health and culture.

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