

NORDIC DEMOGRAPHY PROGRAMME 2014–2015

# LOCAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

# NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS DEMOGRAPHY PROGRAMME PROJECTS 2014–2015

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# LET'S LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER

 Demographic trends in the Nordic countries are characterised by urbanisation, mobility and ageing population. Many municipalities and societies – especially those that are distant from large cities – are deeply affected by these changes, and they are facing serious challenges when it comes to issues such as ensuring a population of skilled people and access to both public and private services. The Nordic countries share these challenges, and therefore there is great interest in learning from one another in the Nordic region when it comes to how to meet the challenges.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy is a gathering of national officials from all the Nordic countries. The demographic challenges have ranked near the top of their agenda for a long time – with a particular focus on sparsely-populated and rural areas. Two of the committee's initiatives are to initiate a working group for demography and welfare, and to launch the DKK 6 million Nordic demography programme. The purpose of the programme is to support local and regional initiatives and new work approaches in order to meet demographic challenges. The programme is also intended to encourage knowledge exchange among the Nordic countries, by organising all of the projects as

partnerships between at least two Nordic municipalities, regions and/or organisations.

The first round of the demography programme was launched in the summer of 2012, and four Nordic projects received financing. The second round of the programme was launched at the end of 2013, and a total of six projects received financing. Three of them had already begun as part of the first round, and received support to continue their cooperation. A total of about thirty municipalities, regions and actors throughout the Nordic region have participated in the project.

The results from the six projects that made up the second round of the programme are presented in this report. Concrete models were developed and tested in several of the projects, in order to provide regions and municipalities with tools to approach these issues more systematically. These include tools to increase the attractiveness of municipalities on a broader front, and targeted initiatives to make use of young people's creativity and entrepreneurship. The ambition is for these projects to serve as a source of inspiration for other municipalities and communities around the Nordic region struggling with similar challenges. The Nordic working group for demography and welfare will work to disseminate and refine their results and models through seminars and other channels.

**We hope you will find this report inspiring!**

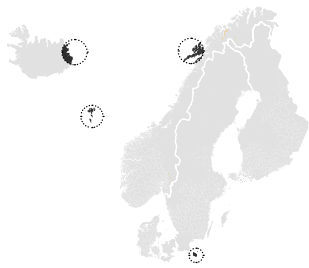


**SVERKER LINDBLAD** CHAIRMAN

Nordic working group for demography and welfare, Nordic Council of Ministers  
June 2015

# HOME IS WHERE THE ISLAND HEART BEATS

Buying a summer house and organising various festivals has become a way for young people who have moved away to keep a connection with the place where they grew up. Therefore these emigrants should be seen as important assets to a community's survival – and not as a brain drain. The key is to forge strong bonds while they are growing up.



## MORE INFORMATION

[www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography)

## PARTNERS

### Iceland

Austurbrú (lead partner)

### Norway

Vesterålen Regional Council

### Denmark

Centre for Regional & Tourism Research, Bornholm

University of the Faroe Islands

Municipality of Vágur

We are in the midst of change. On the one hand we have the traditional strategies for enticing young people to return to the communities where they grew up. On the other hand we are seeing more and more emigrants who continue to contribute to the community's survival, development and future, through measures including organising activities and festivals in their home villages.

Bornholm is a clear example. Many people move away to Copenhagen for the sake of education and jobs, and to start families. They settle down there, but they maintain active connections to Bornholm and continue to be part of the island.

They buy summer houses in Bornholm, and they are extremely loyal summer visitors, and moreover they are a direct source of income for the island. They renew the Bornholm brand by creating and participating in local art, film, food and music festivals. They are ambassadors in Copenhagen – for both the island and its festivals. They are role models for young people who live in Bornholm, and they add a group of well-educated and widely-travelled people with advanced skills to the island.

## FESTIVALS STUDIED DURING THE COURSE OF THE PROJECT

16 festivals were studied – all organised by or with the support of emigrants:

■ **Bornholm:** Wonderfestivall, Svaneke Beach volleyball, Born Shorts International Film Festival, Sol over Gudhjem – Gourmet Cooking Competition

■ **East Iceland:** Bræðslan (music festival), Eistnaflug (metal music festival), LungA (art festival), Sviðamessa (annual town fest)

■ **Vesterålen:** BlaBla Festivale (punk music festival), Rock mot rus (one of northern Norway's oldest rock festivals), Bjørnskinnfestivalen (village festival), Arctic Sea Kayak Race

■ **The Faroe Islands:** MENT (village festival), The New Year's Eve, Jóansøka, the Midsummer festival on Suðuroy, Viking days in Hovi

## Cooperation among four Nordic islands

The project began with Bornholm's situation as its starting point. By gathering information from a total of 16 festivals, the participants learned that the same state of affairs existed in eastern Iceland, Vesterålen in northern Norway and in the Faroe islands.

## A basis for a new policy

But how do you transform the insight about the continued importance of emigrants into practical policies and local initiatives? The purpose of the project was in fact to provide knowledge and analytical tools to evaluate festivals organised by emigrants. The knowledge is intended to form the basis for decisions and choices of direction for municipalities and local politicians.

## Local business rose by 153 percent

It's clear that the festivals included in the study contributed to the communities in several ways. One directly measurable fact was that local business rose by up to 153 percent during the festivals. The rise in business is connected with the community's changed image connected to the marketing of the festival – an image that moreover continues to attract tourists all year round.

Ordinarily the festivals are held in the village where the emigrants grew up due to their connection to the place, their networks and family relationships. Meanwhile in some cases the festival was located far away from the local residents, who therefore did not perceive the festival as "theirs". In other cases there were problems due to insufficient infrastructure.

## Local support is critical

When asked what could cause emigrants to stop involving themselves in their home village, there was only one answer: Negative reactions from the residents and lack of support from the local community on issues such as financing and access to facilities. Therefore it's clear that this type of project requires coordination and regular meetings between the parties working together for their community's development.



Maintaining ties was the single most important factor behind contributing to events. So, how can a community foster such strong ties?

**Create strong bonds and keep them alive**

The emigrants want to preserve and renew their bond with the area where they grew up for both personal and altruistic reasons, while their feelings of guilt about having left are assuaged by contributing to their home area's well-being.

These driving forces bring up important questions for municipalities and local politicians: What can they do to forge these strong bonds between the generation currently growing up and the community? And what sort of political agenda supports the creation of memories and emotional bonds, and encourages young

people to come back as event organisers and resources for their home communities?

One thing is clear. There is good reason to rethink the meaning of home and belonging. A home is not just the place where one temporarily happens to live. Home is where the heart is. ■

# MONEY OF MY OWN

## EARNING A LIVING AS A YOUNG PERSON IN THE ARCHIPELAGO OR SPARSELY-POPULATED AREAS

The *Money of my own* project highlights people, ideas and how communities can promote participation and opportunities for young people in sparsely-populated areas. Two things stand out as a recipe for success: having courage and adults who really listen to young people and young adults.



### MORE INFORMATION

[www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography)

### PARTNERS

The Nordic Archipelago Cooperation (lead partner)

#### Sweden

Östergötland County Administrative Board

#### Finland

Confederation of Åland Enterprise, Young Entrepreneurship

SKUNK Skärgårds-ungdomarnas intresseorganisation, Åland

Luckan Raseborg, UngInfo (information and cultural centre)

Finlands Svenska 4H (organisation for children and youth)

In many places there is an exodus from the archipelago and sparsely-populated areas. The gender distribution becomes more uneven and the labour market is changing. The culture of having multiple occupations is important – sometimes decisive – but is not always visible in the ordinary statistics. However, there is more to demographics than just statistics and figures. For that reason, the project has chosen to highlight people and present good examples of young entrepreneurs and adults who make things possible.

Young people in the archipelago and sparsely-populated areas have a lot of questions with regard to employment and earning a living and establishing the life they want. If a region is to be developed, the key thing is to

make use of and develop the human capital, in other words the people who live there. The people are what matters. It is the people that think, get ideas and make decisions, that trade and make choices.

In order for sparsely-populated areas and the archipelago to live, civil servants and politicians need to ask themselves how they can make it easier for young adults to live and work in these areas. An investment in young people is a long-term investment.

### Matters concerning young people that are settled by adults

The project has shown that the question of encouraging and involving young people is largely about adults. Therein lies the challenge. It is a question of changing the adult world's attitudes and of getting adults to stop deciding what is "good" for young people. That means, among other things, dealing with their own prejudices and finding new ways of looking at their locality and the young people who do not choose to move away to study. This applies to local politicians, civil servants and everyone who works closely with young people. The task and the challenge is to enable young people's own ideas to become real – not to serve up activities chosen by adults.

### "I know someone you should talk to"

A local community that wishes to keep its young people and welcome them as part of the social structure needs to look at what signals it is sending out. It also needs to establish a meeting place where young people feel comfortable. It is necessary to have a contact person that young people can go to with questions and it is important for that person not to be replaced every six months, but to build up long-term relationships and continuity.

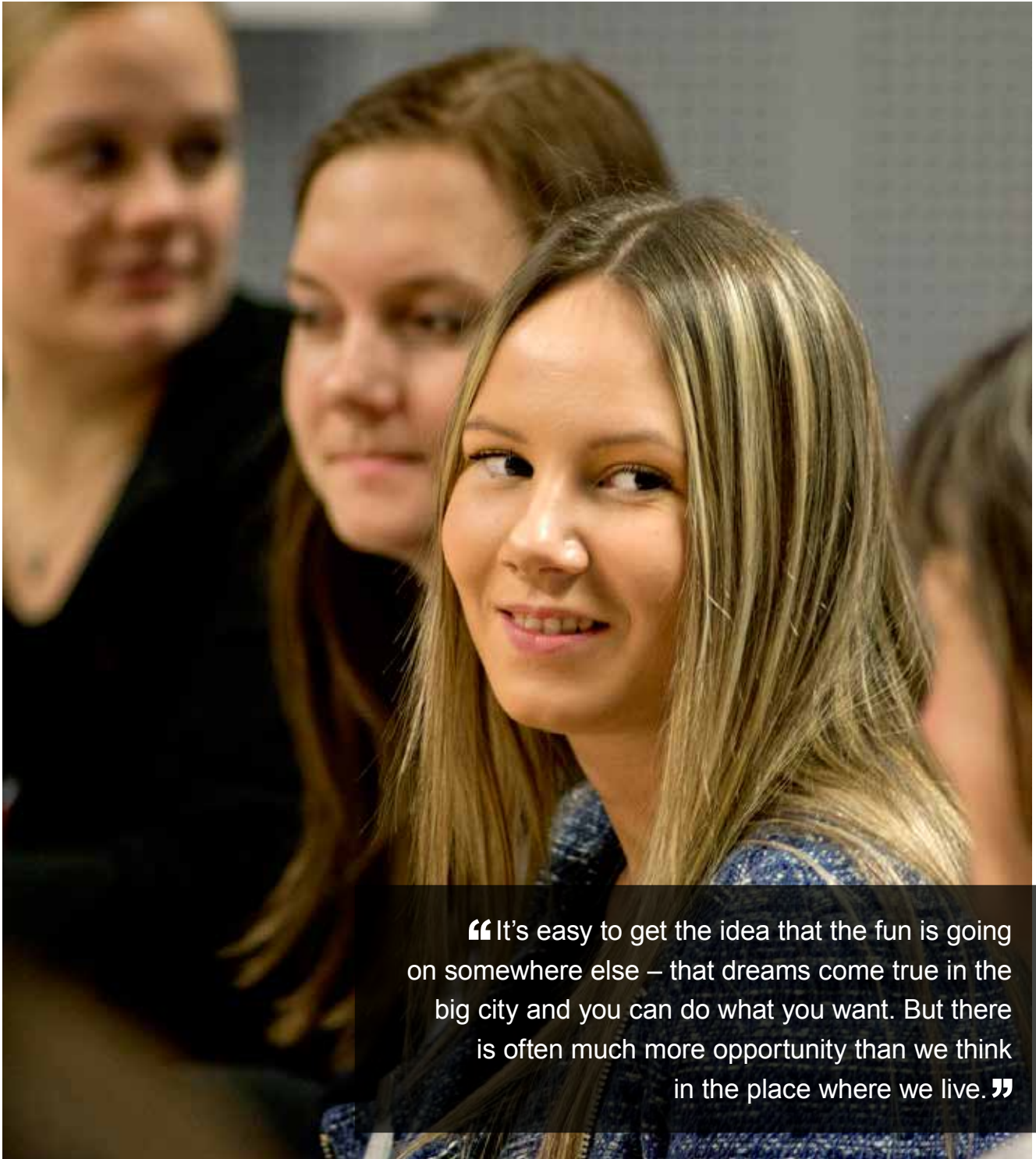
However, everything does not just depend on the contact person, it is more a question of involvement by adults generally. Getting young people to participate in the life of the community works best in places where there are large numbers of adults who draw in

### ABOUT THE PROJECT:

■ **Working model:** Meetings and study visits within the project group and member regions. Closing Nordic Conference "*Just här är det möjligt*" [*It's possible right here*] to generate contacts, involving specific examples and role models from the member regions in the form of energetic young people, inspirational adults and structural solutions in municipalities and organisations. The project has put together a written "Idea bank" as a specific tool for others to use and be inspired by when working in their own municipalities and regions. The report, idea bank and conference are available at [www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography).

■ **On the choice of working model:** "*Storytelling from real life is always a strong tool for understanding and inspiration. It is often more powerful than pure statistics, figures and facts.*"

Ester Miiros, Project Leader of Money of my own and Head of Cooperation at The Nordic Archipelago Cooperation.



“It’s easy to get the idea that the fun is going on somewhere else – that dreams come true in the big city and you can do what you want. But there is often much more opportunity than we think in the place where we live.”

young people and their ideas and who pass those ideas on. Their enthusiasm should be met with “I know someone you should talk to” and “OK, we’ll try that out”.

**Listen and dare**

“Listen and dare” summarises the project’s conclusions. By listening we encourage young people to participate and we make their ideas vis-

ible. That also gives them the courage to make their own living in sparsely-populated areas.

So listen calmly, respectfully, with an open mind and above all really listen – without taking over or making suggestions. And don’t hide behind routine phrases like “No, that can’t be done”. Listen openly and dare to say “Yes”.

Dare to try things out, do things differently and follow your own path and convictions.

That applies to both young people and adults – businessmen, civil servants and politicians.

Developing human capital is crucial for sustainable development in sparsely-populated areas in the Nordic countries. Young people are the future, they say, but, more importantly, they are here right now. Listen and dare to say “Yes” to their ideas today instead of planning for the future. ■



# PARTICIPATION AND INNOVATION IN REMOTE AREAS

## FOCUSING ON AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS

The project introduces the Bygdastovan model, which is based on the population's concrete need for support, while offering a professional, political and practical foundation. It's believed that the model will be able to blaze a path for a new approach to work in the peripheral islands of the Faroes and other similar areas in the Nordic region.



### MORE INFORMATION

[www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography)

### PARTNERS

#### The Faroes

The Research Center for Social Development, University of the Faroe Islands (lead partner)

Kommunufelagið (joint municipal organization)

Vinnuframi

The Ministry of Industry ALS (Employment Service)

The municipalities of Tórshavn, Klaksvík, Húsar, Fugloy and Sunda

The Entrepreneur House

#### Iceland

SSNV (The North-West Union of Local Authorities)

Living conditions in the sparsely populated Faroe islands and northwest Iceland are dictated by major demographic challenges. In many villages there are very few women left, and almost no children or young people. For example in northwest Iceland the number of residents below the age of 39 has declined by 24 percent since 1998.

There is a direct link between the lack of local jobs and the problem of depopulation. Organisations in both the Faroes and northwest Iceland are engaged with employment issues. Through the course of earlier cooperation

schemes, they noted numerous similarities in the challenges facing their regions and determined that the problem requires a customised approach.

Therefore the objective of the project was to create an effective support system to provide advice and guidance to local entities wishing to start companies and create jobs.

### A more relevant support system

The project was based on the needs of the local Faroese population and entrepreneurs. This is because previous experience has shown that there is a large gap between available startup support and the reality experienced by the entrepreneurs.

In order to bridge this gap and boost entrepreneurship, it was important for the Faroese entrepreneurs to be able to describe their needs themselves. The next step was to develop a model wherein the Faroese local population created a relevant support system in dialogue with government authorities, the research world and the business sector.

The model is designed based on the example of the established Icelandic support organisation SSNV. Iceland's experience is well known, and it has been extremely important to the design of the Faroese model.

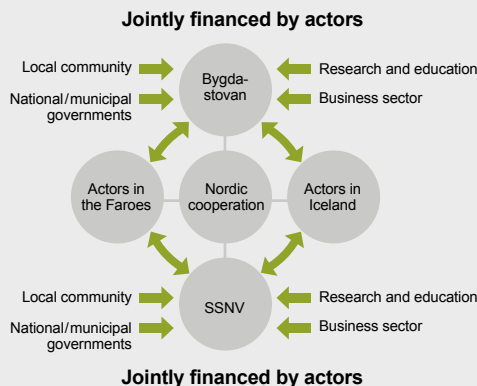
### The results: The Bygdastovan model

The model, which organises professional support based on entrepreneurs' actual needs, has been named Bygdastovan. The model's strength is that it is based on concrete needs for support, while the makeup of the participants provides a broad professional, political and practical foundation.

The Bygdastovan model is expected to be ready for implementation in the spring of 2016. It will include

## BYGDASTOVAN

■ The Bygdastovan model organises professional support for local entrepreneurs based on their concrete needs, while the makeup of the participants provides a broad professional, political and practical foundation.







“Great people, but governed by the norm that says that the good life is the city life.”

everything from mentorship and a local presence to quality and product development. It's also an organised platform to encourage partnerships and hold workshops and inspiration meetings.

#### **Lessons for the entire Nordic region**

Several lessons have been learned at this point

in the project. One is that it is possible to transfer models from a local area in one Nordic country to another. Another lesson for regions, municipalities and institutions is the possibility of developing a feeling of solidarity between countries by focusing on a simple and concrete subject. In addition, the project shows that it is easy to get the local popula-

tion involved, create a sense of commitment and get partnerships going. People want to see their area develop, but they need to be met halfway.

The actual results of the project will not be seen until 2016–2017, but it is believed that working based on the Bygdastovan model will be extremely successful. ■

# DEVELOPING HEDMARK AND DALARNA AS AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO LIVE

The attractiveness model is a strategic tool for understanding the factors that make a community an attractive place to live. It has provided the neighbouring regions of Hedmark in Norway and Dalarna in Sweden with the basis for a scientific, strategic and long-term process to turn the current trend towards depopulation.



## MORE INFORMATION

[www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography)

## PARTNERS

### Sweden

The Border Committee of Hedmark-Dalarna (lead partner)

Region Dalarna

The County Administrative Board of Dalarna

### Norway

Hedmark County Council  
County Governor Hedmark

Regional Council  
Sør-Østerdal

The Norwegian region of Hedmark and the Swedish region of Dalarna are facing similar demographic challenges, and they've been working together since 2007. The issues confronting them are depopulation, a low birth rate, a gender imbalance and an ageing population. Young people and women move away to study and find work, and neither region has been able to halt this trend despite multiple campaigns.

The Hedmark-Dalarna border committee decided to arm themselves against these challenges with knowledge about the factors that are actually at play in a community's development by using the Attractiveness Model – an analytical instrument developed by the Telemark Research Institute in Norway.

The Attractiveness Model analyses and explains which factors affect communities' development. The model is designed to be used directly in the strategic development processes of municipalities, regions and counties.

## Attractiveness affects established factors

It looks quite straightforward. Companies and visitors create jobs. Jobs and housing create growth. If a community is perceived to be an attractive place to live, this contributes to development and growth. The fact of the

matter is that a community that is perceived as attractive experiences higher growth than might be expected.

Surprisingly, some municipalities experience immigration despite little to no growth in the number of jobs, while other municipalities experience out-migration despite good access to jobs. In this case attractiveness for companies, visitors and potential residents is the important factor.

## The model becomes relevant for Sweden

The Hedmark-Dalarna border committee contacted the Telemark Research Institute and began a partnership concerning the five municipalities of Trysil and Rendalen in Hedmark and Vansbro, Smedjebacken and Säter in Dalarna. The Telemark Research Institute's work had previously only been used in Norway. Now the model was refined so that it would work in Sweden as well, through measures including retrieving data from Statistics Sweden and a relevant analytical framework divided by industry for Sweden.

## The ability to create future projections

The attractiveness model was previously used to analyse historical development, but now it was used for the first time for future projections. The objective was to project how jobs and population would develop at varying levels of attractiveness.

The projections proved to be the most interesting parts of the analysis of the five municipalities. There were striking similarities between the challenges facing Norwegian communities and the driving forces for development, even if the structural traits of development differed between the two countries.

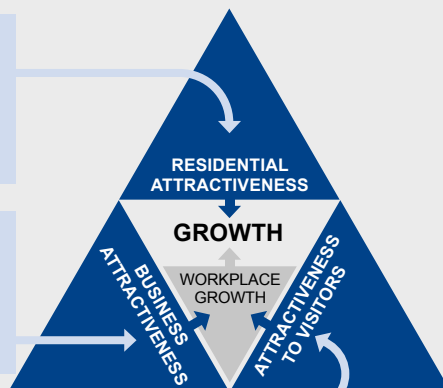
## Towards the future they choose

For Hedmark and Dalarna, this project means that the municipalities that were analysed can address their demographic challenges with planning and initiatives using a scientific, strategic and long-term approach going forward. They understand how various factors interact and affect their municipalities; they have a new tool to manage the current situation; and they have even had a glimpse into the future. In fact, different versions of it. ■

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ATTRACTIVENESS MODEL

- Pricing
- Variety of housing types
- Availability
- Quality of lots and residential construction

- Reputation
- Land and buildings
- Services/amenities
- Identity and regional culture

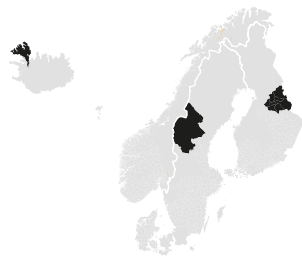




“ How to beat the demographic challenges? We don't know. One thing we know though, is that we have to do something different from what we have done in the past. ”

# REGIONAL COOPERATION ON IN-MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHY TO PRESERVE EMPLOYMENT AND THE TAX BASE

Demographic challenges and a shortage of jobs are hitting sparsely-populated areas and the tax-financed welfare system hard. A new method uses a holistic cross-sector perspective as its starting point. Now decision makers and stakeholders are gathering around a shared vision of the possibilities to offer jobs, retain young people, increase in-migration and attract companies.



## MORE INFORMATION

[www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography)

## PARTNERS

### Sweden

Jämtland-Härjedalen County Council (lead partner)

### Finland

Regional Council of Kainuu

### Iceland

Fjórðungssamband Vestfirðinga (Coalition of Local Authorities in Westfjord)

The demographic challenges facing rural areas and small towns – populations with a declining share working-age people and a rising share of the elderly – affect the foundation of the tax-financed welfare system. Reduced tax revenues lead to consequences including difficulty in maintaining medical care and social services, areas where there will be a great need for workers in the near future.

The demographic changes also cause many companies to experience difficulties in finding people with the right skills when they are recruiting, while the general shortage of jobs has a negative impact on the region's development.

Region Jämtland-Härjedalen in Sweden, the Regional Council of Kainuu in Finland and Fjórðungssamband Vestfirðinga in Iceland's Westfjords have initiated a partnership on these issues.

## The necessary turnaround

To turn the situation around, in-migration to rural regions must increase and rigorous efforts are needed to attract the younger generation and get young emigrants to move back to stay in the region where they grew up.

The regions participating in the project are unanimous in their belief that jobs and competitiveness are key factors in demographic development. They also agree that attractiveness and public services offered by the regions are critical to this development as well. All of them must be maintained at a high level.

## A new method based on the right driving forces

The one-year project has worked on and revealed the

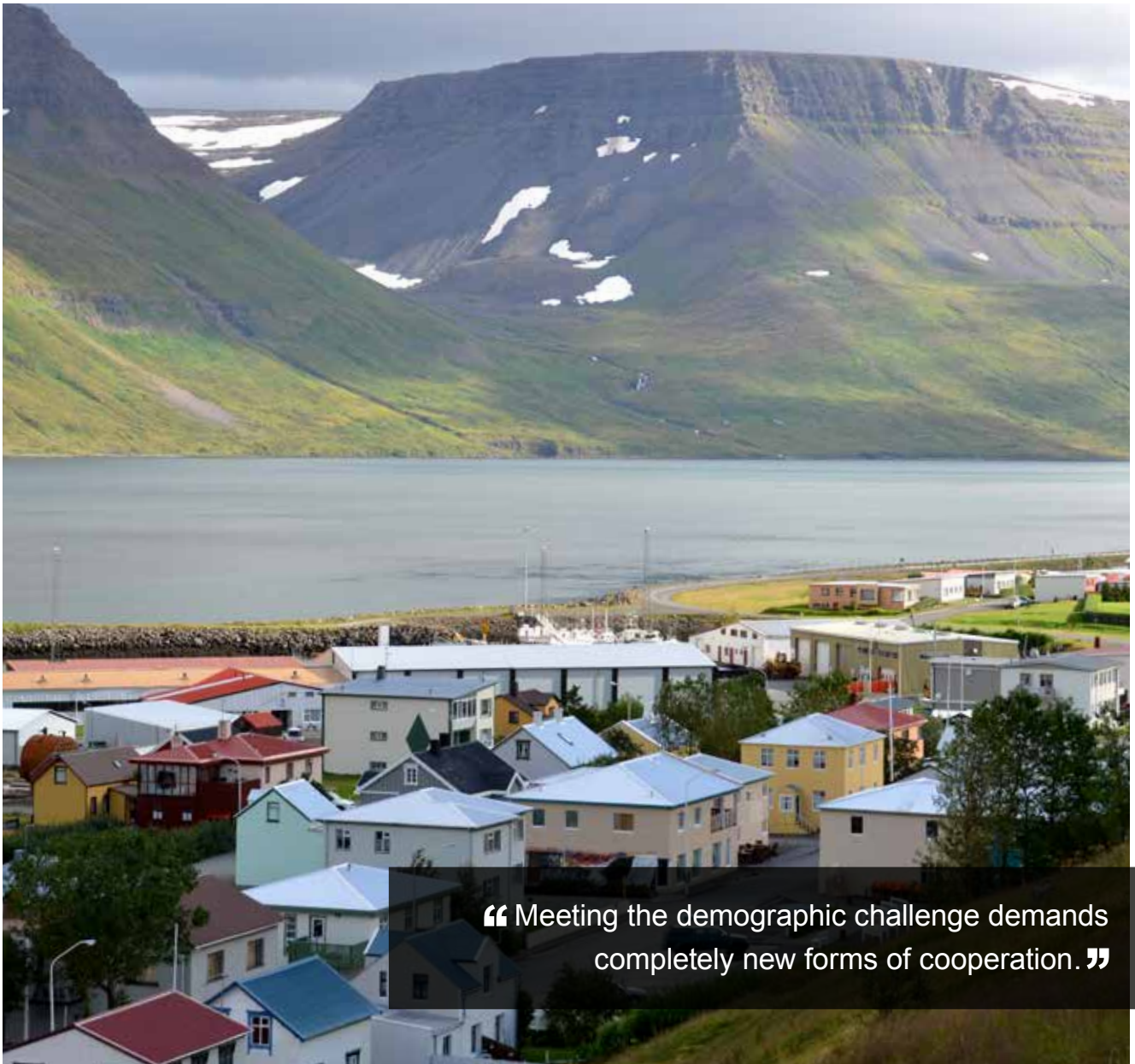
underlying structures that consciously and unconsciously determine the regions' efforts on employment and demography issues. It was important to design a completely new method that took into account these underlying tendencies, emotions and impressions.

Therefore the most important result is the holistic cross-sector method that emerged in the course of the cooperation among the project's regions, municipalities and other stakeholders. The method serves as the starting point for a joint working model that can become a long-term model – provided that all of the parties feel that they contributed and that they are part of the process.

Thanks to the method, it will be easier for the regions to concentrate on the right objectives – namely the objectives that are most important in their efforts to manage the demographic challenges.

## A new chance to make comparisons

Since the project participants from Sweden, Finland and Iceland are now working based on the same method, comparisons between the regions will be interesting and relevant in an entirely new way. This also applies to opportunities to learn from one another's efforts and setbacks, as well as to transfer experiences to other regions. The basis for future decisions and analyses will grow larger, and create a new sense of confidence as the regions work primarily on stabilising their population numbers during a time of strong urbanisation. ■



“ Meeting the demographic challenge demands completely new forms of cooperation. ”

## RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE NEW WORKING METHOD:

■ **Communication.** Better communication between actors in all parts of public and civil society is a requirement to turn around the trend towards regional resettlement and emigration. For this communication to be effective, an analysis of the target groups is necessary to serve as the basis for the strategic ranking of initiatives to meet stated goals.

■ **Cooperation.** Cooperation on various projects and initiatives related to in-migration is needed in order to exchange experiences and to use good examples to shine a light on work on the demographic challenges. The work can be managed by a coordinator at the regional level, along with representatives from the municipal level and other organisations working on the issue.

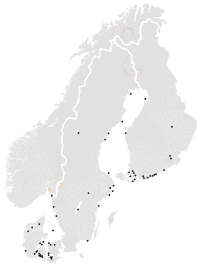
■ **Networks.** Joint public/private sector networks consisting of committed and responsible employers who provide for their recruitment needs now and in the future.

■ **Attractiveness.** In order to attract new residents, better descriptions of the prospects for moving to and working in the region are needed (the business sector, education, the labour market, culture etc.). The information must be visible and accessible on the regions' and municipalities' websites, through marketing activities and in international networks.

■ **Broader responsibility.** Meeting the demographic challenge of a labour shortage and emigration demands that the parts of society that are not primarily affected by the issue understand it and take responsibility.

# NEXT STOP – THE SMALL ISLANDS

Smaller island communities are being hit hard by urbanisation. This is the reality in all of the Nordic countries. The project *Next stop – the small islands* is a partnership with the objective of developing strategies to make small islands into strong local communities.



## MORE INFORMATION

[www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography)

## PARTNERS

### Denmark

The Association of Danish Small Islands (lead partner)

### Sweden

The National Association of the Swedish Archipelago

### Finland

The National Association of Finnish Islands

Island communities in the Nordic region are suffering from depopulation, with men and the elderly being the ones who remain. As a result it is obvious to make a joint effort to look into new ways of thinking and to inject new energy into the discussion of how small island communities can attract new inhabitants.

The basis for the project was the situation of island communities in Denmark, Sweden and Finland. The short-term goal was to share experiences with the challenges and opportunities of developing stronger local communities. The long-term goal is to provide knowledge to change the population structure so that it is closer to the respective countries' normal age and gender distribution. The solution involves both providing better job opportunities and a better business environment, and marketing island life and creating a higher level of attractiveness.

### Unexpected difference among the countries

Demographic data was collected, analysed and compared during the course of the project. One surprising difference that appeared among the countries was that the percentage reduction in the island population is significantly higher in Denmark than in Sweden and Finland – even though Denmark is a smaller country with relatively short distances to population centres, with what would appear to be better prospects for a stable population on the islands.

Could this be because Sweden and Finland have a different rural culture? Have they been better at keeping their archipelagos and rural areas alive with services, schools and jobs? These types of questions need to be researched in more detail, while reviewing the results of the workshops held with the three countries' islanders. Moreover it is extremely valuable for each country

to compare population statistics for its sparsely-populated areas with those for its smaller island communities.

### The next steps at the local and regional levels...

For local and regional politicians, the next steps towards stronger local communities are a matter of being aware of the local situation, the island communities' needs and how they contribute to society during the regional planning and development process. After the situation is analysed, they must look beyond the numbers in order to make certain that the local population has access to services and infrastructure that work at a local level – sometimes through “home-grown” solutions that work on the ground and are determined by the residents.

### ... and at the EU level

The project has established that there must also be an EU policy for the development of the islands where the islands are viewed as an asset. This policy must ensure fundamental needs such as transport to the mainland and access to health care, preschools, IT and telecommunications as well as opportunities for borrowing and financing of local initiatives.

But developing smaller island communities is also a matter of flexibility in applying the law. Some laws are quite simply irrelevant, or cannot be taken into account if the island communities are to live. These include certain nature conservation laws.

Last but not least, the project emphasises the importance of the EU revising the definition of islands with a right to support to include islands with a population of less than 50.

### United in the face of future challenges

The project has united the island associations of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, which share many challenges despite their national differences. Everyone involved with the project sees a need to employ national strategies for sustainable island communities. Together the island communities will go forward with the results and recommendations that have resulted from the project.

Collaborating has also enabled them to see their own countries' problems objectively and to become more open to new ideas. ■

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

■ **Working model:** Collection and analysis of statistical data, combined with workshops for islanders. The workshops involve the development of experiences and the collection of cases and ideas.

“It is important for small communities to be seen – on all levels.”





## LESSONS FOR THE ENTIRE NORDIC REGION

The Nordic demography programme has helped both to develop existing partnerships and to establish new ones. The project has served as a platform for sharing experiences, holding discussions and learning about demographic challenges, local development and the creation of attractive communities. Now we have methods, inspiration and experiences to disseminate, adapt and test throughout the Nordic region. In this article we will summarise our thoughts and conclusions about the programme's three overarching topics.

### THE MOBILE GENERATION.

The ongoing urbanisation process is hitting sparsely populated areas hard, but there are some bright spots. It is easy for young people in sparsely populated areas to move to a larger city for education or work. They also belong to a mobile generation that will live in and experience many places throughout their lives. At the same time, many of them are also interested in the potential to stay, and they are defying the lack of jobs by creating their own jobs.

Both the choice to leave their hometowns and the choice to stay must be respected. The focus should be on viewing young people as continuing long-term assets for the community, and on involving them in local development efforts, regardless of which choice they make about their future. In fact, the project

*Home is where the island heart beats* (Bornholm, the Faroes, Norway, Iceland) demonstrates that many young people who leave their communities retain strong ties and want to give something back and contribute to the community, for example by organising festivals in their hometowns and serving as informal tourism ambassadors. In other words, there is good reason to reevaluate the young people who move away, and to view them as part of the community's continued development instead of as a painful brain drain.

The young people who want to remain in the community have their own ideas about how to support themselves. However they depend on having a local community that listens without prejudice and dares to affirm young people's ideas. Adults should also stop defining which activities are "good" for young people based

on old standards and ideas. The adults' task becomes to involve young people in community decisions and in democratic processes, so that they feel that they are being taken seriously. This is shown in *Money of my own – How to earn a living for young people in the archipelago and other sparsely populated areas* (Åland, Finland, Sweden).

Strong ties to their home communities are the key to having young people become part of its future in some way. In order to preserve existing ties, it's critical for municipalities and regions to become interested in young people's needs and to work based on a perspective where young people are validated and taken seriously. But the major task for the Nordic region's sparsely-populated areas is to create these strong emotional bonds from the very beginning. ■



## LOCAL ECONOMIES AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SPARSELY-POPULATED AREAS.

There is a direct link between the lack of local jobs and the problem of depopulation. Keeping the local business community and entrepreneurial spirit going demands cooperation, networking and unified action by all of the different stakeholders. It's a matter of mustering energy, moving in the same direction and actually working with what you've got. Good examples and experiences from communities that have succeeded are extremely important for a sense of commitment and belief in your own community. Local companies and organisations need to feel a sense of commitment from their leaders and they need access to services and infrastructure that works at the local level, sometimes through "homegrown" solutions.

The Bygdastovan model emerged from the project *Participation and innovation in remote areas – focusing on an academic support system for local entrepreneurs* (The Faroes, Iceland). This model organises professional sup-

port based on entrepreneurs' actual needs. The model's strength is that it is based on concrete needs for support, while the makeup of the participants provides a broad professional, political and practical foundation.

Tourism demands and depends on many different kinds of local entrepreneurship, and therefore it's possible to motivate companies to participate in projects that help increase tourism. The best advice is to begin with the most committed people, who have the drawing power to bring in other people. Cooperation among companies is important. An attractive business environment begins with local companies – new companies only come to the community once that is in place.

Cooperative company formation is a growing trend, which often has a volunteer element. Therefore there is a growing need for alternative financing solutions, rather than financing through traditional banks which are not focused on the particular circumstances of sparsely-populated communities. Regional microfinance and joint fund-raising efforts to finance community initiatives are increasing. ■

## CREATING ATTRACTIVE COMMUNITIES.

In order to turn around the trend towards urbanisation and get the business community to invest and offer job opportunities, regions and communities beyond large cities must be attractive from several perspectives. It must be attractive to live, visit and run a company there.

It's possible to evaluate attractiveness, to work on the determining factors, to see how they interact and even to show the expected results from different types of initiatives. This is shown in the project *Demographic challenges in Hedmark and Dalarna* (Norway, Sweden), which uses an established Norwegian attractiveness model to help municipalities address their challenges and take a scientific and strategic approach to planning and investment.

The demographic trend affects the basis for the tax-financed welfare system. The project *Regional cooperation on in-migration and demography to preserve employment and the tax base* (Sweden, Finland, Iceland) has developed a new holistic, cross-sector method that unites the region's stakeholders and looks beyond the underlying structures that consciously and unconsciously determine the regions' efforts on employment and demography issues.

### Recommendations:

- Better communication between actors in all parts of public and civil society is to turn around the trend towards regional resettlement and emigration.

- National and Nordic cooperation on projects and initiatives related to in-migration in order to share experiences and to use good examples to shine a light on work on the demographic challenges.
- Joint public/private sector networks consisting of committed and responsible employers.
- Attractiveness through better descriptions of conditions in the region (the business sector, education, the labour market, culture etc.) to attract new residents.
- Meeting the demographic challenge of a labour shortage and emigration demands that responsibility be broadened to the parts of society that are not primarily affected by the issues, and that they understand them and take responsibility.

The island communities are in a special situation. The project *Next stop – the small islands* (Denmark, Sweden, Norway) has established that there must be a better policy for the development of the islands where the islands are viewed as an asset. This policy must ensure fundamental needs such as transport to the mainland and access to health care, preschools, IT and telecommunications as well as opportunities for borrowing and financing of local initiatives.

But developing smaller island communities is also a matter of flexibility in applying the law, since certain laws cannot be applied if the island communities are to survive. ■



## CONCLUSIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS AT VARIOUS LEVELS:

We hope that the project will serve as a source of inspiration and knowledge for other regions and municipalities. We have drawn up some conclusions based on the project which can be viewed as recommendations for continued work on the issues through the Nordic cooperation, as well as on the national, regional and local levels.

■ The Nordic cooperation needs to build further upon a culture that promotes change and cooperation between countries, regions and municipalities.

■ Collaborating makes it possible to take a fresh look at one's own problems and to become more open to new ideas.

■ Growth strategies are not always very effective. Instead, we must accept that some communities will continue to decrease in numbers. The communities must accept this as a fact, but they must continue to ensure that their municipal residents have good access to services.

■ Making regions and municipalities attractive and managing demographic challenges is a local issue. But support is needed from the national level in the form of infrastructure, broadband, educational opportunities and housing.

■ At the national level, people's life choices need to be respected equally, regardless of whether they choose a life in the countryside, a sparsely populated area or an urban area.

■ At the EU level, what is needed is greater awareness of and a strong focus on the demographic challenges, with strategies, programmes and financing that helps the regions to cope with this trend.

# CONTACT US

All of the demography programme's projects and reports are posted at [www.nordregio.se/demography](http://www.nordregio.se/demography) for the use of municipalities, regions and other stakeholders in the Nordic region. Use and collaborate with the materials and benefit from the methods, knowledge and experience in order to meet demographic challenges and to create local development and attractive communities.



More information about all of the demography programme's projects, reports and presentations:  
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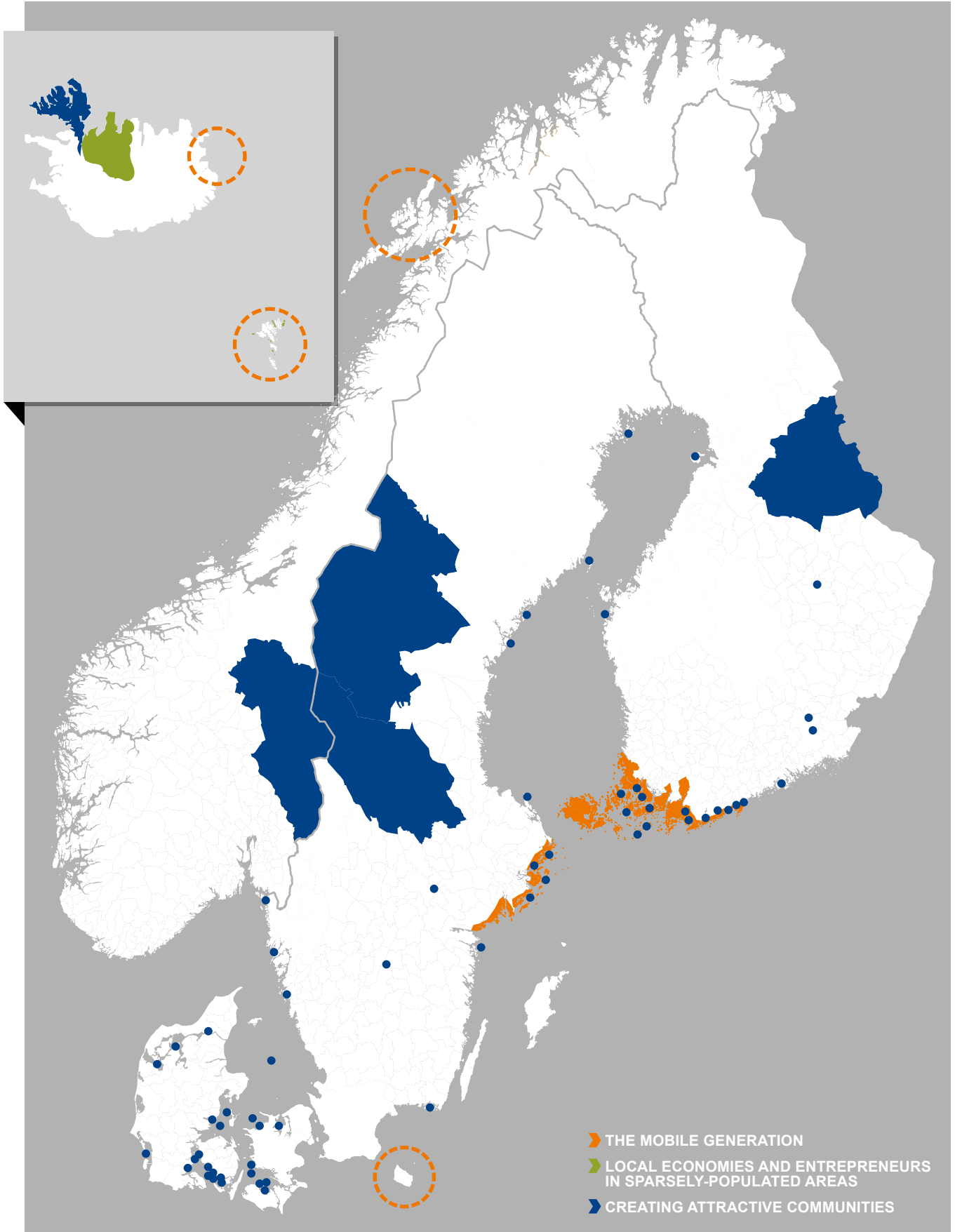
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