Nordic Council of Ministers

Living conditions for LGBTI people in Nordic rural areas



About the report

The living conditions for LGBTI[1] people are influenced by where in the Nordic region they live. There are regional differences in terms of access to support, targeted measures and networks.

To increase knowledge and understanding of the challenges that affect living conditions for LGBTI people in the Nordic countries, the Nordic Council of Ministers has commissioned Nordic information on gender (NIKK) to compile this report. The report has been written by Helga Eggebø and Fredrik Langeland of the Nordlandsforskning research institute in Norway.

The report is based on a review of existing knowledge, mainly research literature, that sheds light on the living conditions for LGBTI people in rural areas of the Nordic region. By comparing and analysing previous research, the report makes visible both challenges and opportunities for LGBTI people, as well as identifying key gaps in knowledge.

The hope is that the report will contribute to a strengthened knowledge base for the work on promoting equal rights and opportunities for LGBTI people in rural areas of the Nordic region. Consequently, the results can support knowledge transfer, policy development and continued Nordic co-operation.

Authors' acknowledgements

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1. LGBTI is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex. Following a decision by the Nordic ministers for gender equality, the term is used in official Nordic cooperation.

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Summary

The last 10–15 years have seen a growing interest in queer lives and living conditions in non-urban areas. What picture does existing research literature paint of living conditions for queer people in different rural areas of the Nordic region? Which geographical areas, perspectives and methods does the research literature on living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region focus on, and what are the research requirements? This report is based on a review of research, and some other contributions to knowledge, that sheds light on living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the eight Nordic countries: Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland, as well as Sápmi.

We have used a wide range of different search strategies, including systematic searches in Nordic and English-language library databases, snowballing and academic networks. The review covers around 75 contributions, primarily with research funding, data collection and references from and academic environments in the same country. We found most contributions from the Norwegian and Swedish context, and fewest from countries on the Nordic periphery, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

There are four recurring themes in the literature: 1. settlement patterns, 2. experiences of young queer people, 3. queer organisation, 4. the importance of Christianity.

Quantitative studies from several Nordic countries show that the concentration of queer people is higher in the big cities than in the general population. This applies particularly to gay men, and to a somewhat lesser degree to lesbian women in established couple relationships. Some studies point out that this may be due to more negative attitudes to queer people in rural areas, while other studies find little support for such an interpretation.

Many of the studies reviewed concern young people. A recurring theme in these studies is that breaking with gender and sexual norms can be challenging, and that several people explain this in terms of living in small places that tend to be characterised by heteronormative gender and sexual norms, religious norms, a lack of queer role models and few queer networks. These young people often express a longing or a desire to move to an urban setting. However, there are also participants who share counternarratives where rural areas are portrayed as inclusive and open, and a place where they feel safe and a sense of belonging. Others speak of a commitment to being the role model in the local community that they themselves lacked, and establishing the communities and arenas they want their hometown to have. Several research participants problematise the dominant cultural narratives that it is difficult to be queer in small places, and the research shows that rural and urban areas are diverse and influenced by different local cultures.

Another central theme is the importance of queer organisation and spaces. The reviewed literature shows that establishing queer spaces outside urban areas is important for many queer people, for example young people and queer Sámi, and emphasises the importance of, for example, Sápmi Pride and other events that make visible the experiences of young queer Sámi. Local pride celebrations can contribute to openness, inclusivity, feelings of belonging and community, and provide visible role models in the local community.

The importance of religious norms, specifically Christianity, is a recurring theme in the literature. Several studies that explore what it means to be queer emphasise the importance of Laestadianism and conservative Christian theology. Conservative religious gender and sexual norms are present in many rural areas, but also in urban areas, and in both Christian and other religious milieus. For some queer people, religious faith and milieus can be difficult to reconcile with living good queer lives, and there is little doubt that religion and religious norms are stronger in some countries, regions and local communities than others.

The report identifies the following research requirements:

1. Comparative studies of living conditions for queer people in different areas of the Nordic region, for example across nation states, autonomous areas, regions, towns/cities and local communities.
2. Studies of living conditions for queer people and queer history on the Nordic periphery, such as Greenland, the Faroe Islands and different parts of Sápmi.
3. Analyses of available quantitative data-sets to study the importance of place for living conditions and quality of life among queer people.
4. Studies of queer organisation on the Nordic periphery, including "village pride", Sápmi Pride, local interest organisations and events.



1 Introduction

The modern homosexual identity narrative is closely associated with the urban, and the strong link between homosexuality and the urban has contributed to establishing a notion of gays leaving rural areas and moving to the big cities to be able to live out their queer identity. This has been discussed as "the gay migration myth" (Howard, 1999) and narratives of being "seksuell flyktning" [a sexual refugee] in the big cities (Mortenson, 2001).

The last 10-15 years have seen a growing interest in LGBTI lives and living conditions in non-urban areas. What is it like to live as a queer person in rural areas? Is it necessarily better to live as a queer person in the town than in the country? In the Nordic region, these questions have been raised by journalists, interest organisations and researchers, and not least by those of us who identify as queer ourselves.

This report discusses living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region from the 2000s to the present day. We have reviewed existing knowledge of the subject and used literature review[2] as a method for studying the following research questions:

- What picture does existing research literature paint of living conditions for queer people in different rural areas of the Nordic region?
- Which geographical areas, perspectives and methods does the research literature on living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region focus on?
- What are the research requirements?

"Queer" is used generally in the report as a collective term for people who in various ways break with hetero and/or cis norms. In the review of research and studies from the different Nordic countries, we use the terms that are relevant in the individual context to acknowledge the variations in terminology that exist in the field.[3]

There seems to be a widespread perception that is difficult to live good queer lives in rural areas because of the lack of diversity, conservative attitudes to gender and sexuality, and few role models and queer networks. In contrast to rural areas, the big cities are perceived as places where it is possible to live good queer lives because of the acceptance of diversity, and LGBTI spaces in the form of places to go, organisations and parades. Eggebø and Stubberud (2022a) describe this as a

2. In this report we use the term "literature review" as a designation for the method underlying the analyses, i.e. search, review and discussion of existing research literature. Other studies also use the terms "literature study", "research overview" and "knowledge review". See also chapter 2 for information on methodology.
3. For a reflection on terminology in the LGBTI field in a Nordic context, see Björklund & Dahl (2020).

"dominant cultural narrative" about queer lives. The rural research shows that this dominant cultural narrative is part of a more general narrative about the town as modern, liberal and diverse, and the country as old-fashioned, conservative and having little diversity.

The dominant cultural narrative about town and country is a recurring theme in the research thematising LGBTI living conditions in rural areas. Firstly, the myth of LGBTI migration to the towns and cities is problematised by demonstrating the opportunities for living good LGBTI lives in rural areas, and the term "queer anti-urbanism" (Herring, 2010a) has been developed to describe rural LGBTI identities that are written into a cultural counternarrative. Secondly, there is a body of research literature documenting challenges in living conditions faced by LGBTI people in rural areas, which are hence written into the dominant cultural narrative. Based on the material with which we are familiar, the majority of the existing research literature on LGBTI people in rural areas is from the USA[4], a country that differs significantly from the Nordic context in a number of areas such as geography, history and welfare rights. Nevertheless, terms and theories from American LGBTI research are widely cited in Nordic studies, and the terms "metronormativity", "sexual imaginaries", "queer anti-urbanism" and "the gay migration myth" are key in connection with the rural.

Living conditions can be defined as "økonomiske, sosiale, mellommenneskelige og personlige forhold som utgjør betingelser for og uttrykk for hvordan mennesker lever sine liv" [economic, social, interpersonal and personal factors that constitute conditions for and expressions of how people live their lives] (Anderssen, Buer, Olaniyan and Malterud, 2016: 8, cited in Anderssen et al., 2021). Nordic research on living conditions for LGBTI people covers both quantitative and qualitative studies, focussing on structural factors, personal experiences and attitudes among the population.[5] Most existing studies illuminate living conditions for LGBTI people within one of the Nordic nation states. There is a lack of empirical studies of living conditions for LGBTI people on the Nordic periphery and of studies that compare living conditions in different areas of the Nordic region.

The Nordic region comprises the eight countries Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland. Sápmi is also part of this

4. See inter alia DeFonso, 2002; Gilley et al., 2016; Herring, 2010b; Lee & Quam, 2013; Preston et al., 2004; Preston & D'Augelli, 2013; Puckett et al., 2011; Rowan et al., 2013; Schnarrs et al., 2010; Shernoff, 1996; Wang, 2011; Weston, 1995; Whitlock, 2009; Wienke & Hill, 2013; Williams et al., 2005; Yoder et al., 1997; Yost & Chmielewski, 2011.
5. A review of Nordic research into living conditions for LGBTI people in general is beyond the scope of this assignment and is moreover covered in other research reports (see for example Anderssen et al., 2021, pp. 13–19). However, some general findings are that many lesbians and gays live good lives on a par with heterosexuals but nevertheless report more challenging living conditions in some areas, and that bisexual men and women are more vulnerable. Trans people face significant challenges in terms of living conditions (Anderssen et al., 2021; Suvisaari, Jaana & Lehtonen, Jukka, 2026). There are also some particular challenges – but also joys – associated with occupying multiple minority positions, for example LGBTI with an immigrant background, LGBTI and Sami, LGBTI and elderly, LGBTI with disabilities, LGBTI and religious, etc. (Bergman et al., 2013; Eggebø & Stubberud, 2022b; Langeland et al., 2022; Matthiesen, 2019; Olsen & Sæther, 2025). Several researchers in the field have focused on the fact that studies of living conditions for LGBTI people not only emphasise and hence reproduce narratives of challenging living conditions and discrimination, but also explore resources and resilience (Anderssen et al., 2021, pp. 12–13). Within the tradition of LGBTI theory, the concept of "queer joy" has been launched as a critical counterpoint to "the misery research" (Wright & Burkholder, 2025).

geographical area. In our work on this report, we have mostly found literature thematising LGBTI lives in rural areas of Denmark, Norway, Sápmi and Sweden. The scope of research literature on LGBTI lives in rural parts of the Faroe Islands, Finland and Iceland is limited, and we have not found any studies that shed light on living conditions for LGBTI people in Greenland or Åland (see however report from civil society actors in Greenland, Kristensen, 2020). This is in line with Nyegaard et al. (2022), who point out that the research on LGBTI history in the Nordic region is first and foremost focused on what can be called the heart of the Nordic region, and that there are few studies of gender and sexual diversity on the Nordic periphery such as Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

1.1 What is rurality?

Rurality can be understood from three dimensions: Firstly, it has a geographical or territorial dimension defined on the basis of criteria such as distance to towns/cities, population density, population figures and industry structure. The second dimension concerns social relationships and everyday practices in rural places. The third dimension involves the representations and narratives that exist about the rural (Haugen and Stræte, 2011, cited in Eggebø et al., 2015).

In terms of the geographical dimension, the Nordic region – in common with the world at large – is characterised by a continual urbanisation process, i.e. a demographic movement of people towards urban areas (Berg-Nordlie et al., 2022). Based on population figures, population density and distance to large towns/cities, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands could be seen as rural areas by definition. But based on the territorial dimension, too, rurality is a relative concept compared with places with higher population figures and densities, and the capitals Reykjavik, Tórshavn and Nuuk are examples of places that can be characterised as urban in a national context even if the population figures are not particularly high and these towns/cities are located on the Nordic periphery.

The differences between the Nordic countries illustrate that different "rural" and "urban" places can differ significantly. Moreover, social relationships and everyday practices linked to place are significantly more varied than the division into urban and rural is able to capture. There is also a multiplicity of designations for rural areas that highlight that these are different types of places: district, village, local community, coastal community, fishing village, rural community, outskirts, small community, province, periphery and sparsely populated area.

However, our narratives of the rural are often characterised by exactly such a dichotomous understanding of the country as the opposite of the town, and cultural narratives of this kind can contribute to concealing differences between places based on national context, system of government and local culture. Moreover, the rural/urban dichotomy can conceal structural elements and local

cultures in small towns, municipal centres in sparsely populated areas, and other places that may have both "rural" and "urban" aspects as well as distinctive territorial and social qualities.

The studies described in this report address a specific country in the Nordic region, and there seems to be an absence of comparative Nordic studies of living conditions for LGBTI people. LGBTI lives are localised in specific places characterised by different structural conditions, languages, cultures and national contexts, and the research findings neither can nor should be separated from these contexts. Toning down the national context in which the studies were carried out can easily contribute to reproducing the urban/rural dichotomy by giving the impression that "the rural" is the same across national contexts.

1.2 Outline of the report

In chapter 2 we explain the data used and methodology chosen. We describe our approach to literature review as a method, and explain search strategies, delimitations, how the sample was established and the project's limitations.

As mentioned above, we have chosen to organise the literature we have reviewed by country. The literature from the eight Nordic countries and Sápmi is presented in alphabetical order: Denmark (chapter 3), the Faroe Islands (chapter 4), Finland (chapter 5), Greenland (chapter 6), Iceland (chapter 7), Norway (chapter 8), Sápmi (chapter 9) and Sweden (chapter 10).

In the final chapter of the report, we discuss the main findings from the literature reviews and some of the cross-cutting themes across the different national contexts. In addition, we discuss to which field of study living conditions for LGBTI people in rural areas can be considered to belong, and which are the most important research requirements.

2 Method

The analyses in this report are based on a review of literature that illuminates living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region. There are several different approaches to literature review as a research method. The most widely cited is "systematic literature review", which has its origins in quantitively oriented methods from medical and healthcare research. Guidelines for systematic literature review build on a positivist paradigm, with the emphasis on sampling procedures, and strict criteria for inclusion, exclusion and replicability (Bragtveit & Arora, 2026, pp. 18–19).

We have chosen to conduct what we refer to as an analytical literature review, which is similar to what others have called narrative literature review (Bragtveit & Arora, 2026). An analytical literature review takes its starting point in interpretive research traditions within the humanities and social sciences, and entails carrying out an analytical interpretation of the characteristics of the literature field, including themes, methods, theoretical approaches and blind spots.

An analytical literature review requires a broad range of search strategies, and an academic and subjective evaluation of which studies are and are not relevant to include as part of the process. We have chosen to include peer-reviewed research published in the form of academic articles, books and book chapters. In addition, we have included several other types of publications, primarily research reports and master's theses.

The report seeks to provide a broad, descriptive and critical summary of existing research that can tell us something about living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region, with the emphasis on analyses that can offer insights into what this fractured "field" can tell us about queer lives in rural areas of the Nordic region.

In this chapter, we strive to provide a concrete and transparent description of the methodological choices, strategies and working methods used in the work on this report.

2.1 Search strategies

We used five strategies for literature searches:

1. Searches in library databased
2. Searches in the researchers' own library databases on living conditions for queer people
3. Snowballing/reference safari

4. Targeted searches for new publications from key researchers
5. Tips from academic networks

2.1.1 Searches in library databases

Searches in library databases are usually described as the most important search strategy in the work on literature reviews. We conducted systematic searches in library databases with assistance from KvinnSam – the National Library for Gender Research at the University of Gothenburg, which has long experience of literature searches and has assisted in a number of similar assignments for the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Searches were made in the following library databases: ORIA, LIBRIS, SwePub, the Royal Danish Library, Research Portal Denmark, Research portal, Scopus and Web of Science.[6] Search strings were determined in collaboration between the authors and the librarians and contain three main blocks: 1. search words for queer thematics, 2. search words for rural areas and 3. search words for the Nordic region (see Appendix).

The search block for queer thematics was determined based on search blocks from other projects concerning living conditions for queer people. The search block for rural areas was determined by the authors and librarians in collaboration. In addition to words for rural areas in general, we decided to include place names in the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Sápmi and Åland. As mentioned in the introduction, centre/periphery and urban/rural are relative terms, and even on the Nordic periphery, there are towns and more densely populated areas that are centres in a national/local context. Nevertheless, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Sápmi and Åland can be said to be on the Nordic periphery, and limited prior research on living conditions for queer people in these areas allowed us to conduct a targeted academic evaluation of the way in which individual studies discuss the rural and the urban.

The two search blocks were used in combination, which means that publications that address queer people but did not return a result for any of the place designations are not included. This was necessary in order to delimit the searches but is also a possible weakness, as studies of living conditions for queer people can provide relevant information on rural areas without this being apparent from summaries or the keywords registered in the database. The other search strategies can partly compensate for this.

6. The ongoing relocation of Norwegian university archives to the Norwegian Research Information Repository (NVA) means that the searches in the Oria database appear to be somewhat incomplete, and it is possible that systematic database searches in NVA could have identified more publications from the Norwegian context.

We decided to let the searches cover publications for the entire time period 2000–2026. This was because we had prior knowledge of the field and knew that it is a research field where relatively few studies have been carried out and that what there is has mainly been published in the last 10–15 years.

In evaluating whether or not the results were relevant to the research questions addressed in the report, we decided first to categorise the results into three main categories: 1. relevant, 2. not relevant and 3. perhaps relevant. In the course of the work, we decided to include several subject headings, for example "skeiv historie" [queer history][7] and "representasjon av skeivhet" [representation of queerness].[8] Many of the studies that fell outside the scope of the assignment were in fact suitable for illuminating queerness in rural areas in a historical perspective or representation of queerness and rurality in fiction, art and media contributions.

Searches were also conducted in the Overton database to identify relevant non-academic publications, for example public documents, publications from civil society organisations and research reports that had not come to light in the other database searches. However, it proved difficult to make meaningful delimitations to the searches in Overton. To avoid missing relevant types of publications, we ended up with 400 results, random sampling of which showed that only a very small number would be relevant to include in the report. Based on these checks, we decided not to continue with the searches in Overton because they were time-consuming and not particularly effective or relevant given the research questions and parameters for this project.

2.1.2 Other search strategies

In addition to the database searches, we used a search strategy known as "snowballing" (Greenhalgh, & Peacock, R., 2005) or "referansesafari" [reference safari] (M. H. Eriksen, 2025, p. 88), i.e. searching for publications in reference lists of studies already identified. This included carrying out targeted searches for more recent publications from key researchers.

The authors of the report have previously conducted multiple studies of living conditions for queer people, including information on the rural. This enabled us to search for relevant literature in our own libraries using our usual reference management tools. We also undertook searches in Google, Google Scholar and Scandinavian University Press. Furthermore, we used our own network and that of the Nordic Council of Ministers to identify studies from the Nordic areas with which we ourselves are least familiar, including Denmark, Finland and Iceland.

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7. See for example Hundstad et al., 2023; Edelberg & Christensen, 2026; Fur, 1998; Hundstad et al., 2022; Kristiansen, 2008; Martinsson, 2008; Rydström, 2005; Skjoldhammer, 2026; Sorainen, 2012. QUEERDOM and Qprovince, research projects on queer history outside the big cities, are ongoing in Norway and Denmark respectively. See https://www4.uib.no/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/queerdom and https://nors.ku.dk/english/research/centre-for-gender-studies/qprovince_en/
8. See for example Bjerknes, 2023; Edelberg & Christensen, 2026; Hansson et al., 2023; Kokkola, 2024; Korneliussen, 2022; Kyrölä & Huuki, 2021; Palo & Manderstedt, 2022a; Rosenberg, 1970; Vervoort, 2018; Wennerscheid, 2017; Wikström, 2019.

There proved to be relatively few overlapping results in the database searches and the other searches, and over half of the studies included were identified by means of search strategies other than systematic searches in library databases. The body of knowledge for the report would have been significantly smaller if we had restricted ourselves to database searches, and this underlines the importance of using a wide range of strategies. Taken as a whole, the five search strategies made it possible to identify a relatively substantial number of research publications and other literature suitable for shedding light on the research questions.

2.2 Type of material

The types of material searched for were primarily academic articles, books, book chapters and theses. Publications that are not peer-reviewed research are popularly known as "grey literature". Delimiting the material to peer-reviewed research would have resulted in an extremely limited picture of the existing knowledge of living conditions for queers in rural areas of the Nordic region, and we therefore decided to broaden the scope.

As well as master's theses and research reports, we also included some official documents, journalistic contributions and popular science articles where these serve to shed light on the research questions addressed in the report.

2.3 The sample

The database searches resulted in 290 publications (after removing duplicates). Based on an assessment of title, type of material, summary and in some cases the publication itself, these 290 results were classified initially as "relevant", "not relevant" or "perhaps relevant".[9] Completely irrelevant results, for example scientific articles on flora and fauna in Greenland, were removed from the library.[10] Publications that were identified using other search strategies were added to the library on an ongoing basis.

The studies we had initially classified as "perhaps relevant" were reassessed in the course of the work on the report. Following a more detailed review of summaries, introductions and keyword searches in full-text publications, all of these were reclassified as either relevant or not relevant.

Using the various search strategies, a total of around 75 publications were identified and classified as relevant to the research questions in this report. It must,

9. This work was carried out using the Zotero reference management tool, which provides a number of options for sorting by keyword, subject headings and subsamples.
10. Most of the results that came up in the database searches for Greenland were scientific publications that had been incorrectly identified because of the search terms "homo*" and "trans*", which are used in designations in the field of biology. This type of result, which occurred exclusively in connection with Greenland, may reflect a tendency for scientific research to dominate in the Greenlandic geographical context.

however, be stressed that relevance is a question of judgement. It was neither possible nor expedient to establish strict predefined criteria for inclusion. The researchers were in continual dialogue with each other to discuss and assess whether and how a specific study was relevant to the research questions in the report. In many cases, it is the rural and/or queer subthemes that emerge in a publication although these are not its primary focus. By adopting a relatively inclusive and broad perspective on relevance, we believe we have succeeded in providing a broad and transparent picture of literature that in various ways can shed light on the research questions in this report.

In the work to analyse the data material, the authors worked closely together by means of shared work meetings. Writing and analytical retreats are a collectively oriented and efficient way of working that facilitates ongoing conversations about the literature, research questions and analyses. The aim of the textual work was to provide the best possible analytical and comprehensive presentation of the reviewed literature in light of other research on living conditions for queers, and the terms and theoretical perspectives that are central to the field.

2.4 Limitations

The question of which studies are relevant is one of professional judgement and cannot be deduced using strict predefined criteria. For example, as mentioned we assessed that historical studies of queer lives and studies of popular culture, literature and art were outside the parameters of this assignment (see, however, some examples in footnotes 5 and 6).

However, this delimitation is not unproblematic, considering that several such studies thematise the connections between the queer and the rural. In addition, studies of historical change processes and representations of queerness in culture can provide important insight into how queer lives are lived, and under what conditions, in different places and at different times. As Palo and Manderstedt (2022b) point out, literature plays an important role in terms of making visible minority experiences, creating counternarratives and opening a space where readers recognise themselves. In this sense, literary representations serve to broaden the narratives of which lives can be lived in which places and, historically speaking, novels have been important sources of identification and identity development for many queer people in different places and historical periods.

For this project we used search blocks in English, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish. The other Nordic languages were not included because no one in the project group has the necessary linguistic competence. Accordingly, we have been dependent on literature discussing the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Sápmi and Åland being available in English or Scandinavian languages. This represents a limitation of the literature review, and we therefore drew on the commissioning

organization's Nordic network to identify potentially relevant studies from Finland and Iceland. Machine-translated versions of these were forwarded to us, and we assessed the relevance and included a discussion of these studies.

Linguistic limitations were also evident in determining search blocks. It emerged from comments from a colleague that we had not included the most usual Danish term for rural areas, namely "provinsen" [the provinces]. Neither had Kaalalit Nunaat – the Greenlandic name for Greenland – been included in the initial search. We therefore conducted a supplementary search in the Danish library databases including these and some other search words. The supplementary search did not produce any further relevant results, but our colleague pointed us towards a few more recent studies relevant to our research. Based on this experience, we conclude that it would have been beneficial to have a reference group comprising researchers' resident in all the Nordic countries, but a larger reference group was outside the parameters of this project.



3 Danmark

The literature from the Danish context includes two more recent studies that explicitly compare living conditions for young queer people (Andersen et al., 2024) and attitudes to queer people in different geographical areas (Andresen et al., 2025). We also found an older study of settlement patterns, a qualitative study of living conditions for older queer people. In addition, there are several more recent studies of queer history that fall outside the scope of this report.[11]

3.1 Quality of life and mental health among young people

The research report "Trivsel og mental sundhed blandt LGBT+-unge – En kortlægning for udvalgte områder i Danmark" (Andersen et al., 2024) studies differences in well-being among young queer people based on where in Denmark they live.[12] The hypothesis is that there are more young people who identify as queer in the big cities, and that living conditions are perceived to be better there.

The source data for the study has been derived from the questionnaire survey "Ung i 2023 – Plads til alle?", for which participants were selected at random; the survey had a response rate of 19.6 per cent. The analyses in the report cover 10,068 respondents aged between 15 and 17 living in the municipalities of Copenhagen, Frederiksberg, Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg, as well as the largest municipalities in South and Central Zealand and South Jutland (Andersen et al., 2024, pp. 13–16, 43).

The results show that young queer people generally report significant challenges relating to living conditions in terms of life satisfaction, self-confidence, anxiety and depression, and that well-being is significantly lower in this group compared with young heterosexuals. According to the authors of the report, the proportion of young people reporting unhappiness is significantly lower among those living in the metropolitan areas than in the other municipalities included in the study.

It must, however, be clarified that the differences are only significant at a significance level of 0.1 and not 0.05 as is usually applied. There are also no significant differences when comparing the other regions with the national average, including at a significance level of 0.1 (Andersen et al., 2024).

11. LollandBibliotekerne has published the anthology *Queerfortællinger fra Lolland og Falster* (Engel et al., 2024), in which 22 queer people from Lolland and Falster have written about their lives. A discussion of the book describes the feeling of differentness and lack of queer role models as a recurring theme in the narratives. This is echoed in the book project "Queering Sápmi", which is based on the same type of material and also thematises feelings of differentness. Also published earlier this year was the book "Queer i Provinsen" (Edelberg & Christensen, 2026), an anthology based on historical sources such as diaries, letters, novels and memoirs, addressing the lives of queer people from the 18th century onwards.
12. Based on the results of this study, in 2026 the Tuborg Foundation awarded funding to the project "Regnbue i provinsen" [Rainbow in the provinces], which aims to create safe local environments outside Denmark's big cities. See a discussion of the project [in Danish] here: https://lgbt.dk/tuborgfondet-stoetter-nyt-projekt-der-skal-styrke-unges-regnbue-faellesskaber-i-hele-landet/

The majority of the young people in the study reported that they feel accepted for who they are at school, but the proportion of queer people who gave this affirmative response was lower than among the other young people. The majority of the young people reported that there were no rules governing good behaviour at school, or that the rules were not observed, and there were no significant differences between the different regions in this respect.

3.2 Attitudes to queer people

Project SEXUS[13] is a comprehensive survey of sexuality and health carried out by means of web-based questionnaires among a wide sample of the Danish population aged 15 to 89 and repeated every few years. Almost 75,000 people responded to the first edition of the survey in 2017/2018, and new data is being collected in 2026. The analyses formed the basis for the report "Sex i Danmark" (Frisch et al., 2019) and several research articles.

Based on data from Projekt SEXUS, the article "Factors Associated with Moral Disapproval of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior in Denmark: Baseline Findings from the Project SEXUS Cohort Study" (N=62,675) (Andresen et al., 2025) analyses the prevalence of homophobic attitudes in the Danish population. The results show that around 20 per cent of the Danish population demonstrate homophobic attitudes and that homophobia is significantly more widespread among men than women. Homophobia is also more widespread among people who display strong sexual morality and religiosity. Moreover, homophobic attitudes are significantly more widespread among those living outside the capital region and are seen more frequently among people who have a lower level of education, poor self-rated health, and received little teaching and communication on sexuality in childhood (Andresen et al., 2025; Projekt SEXUS, 2025).

3.3 Living conditions for older queer people

The research report "Seksuel identitet sent i livet – ældre homo- og biseksuelles sociale vilkår i Danmark" (Matthiesen, 2019) is based on fieldwork and interviews with 32 persons, both men and women, aged 63 to 95 who identified as bi- or homosexual. Participants from both big cities and smaller places were invited to participate, including the capital area; Central Funen; Central, West, East and South Jutland; and West, South and North Zealand. In addition, five of the participants were from other countries in Europe.

13. See a discussion of Projekt SEXUS here: https://www.projektsexus.dk/project-sexus-in-english. Press release on geographical differences in homophobic attitudes [in Danish]: https://www.projektsexus.dk/seneste-nyt/2025/ny-undersoegelse-mere-end-hver-femte-dansker-har-homofobiske-holdninger

Several of the participants reflected on the importance of where you live, and some pointed out that there was a big difference in living openly as queer in Copenhagen compared with smaller and more peripheral places in Denmark. Participants mention being stared at or frozen out. However, other participants point out that it is in no way unproblematic for queer people in the capital areas either. However, participants who live outside the capital area and the big cities seem to establish important relationships with heterosexuals and participate in mainstream services for seniors to a greater degree, as they have less access to queer networks and services where they live. Participants spoke enthusiastically of these services, and the lack of focus on gender and sexuality was not necessarily problematic for those who had never been openly queer. The authors of the report point out that there is a nursing home in Copenhagen that particularly caters for queer minorities and recommend investigating the possibility of establishing "regnbueplejehjem" [rainbow care homes] in other big cities too (Matthiesen, 2019).

3.4 Settlement patterns

In the 2000s, Frisch and Hviid (2006) conducted a national cohort study of heterosexual and non-heterosexual marriages contracted since 1970, among approximately two million Danes born 1952–1983. Data was retrieved from Danish population and civil status registers, and tracks people aged 18 to 49. Heterosexual marriages are registered from 1970 and registered same-sex partnerships from 1989. The data material hence relates to marriages going back a long time.

The results show that people born in the capital area were more likely to enter into same-sex marriages than people born in rural areas. Equivalent patterns have also been found in analyses of more recent data from the Norwegian context (Zahl-Olsen & Thuen, 2023). Frisch and Hviid have also analysed statistical connections between choice of form of marriage and experiences of growing up and family, and interpret the results as showing that childhood family experiences are significant in later choices of form of marriage.

4 The Faroe Islands

There is little research addressing the lives of queer people and queer history on the Nordic periphery (Nyegaard et al., 2022), but we found two recent academic articles concerning queer living conditions in the Faroe Islands.

The article "Den usynlige understrøm" (Gaini, 2024) discusses queer lives in the Faroe Islands from the post-war period to the present day. The author shows how, for several decades, many queer Faroe Islanders did not feel there was space for them in the small island society defined by religion, and therefore travelled to Denmark, and particularly to Copenhagen. According to the author, the Faroe Islands are often described as a Nordic exception in terms of queer rights. Gaini draws both on interviews with Faroese men and examples from newspapers, documentaries, art and culture, and shows that queer people have experienced social control, silence surrounding sexuality and pronounced pressure from Christian norms. But some have also chosen to move back and stay, precisely to be part of changing society from the inside.

However, much happened during the 2000s: an antidiscrimination clause addressing gay hate was introduced in legislation, the organisation LGBT+ Føroyar became more visible, and places such as the Sirkus nightclub in Tórshavn became symbols of a more open milieu. A younger generation uses art, music and film to challenge old narratives of gender, sexuality and family, and to create new spaces for queer people in the Faroe Islands.

Nevertheless, much remains unresolved. There are still queer people who do not dare to be open, and some continue to move away and do not envision moving back. The author describes "den usynlige understrømmen" [the invisible under-current] as all the people, experiences and ideas that run counter to the main current in society: they live queer lives, often silent and without making big statements, but are still part of changing the island society over time. Silence, semi-openness and "not talking about it" are described as both a protection mechanism and a limitation, and the article calls for more research and more listening to queer people's own stories in small island societies like the Faroe Islands.

The article "Færøerne mellem religiøs vækkelse og sekularisering: En nordisk undtagelse bliver til" (Skorini et al., 2022) shows how the Faroe Islands differ from the rest of the Nordic region in terms of religion and that this is highly significant for queer people. The authors describe how strong Christian revivalist environments have shaped both culture and politics, and how this has contributed to queer rights having long been a controversial subject: every time there are proposals for better legal protection or equality for queer people, it leads to intense conflicts between

conservative Christians and more liberal forces. Bills on protection from discrimination and same-sex partnerships/marriages in particular have triggered strident political debate, government crises and powerful emotions among the public. Issues concerning gender and sexuality have become symbols in a battle of what kind of society the Faroe Islands should be: a distinctly Christian conservative society or a more secularised and rights-oriented society, like the rest of the Nordic region. At the same time, the authors point out that attitudes to queer people are changing. Younger generations are generally less religious and more accepting of queer people than older ones, and little by little more political and social actors are seeking stronger protection against queer discrimination. Compared with Denmark and the other Nordic countries however, Christian conservative milieus have a significant influence on queer people's access to rights.

5 Finland

Hanna Peltomaa (2022) has written a thesis that investigates living conditions and freedom of action for non-heterosexual people in Finnish Lapland.[14] The data material builds on 23 biographical interviews with non-heterosexual informants and observation in their local environment. The main themes of the thesis are the opportunities open to non-heterosexuals in rural communities in Lapland, what characterises life in rural areas, and how being queer is relevant in different social spaces and situations. The thesis shows that local communities are defined by strong heteronormative structures. Peltomaa describes societies characterised by social control with strong ideals of normality, where care and fellowship can easily tip over into small-mindedness and gossip. Some participants are not open about their sexual orientation with their family, and some parents are concerned about how a family may be disgraced if a family member is openly queer. At the same time, there can also be tacit acceptance of same-sex relationships in the local communities.

Peltomaa (2013, 2013) has also written two English-language articles based on the fieldwork she carried out in connection with her thesis.[15] Her starting point is that media and research portray Lapland as "terrible" for sexual minorities, and that queer people therefore have to move to the city. Peltomaa challenges this image by showing how queer people both choose to stay in and to return to Lapland.

Peltomaa emphasises how life in rural areas is closely connected to family life, and having a close relationship with family potentially provides both status and security. At the same time, the family will also require a certain degree of loyalty. One important point in the analyses is the significance of the alpine-skiing facilities in Lapland, which function as temporary "pseudotowns" in the ski season with tourists and seasonal workers. These are a space where queers can express themselves, as they represent something different from what the local community otherwise represents: "The resorts are places where people can 'escape' the close-knit village life, especially the family and familiarity." (Peltomaa, 2013, p. 154).

The article "Cross-Generational Relationships before 'the Lesbian': Female Same-Sex Sexuality in 1950s Rural Finland" (Sorainen, 2012) builds on ethnographic fieldwork (interviews, observations) and takes its starting point in the story of two lesbian women in a small town in Finland. Sorainen (2014) examines how queer lives

14. We have only read extracts from an AI-translated version of this thesis; see also comment on use of AI-translated literature in the chapter on methodology.
15. These articles were written a few years before the published thesis of 2022. She conducted fieldwork for the thesis in the period 2009–2013. In the two articles she draws on the experiences of some of the 15 informants who were interviewed at the time the articles were written. Sami is mentioned here as one of several languages spoken in the region where she carried out her fieldwork, but the Sami aspect as such is not a theme of the articles to any significant degree.

in small places challenge a dominant narrative of "queer flight", i.e. the idea that queer people have to migrate to the city to live freely and authentically (see also Weston, 1995; Wimark, 2014a).

At the same time, the article emphasises how personal relationships, networks, heritage and economics shape queer everyday life and life circumstances in rural areas. Both informants have extensive queer networks but also strong ties to their biological families. Sorainen argues that queer people can have closer ties to the family they grew up in than queer theory often assumes, and she also includes descriptions of the informants' wider families in her analysis of queer lives. The concept of "personal life" (Carol Smart) is used to analyse support, care and kin relationships. "Cultural memory" refers to how historical and national narratives of rurality, family and kin also influence queer people's life choices. The article shows that small places are not only arenas for social control and isolation but also provide a private life, security and space for alternative life projects. This challenges the idea of the oppressive village and the liberal metropolis as opposites. A central point is that our lives are always interwoven in material difference and the structures of the welfare state, and Sorainen emphasises how biological family, chosen family, legal frameworks and economic resources affect the lives of queer people.


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6 Greenland

The report "At være LGBTQIA+ i Kalaallit Nunaat" was compiled by the Human Rights Council of Greenland and Sipineq+ (Kristensen, 2020). Sipineq+ is one of the interest organisations for queer people in Greenland. The Institute for Human Rights also works on queer rights.

The purpose of the report is to bring into focus rights and challenges for LGBTQIA+ people in Kalaallit Nunaat. The report is based on knowledge from international studies of living conditions for queer people in general and queer people who belong to an indigenous group in particular. According to the report authors and the knowledge gained from these studies, neither qualitative nor quantitative research data is available on living conditions for queer people in Greenland. It is therefore extremely important and valuable that Sipineq+ has contributed with the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people, and that experiences of hate crime, discrimination, lack of support in encounters with service providers, but also support among friends and close persons, are documented in the report.

The report starts with a glossary of words for sexual orientation and gender identity in Danish and Greenlandic (Kristensen, 2020, pp. 6–7) and, seen in the light of the research on queer Sami and the need for language for gender and sexual diversity, terminology is an important area for development. The report also points out that Greenland's first equality and antidiscrimination law was adopted in 2024, covering sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity and gender characteristics. In addition, Greenlandic women have been granted the right to co-motherhood.

The report highlights that, in Greenland too, sex education is perceived as heteronormative, and that work is required to educate people and ensure that sex education is a safe arena where young people can access information on gender and sexual diversity.

Where health is concerned, the report's authors refer to experiences of discrimination and lack of knowledge of gender and sexual orientation among healthcare personnel. Not least, it is pointed out that trans people in Greenland lack access to hormone treatment and that this constitutes a significant health challenge. The report states that "Adgang til kønsbekræftende behandlinger som hormonbehandling eller kirurgi er derfor en vigtig faktor for LGBTQIA+ samfundet og har potentiale til at sikre bedre sundhed og trivsel for enkeltpersoner" [Access to gender-affirming care such as hormone treatment or surgery is therefore an important factor for the LGBTQIA+ community and has the potential to ensure better health and well-being for individuals] (Kristensen, 2020, p. 15).

Another theme addressed in the report is that Greenland has historically had one of the highest suicide rates in the world. In light of other research into the living conditions of queer people, it is likely that suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts represent a significant challenge to the quality of life among queer people in Greenland. Although the suicide rate among the Greenland-born population has decreased in recent years, the report's authors recommend that gender and sexuality are thematised in all plans and actions to prevent suicide and improve mental health (Kristensen, 2020, p. 27).

7 Iceland

We found one academic article from the Icelandic context, which puts sexual orientation and place of residence under the spotlight. We also identified a number of studies addressing living conditions for queer people in Iceland without a particular focus on rural areas, and earlier this year a new action plan was drawn up for queer people in Iceland (Dómsmálaráðherra (Minister for Justice), 2026). These are mentioned here because Iceland can be said to be part of the Nordic periphery where there is a need for more studies of queer lives and history.[16]

The article "Sexual orientation and migration intentions among rural, exurban and urban adolescents in Iceland" addresses the link between sexual orientation and plans to move among 15- to 16-year-olds in Iceland (Thorsteinsson et al., 2022). Based on a quantitative data-set comprising a sample of 2,858 students, young queer people are compared with heterosexuals in terms of expectations of moving within Iceland or abroad. The results show that young queer people are far more inclined than young heterosexuals to have expectations of moving, either domestically or abroad. Young queer people in urban areas more often plan to move abroad, while young people in non-urban areas more often plan to move within Iceland. Moving plans are put in the context of exploring a queer identity, as we have also seen in other Nordic studies of living conditions for queer people (see inter alia Liliequist, 2020; Stubberud et al., 2022).

There are also studies of queer lives in Iceland that do not explicitly thematise the rural, including Guðmundsdóttir and Skaptadóttir's (2018) analyses of the experiences of queer migrants in Iceland. The article takes its starting point in an intersectional perspective on how these experiences are shaped at the intersection between sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, gender and class. The study is based on interviews with ten participants from the Global South. The authors show how the migrants relate to multiple communities: the Icelandic majority population, their own ethnic milieus and Icelandic queer milieus/organisations. Iceland is generally seen as a progressive country in terms of queer rights, but the study emphasises that the informants experience a high level of racism, challenges in terms of language, and requirements to be queer in the "right" way, which includes the issue of being openly queer. A bachelor's thesis has also been written on queer people in sport in Iceland (M. L. Guðmundsdóttir, 2019), and a master's thesis on young queer people at upper-secondary school, which includes schools in both rural and urban areas without explicitly thematising possible differences or similarities (Jafetsdóttir, 2020).[17]

16. The database searches included some studies of gender norms in rural areas of Iceland. These studies do not focus on queer lives but may be relevant in order to understand gender norms in rural areas of Iceland. Skaptadóttir (2004) analyses how globalisation influences gender understandings in fishing villages in rural areas; Bjarnason et al. (2025) study how village gossip influences women's desire to move back; and Faulkner (2012) analyses men and masculinity in male-voice choirs in Iceland.
17. These two theses, which were published in Icelandic, have been made available by contact persons in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Nordic network who helped to identify and machine-translate them. We do not have the linguistic competence to quality-assure the machine translation, which may contain errors.

8 Norway

These two theses, which were published in Icelandic, have been made available by contact persons in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Nordic network who helped to identify and machine-translate them. We do not have the linguistic competence to quality-assure the machine translation, which may contain errors.

8.1 Main cultural narratives about the town and the country

In the book chapter "Forteljingar om å vera skeiv innvandrar og skeiv på bygda i Noreg på 2010-talet", Eggebø and Stubberud (2022a) examine accounts of being queer with an immigrant background and being queer in the countryside respectively. The article builds on data material from the reports "Skeiv på bygda" (Eggebø et al., 2015) and "Levekår blant skeive med innvandrerbakgrunn i Norge" (Eggebø et al., 2018). By comparing these different accounts, the authors contribute to problematising the town/country, Norwegian/immigrant dichotomies.

Eggebø and Stubberud (2022b) point out that there are some dominant cultural narratives where the country is considered to be gender-conservative and old-fashioned with little diversity in terms of gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity. There tend to be few or no visible queer people, networks or interest organisations and, not least, small local communities are frequently associated with village gossip and other forms of social control, which particularly affects those of us who break with gender and sexual norms. Similarly, there is also a dominant cultural narrative that the minority milieus are also characterised by conservative gender norms and social control, and that there are few visible queer role models. According to these dominant narratives, queer people have to escape to the city and break with the minority milieus in order to be able to live good queer lives.

Eggebø and Stubberud indicate that several participants related their life stories in line with the dominant cultural narratives, such as homophobia in local communities and in the minority milieus. Many spoke of bullying, having few friends, little diversity and a lack of queer role models in the local communities where they grew up. Others shared counternarratives to the dominant cultural narratives and emphasised that the country is better than its reputation suggests and can be a good place to live as a queer person. Some participants took a stance that can be characterised as "queer anti-urbanism" and dissociated themselves strongly from the gay milieu in Oslo. They found small places provided greater scope for diversity and queer lives (Eggebø & Stubberud, 2022a).

The authors also point out how the individual accounts are judged against the dominant cultural narratives, and several participants said they had experienced not being believed when they spoke about experiences counter to the dominant cultural narratives about town, country and the present time.

Eggebø and Stubberud believe there has been a significant change in the narratives on queer lives in the country since 2015. Local Pride events are being organised in a number of different small and medium-sized places in Norway, and these events attract mainly positive media attention. The narrative seems to be that yes, the country can be a difficult place for queer people, but it does not need to be that way. The authors finish by positing that the cultural narrative on queer lives in the country is perhaps changing (Eggebø & Stubberud, 2022a).

8.2 Settlement patterns

The article "Same-sex Marriage Over 26 Years: Marriage and Divorce Trends in Rural and Urban Norway" (Zahl-Olsen, 2024; Zahl-Olsen & Thuen, 2023) examines marriage trends in Norway, comparing lesbian, gay and heterosexual couples. The analyses are based on a quantitative cohort study (N=5,187) covering all same-sex marriages in the period. The article analyses differences between couples living in urban areas (cities with over 110,000 inhabitants, i.e. Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger and Bærum) and couples living in rural areas (municipalities with under 31,000 inhabitants).[18]

The analyses show that there is a higher share of same-sex marriages in urban than in rural areas. The authors point out that a possible explanation may be that it is more challenging to live as queer in rural areas:

> *This may indicate that same-sex marriages are still less accepted in rural areas, even 25 years after the formalization of same-sex unions was legalized in Norway. Thus, even though there has been a general trend of more liberal attitudes toward homosexuality during the last couple of decades, our findings suggest that this trend is not equally as strong in rural areas as urban areas. Alternatively, the findings may not primarily reflect a difference in the attitudes toward homosexuality across urban and rural areas, but rather any tendency of people in rural areas to be more favorable toward traditional family values in general, compared to people in urban areas (Zahl-Olsen & Thuen, 2023)*

18. 27 towns including Drammen, Asker and Lillestrøm are not included in the sample.

This explanation can be said to align with the dominant cultural narrative that it is difficult to live a good life as a queer person in the country. The article also analyses divorce rates, with the results showing a falling divorce rate in urban areas and a rising one in rural areas in the period. This result, too, is interpreted as a possible expression of the difficulty of living good queer lives in rural areas and that strains of this kind increase the probability of divorce. A study comparing living conditions for lesbian and bisexual women in Norway discloses that lesbian women living in towns report better living conditions than those living in more rural areas, but that the same does not apply to bisexual women (Prell and Traeen, 2018).

As stated in chapter 3, a recent article has shown that homophobia in Denmark is more widespread among people living outside the capital area (Andresen et al., 2025). In contrast, Wimark's thesis from the Swedish context (2014a, 2016) indicates that the concentration of queer people in urban areas is not because there is greater homonegativity in rural areas but the assumption that this is the case. In younger cohorts, lesbians' and gays' motives for moving are fairly similar to heterosexuals' accounts of moving because of education/training and job opportunities, or moving out from urban areas to be near family.

The report "Seksuell orientering, kjønnsmangfold og levekår" compares the living conditions of gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual and trans people with heterosexuals/cis persons in the Norwegian population (Anderssen et al., 2021). In this sample, 44 per cent of the gay men lived in Oslo and 14 per cent in sparsely populated areas. This settlement pattern differs significantly from both bisexual and heterosexual men, whose places of residence are more evenly distributed in various towns and sparsely populated areas. For the women in the sample, there is also a significantly higher concentration of lesbian and bisexual women in Oslo and the other big cities compared with heterosexual women. When the sample is compared based on gender identity (cis person, binary trans person, non-binary trans person), there are no significant differences in settlement pattern (Anderssen et al., 2021, p. 46).

The article "Minority Stress and Mental Health Among Bisexual and Lesbian Women" (Prell and Traeen, 2018) is based on a questionnaire survey of a self-recruited sample of lesbian and bisexual women (N=499). The sample included significantly more lesbians living in a town than was the case for bisexual women.

As is the case in Sweden (Wimark, 2014a), the concentration of lesbians and gays in Norway is higher in the big cities than in the general population. Anderssen et al. have not examined whether the living conditions for different groups of queers vary systematically with place of residence, but the data-set and equivalent studies in 2013 (Anderssen et al., 2013) and 2026 (ongoing[19]) are being made available for further research by Sikt, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. There is also unexplored potential here to analyse differences in living conditions for queer people in rural and urban areas of Norway.

19. https://www.nordlandsforskning.no/prosjekter/2025/08/01/nb-skeive

8.3 Experiences of young people

The research report "Skeiv på bygda" (Eggebø et al., 2015) examined living conditions for queer people in rural areas of Norway (fewer than 20,000 inhabitants). The study was based on qualitative interviews with 24 persons who live in or grew up in various villages or rural areas, and thematises identity, experiences with bullying at school, social networks, health, experiences of being both highly visible and invisible, as well as accounts of town and country as places to live.

The report was one of the first studies to focus on the experiences of being queer in rural areas of Norway. Many of the participants recounted difficult experiences from childhood, the feeling of being different, bullying, and lack of queer role models and networks. Some linked this to the place they lived, and others interpreted it more as a general experience of being queer in Norway, irrespective of location. Some participants spoke of friendships, positive relationships and social communities in the place where they lived, and others more of loneliness and isolation. Some of the latter link this to living in a small place with few people, little diversity and a lack of queer networks.

The report also thematises what seem to be common queer experiences across places of residence (see also Stubberud et al., 2022), such as exploring a queer identity and sexuality, and how moving experiences can overlap with coming out as queer, finding out who you are and finding your place.

The report shows how social relationships, religious norms and village culture are significant to what it is like to live as queer. Fewer different social milieus and networks, village gossip and everyone knowing everyone can be more typical of close-knit communities, and this is something that several of the participants highlight as challenging in terms of having a queer identity.

The participants relate different accounts of both urban and rural areas, which can help to challenge and add nuance to dichotomous understandings of town and country. Small towns can be the best of both worlds and, at the same time, places people have escaped from. Several participants pointed out that local macho cultures made it difficult for queer people to live well in some places.[20]

One common element in the narratives is that the participants consider it crucial to have visible queer people, supporting and accepting families, and an experience of being able to be yourself in the place you live.

Some of the participants told how they themselves had wanted to help make rural areas a good place for queer people to live by being role models and organising

20. Rural constructions of masculinity are also a theme in other research contributions without queer lives being specifically thematised (Bye, 2009; Hervik & Skille, 2021; Stordal, 2017). Other publications examine women's desires to leave rural areas (I. M. Eriksen & Andersen, 2024), or what motivates people to move to the country (Grimsrud, 2011).

queer meeting places. Some recounted stories that aligned with the dominant cultural narratives that the country is a difficult place to live as a queer person. Other participants shared clear counternarratives of happy lesbian lives in the country and of openness to fluid identities in smaller places.

The authors recommend that the authorities implement measures to improve living conditions for queers in three areas: equal public services, equality and diversity in rural areas, and systematic efforts to create non-discriminatory schools.

The research report "Den eneste skeive i bygda? Unge lhbt-personers bruk av helsetjenester" (Stubberud et al., 2018) shows that young people have little trust in public health nurses when it comes to knowledge and information on sexual orientation and gender identity (see section 3.3. on living conditions for queer people in Sápmi for a more comprehensive account of this report). Moreover, it is clear from the report that almost none of the healthcare personnel who were interviewed had been taught about sexual orientation and gender identity as part of their training as public health nurses. Those who did have some expertise in this area a) had management who prioritised skills development in this area, b) had themselves taken responsibility for upgrading their own skills, c) had gained knowledge by working with others or d) had extensive experience.

Regarding the significance of place, the authors of the report write that the young people who had grown up in urban municipalities or peri-urban areas did not necessarily describe feeling safer, had not come out earlier and did not participate in queer networks more than those who grew up in smaller places (Stubberud et al., 2018, p. 38). Nevertheless, place can be significant in the sense that the size of the municipality has consequences for the resources assigned to public health nurses, the public health nurses' proximity to other specialist environments, and how many young queer people they meet themselves. The authors conclude, "Disse momentene kan få ringvirkninger for hvilke opplevelser unge skeive har i møter med helsesøstre" [These elements can have ripple effects for the experiences young queer people have in encounters with public health nurses] (Stubberud et al., 2018, p. 38).

The report "Alene og skeiv. En studie av livssituasjonen for skeive enslige mindreårige asylsøkere i omsorgssentre og asylmottak" (Stubberud & Akin, 2018) focuses on care facilities and reception centres as places, and highlights a number of particular challenges for young queer people seeking asylum in Norway as unaccompanied minors. Care facilities and reception centres are not always perceived as places where it is safe to be queer, and the importance of queer networks in the local area is highlighted as particularly important for this group of young people. Many of Norway's reception centres are located in rural areas and outlying districts. This is not a central theme in the report, but the authors recommend that unaccompanied minors who are queer are able to live close to large towns and queer networks if they wish to, because this group may have a particular need for proximity to queer networks (Stubberud & Akin, 2018, p. 50).

The report "'Det handler om å passe inn': kjønns- og seksualitetsmangfold i ungdomskulturen" (Tokle & Stefansen, 2026) studies how young people relate to gender and sexuality, and focuses in particular on young people who break with gender and sexual norms. The significance of place and different local cultures are an important focal point in the report, but it concentrates on various places in Oslo. The data material comprises interviews with 153 young people from Oslo, Bergen, and four smaller towns and villages in Norway. Analyses of this extensive data material are used to define four ideal types of upper-secondary school: "the west-side school", "the east-side school", "the central school" and "the rural vocational school", where the environment is described as not particularly inclusive. Three of the four ideal types are described as not particularly inclusive or diverse in terms of gender and sexuality, but there are a number of different mechanisms playing out in the different cultures. According to the authors, at the west-side schools there is an absence of visible gender and sexual diversity, something which is associated with conformity and fitting in with social codes defined by narrow gender norms. At the east-side schools, too, there is an absence of visible gender and sexual diversity, and here it is associated with religious norms. The rural vocational school is also described as not particularly inclusive and as providing little space to explore gender and sexual diversity, particularly for boys. It is associated with strong traditional masculinity norms (Tokle & Stefansen, 2026, p. 8). Only the central schools in Oslo are described as open and inclusive environments where diversity is normal and valued, but the ideal types are also given nuance by the observation that vocational schools and upper-secondary schools in smaller places also have inclusive environments defined by well-being among young queer people and space for diversity. In this way, the report helps to challenge and give nuance to the town/country dichotomy by showing that the school cultures in many places in the capital are perceived as not particularly inclusive. The report's authors describe different local school cultures with the spotlight on gender and sexual diversity, providing an insight into what characterises inclusive cultures and showing that this exists in different places.

In her master's thesis "Skeiv bygdeungdom om veien ut av skapet – En kvalitativ undersøkelse av hvordan forestillinger om det rurale kan påvirke utkomstprosessen til skeiv bygdeungdom", Cecilie Aspheim (2017) examines how eight young queer people in their 20s perceive the country. Some of the participants said that the country was a good, safe place to grow up, characterised by fellowship and peace, and where having the same interests as others is important to fit in. Others said that the country is characterised by narrow norms, gossip and social control, few queer role models and a lack of information on queer identity. Some villages are also defined by traditional gender roles, heteronormativity and patriarchal attitudes.

Several of the participants spoke of their fear of coming out, and of hiding their sexual identity because they were afraid of negative reactions. Others found that

they received surprisingly positive reactions when they came out, and that this was significant to how they perceived the place they had grown up. Some of the participants emphasised relocation as important to the process of coming out as queer, while pointing out that it is the social dynamic of a specific place that is significant. The narratives concerning the country as a difficult place for queer people shape perceptions of reality, and sometimes these narratives overshadow the actual social relationships in the home village.

In her master's thesis "Med skeivt blikk på bygd og by: hvordan unge homofile og lesbiske forstår seg selv i forhold til bygda og byen" (Thuen, 2006), Hanna Thuen explores perceptions of the country as narrow, conformative and heteronormative, and the town as more anonymous, tolerant and diverse. Taking its starting point in five in-depth interviews and six field conversations, the perception of the town as a liberating space with greater anonymity, acceptance and queer networks is both confirmed and given nuance. One key finding for Thuen is what she describes as "Byen i bygda" [the town in the country] and "Bygda i byen" [the country in the town], illustrating that the perceptions of town and country are linked not only to geography but also to ways of thinking and living. The year after her master's thesis, Thuen published the article "Produksjon av rom og normative geografier" in *Replikk*, the journal of the former Faculty of History and Philosophy at the University of Bergen (Thuen, 2007). However, this is not available digitally.

The master's thesis "Sted, kropp, identitet og seksualitet. En studie av steders påvirkning på homofiles identitet og fysiske fremtoning" (Leifson, 2006) is based on interviews with seven gay men on identity, relocation and openness. However, following the reorganisation of the Norwegian Research Information repository, this is not available digitally.

8.4 Queer in a religious context

The report "Erfaringer med konverteringsterapi blant skeive" (Langeland et al., 2022) builds on quantitative and qualitative data material, and addresses both experiences with conversion therapy and being queer and religious in Norway. Overall, the report shows that queer people have many negative experiences and encounters in religious contexts because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Several of the informants in the report come from small places in Norway's rural districts, and among other things describe growing up in heteronormative contexts where there were no other openly queer people. However, one of the informants emphasises that in a specific "village" it had become easier to be openly queer because they and others had paved the way as queer role models for others. Similar narratives also emerge in the report "Den eneste skeive i bygda", concerning the experiences of young Norwegians, Sami and Kvens (Stubberud et al., 2018).

Agder in South Norway is one of the areas of the country characterised by religious milieus, and the importance of religion is thematised in the report "Skeives levekår i Agder: en kvantitativ og kvalitativ kartlegging" (Stokke et al., 2018). The quantitative analyses comprise a self-recruited sample of queer people (N=791). In some of the tables, responses to questions on living conditions are broken down by geographical area (Arendal, Kristiansand, other municipalities in Vest-Agder, other municipalities in Aust-Agder). The analyses show small variations between the geographical areas. There is little focus in the qualitative analyses on the connection between geographical affinity and living conditions (Stokke et al., 2018). The report was commissioned by Vest-Agder and Aust-Agder county municipalities and Arendal and Kristiansand municipalities, and is an example of local politicians and authorities starting to take a particular interest in living conditions for queer people in their municipalities and counties, and of how local and regional data of this kind can be an important basis for political measures.

8.5 Metanarratives of queer lives – similarities across place of residence

Based on an extensive data-set comprising 99 interviews with queer people in Norway, Stubberud et al. (2022) present six common experiences across differences:

1. Experiences of feeling different
2. Negative encounters
3. Exploring identity linked to gender and sexuality
4. Coming out as queer
5. Becoming part of queer communities
6. Reflection on family and kinship

The data material covers people living in different geographical locations and with diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Sámi backgrounds. As the article emphasises shared experiences and "queer metanarratives", place of residence is not particularly important, but the authors mention that there are both positive and negative experiences among both those who live in small places and those who live in larger towns (Stubberud et al., 2022, p. 63). Several of the participants told how finding themselves and a sense of belonging in queer networks involved moving physically, usually from their family or childhood home to larger towns or other countries (Stubberud et al., 2022, p. 65). Both Sámi participants and young Norwegians living in rural areas related how they had marked themselves out in the local community to be the role model they themselves had lacked.



9 Sápmi

In this chapter we review knowledge of living conditions for queer Sámi. Sápmi as a geographical area is located within the national borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, but with the majority of the Sámi population resident in Norway. The core Sámi areas are on the Nordic periphery and are mainly small places with sparse populations (Berg-Nordlie et al., 2022). But as Mikkel Berg-Nordli (2022) points out, equating Sámi and the rural is not without problem. Sámi are involved in ongoing urbanisation processes and have also always lived in towns and more densely populated areas. Most of the studies about being Sámi and queer concern people living in the Norwegian part of Sápmi, and the contributions include people who live both in and outside the Sámi core areas, in small places and larger towns.

We begin this chapter with a discussion of the "Queering Sápmi" project, which is not research but was written by journalists and published by civil society organisations. But as we will see in the review of the research in the field, Queering Sápmi is often referred to as an important pioneering work.

Most of the studies described in this chapter align with a postcolonial and intersectional research tradition, and show how different power structures and identities are interwoven. Gender, sexuality, ethnicity and religion interact in different ways in different places and at different times.

9.1 Queering Sápmi

The book "Queering Sápmi. Samiske fortellinger utenfor normen" was written by journalists Elfrida Bergman and Sara Lindquist, and published in 2013.[21] The project is discussed in the peer-reviewed articles and master's theses reviewed above, and has been highly significant for Sami organisation and in making visible Sámi queer experiences.

As the authors of the book highlight in the foreword, few people were thinking about or talking about queer Sámi at the start of the 2010s (Bergman et al., 2013). Both authors identify as queer but are not from Sámi backgrounds. The project was a collaboration among a number of actors, including Sámi interest organisations, with the Sámi youth organisation Sáminuorra as project owner. "Queering Sápmi" led to an exhibition and a book, and the book is based on the personal accounts of queer Sámi. The book has been published in Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, and

21. Several journalists have played an important role in making visible experiences of being queer and Sami. The Norwegian-language queer magazine *Blikk* has had several covers featuring queer Sami, as has NRK. Several journalist interviews came up as results in the database searches carried out as part of the work on this report but have not been included.

Southern and Northern Sami. The accounts shed light on important life experiences and perspectives on what it is like to live as a queer person in Sápmi. Recurring themes in several of the accounts include being met with silence and feeling fear, but also the fantastic sense of belonging to two non-normative groups. The participants spoke about breaking with gender norms, coming out as queer and living as the person you really are. Another recurring theme was not feeling sufficiently Sámi or sufficiently queer. In the interviews, participants also thematised advantages and disadvantages of living in a small place, and how moving can bring both loss and new opportunities. Several of the participants underlined the richness of having multiple minority identities: "Å være homo og same har gitt meg flere muligheter enn mange andre har" [Being gay and Sámi has given me more opportunities than many others have] (Bergman et al., 2013, p. 88).

9.2 Sami queer visibility

Elisabeth Stubberud (Ph.D.) is associate professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and has contributed to the public debate and to the research into perspectives on being queer and Sami. In the article "Queer Sámi Conversations: Making Room for Safer Spaces" (2024), Stubberud and Tuula Vassvik take stock and conclude that we have come to a crossroads in terms of Sámi queer visibility. On the one hand, there have been significant changes in the last ten years in terms of Sámi queer organisation, visibility, rights and research. Yet research in the field is still extremely limited, and what there is, is in the process of becoming outdated, according to Stubberud.

The article was written as an exchange of letters between the authors, with both sharing their experiences and reflections on being queer and Sámi. Stubberud is a researcher and has worked on Sámi queer organisation, and Vassvik works in the field of art. Both highlight the importance of art in feeling at home and part of a Sámi queer community. In another article about being queer and Sámi, Stubberud thematises the importance of being part of a community so as to be able to bear the shame that can be associated with occupying one or more minority positions. Based on a methodological reflection on researching themes close to your own life, Stubberud compares the experience of loneliness as a queer person and fellowship as Sámi and Kven: "Når jeg lettere kunne hvile i det krevende etnisitetsprosjektet enn i arbeidet med levekår blant skeive, tror jeg at det handlet om hvordan kunnskapen er forankret i en kollektiv eller individuell grunnposisjon" [When I was more at ease in the challenging ethnicity project than in the work on living conditions for queer people, I believe it was a question of how the knowledge is anchored in a collective or individual basic position] (Stubberud, 2026, p. 23). Although this quotation refers to the position as researcher, it applies more generally and is supported by other research: fellowship with people whom

someone identifies and can share experiences with is important in handling and reducing negative consequences of discrimination and minority stress.

The method underlying the article "Queer Sámi Conversations" (Stubberud & Vassvik, 2024) is based on indigenous methodology that challenges traditional understandings of academic knowledge production (see also Knobblock & Stubberud, 2021). The dialogical form is an important device, and the article is based on a combination of empirical knowledge, previous research and theoretical reflections.

The authors thematise the feeling of being the only Sámi queer, and the feeling of being neither sufficiently queer nor sufficiently Sámi. Stubberud reflects on how she experiences her visibility as Sámi when she is wearing a traditional knitted jacket as more stressful than her visibility as queer, and thematises internalised shame and a feeling that both being queer and being Sámi are wrong. This is a recurring theme in the literature. Moreover, the authors point out that hetero- and cisnormativity still prevail in Sápmi. As Nordic and English-language research on queer lives shows, the hetero- and cisnormativities are woven into social structures, legislation and relationships. They engender experiences of loneliness and shame, and a feeling of differentness, forming the backdrop for othering, microaggression, discrimination and violence against queer people. Stubberud and Vassvik further point out that Sápmi is also not immune to backlashes against queer rights, and that there is still a lot of work to do, for example in terms of access to healthcare and rights for trans people in Sápmi.

Stubberud also contributed to the text "Sápmi pride: skeiv samisk organisering" (Bruun-Solbakk & Stubberud, 2022), in which "Queering Sápmi" is described as an early expression of Sami queer activism. The first Sami queer interest organisation – Nettverk for homofile og lesbiske samer [Network for gay and lesbian Sami] – was established as early as 2002, but it was the 2010s before we saw the emergence of several Sami festivals, organisations and events that shone a spotlight on being queer and Sami. Sápmi Pride has been the only regular meeting place for queer Sami and is run entirely without permanent funding or specific organisations behind it. It is both an important meeting place for queer Sami and an important arena for making visible Sami queer life and organisations (Bruun-Solbakk & Stubberud, 2022).

9.3 Contradictory developments trends

Torjer Olsen is professor of indigenous studies at UiT The Arctic University of Norway and has contributed to thematising gender and sexuality in Sápmi. In a book chapter titled "Å gjøre kjønn og etnisitet feil. Om læstadianisme, samer og skeivhet i Nord-Troms" (Olsen, 2022), he reviews the state of knowledge at the start of the 2020s, including more recent master's theses (Løvold, 2014; Oskal,

2015; Sollien, 2023). The book chapter takes it starting point in how the status of queer people in Sápmi is described in the Norwegian Sami Parliament's report on equality, Sábme Jállu (the Sámi Parliament, 2020, discussed in section 2.2), and analyses the public debate that the report unleashed.

Olsen discusses how gender is interwoven with complex ethnic relations in Nord-Troms, an area where Norwegian, Kven and Northern Sami communities have had and continue to have a distinctive presence, and where Norwegianisation and Laestadianism have been very important. Olsen points out that there is a lack of research on homosexuality within the Laestadian milieus, and that we can therefore not know for certain whether there may have been a tacit acceptance before the 1970s, when homosexuality was explicitly linked to the devil and perceived as a violation of what was normal, natural and Christian. This discourse continues to characterise Laestadianism in the Lyngen area, where preachers have carried on the conservative tradition.

But the conservative Christian discourse that condemns homosexuality is not universal within the Sami community of Nord-Troms. In 2015 the Sami festival Riddu Riddu focused on queer Sami (Bruun-Solbakk & Stubberud, 2022; Olsen & Sæther, 2025), and the festival has been described as an important venue for Sami queer belonging (Stubberud & Vassvik, 2024). Olsen describes how the different areas and milieus in Nord-Troms – where the Laestadian meeting house and the Riddu Riddu festival stand in opposition – represent completely different views of gender and sexuality: "Dermed kan skeive i Sápmi være tema under et arrangement på Riddu Riddu, med et klart budskap om åpenhet, på den ene sida av elva, mens predikantene i forsamlingshuset på den andre sida av elva kan forkynne at likekjønnsseksualitet er en synd mot Gud og naturen" [As a result, queer people in Sápmi can be the subject of an event at Riddu Riddu, with a clear message of openness, on one side of the river, while the preachers in the meeting house on the other side of the river might be proclaiming that homosexuality is a sin against God and nature] (Olsen, 2022, p. 388). In other words, the same rural district can represent two extremely different places for queer Sámi.

Olsen points out that "coming out" and being "in the closet" can represent a metaphorical parallel between being queer and being Sámi. Since both represent breaches of dominant assumptions of Norwegianness and heterosexuality, it may be that "skeive samer se[r] ut til å ha stor risiko for å bli forstått som fremmede – både som samer i et fornorska samfunn og som skeive i et heteronormativt samfunn" [queer Sami appear to run a high risk of being perceived as alien – both as Sami in a Norwegianised society and as queer in a heteronormative society] (Olsen, 2022, p. 392). At the same time, Olsen points out, patriarchal and heteronormative structures in Sápmi are being challenged by Sámi queer organisation and increasingly visible queer Sámi.

The analyses of gender and sexuality in Sápmi are further developed in the book chapter "Skeiv i Sápmi: ikke lenger usynlig og stille" (Olsen & Sæther, 2025). Here, too, Olsen highlights contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, conservative religious currents have remained strong in Sápmi, but on the other, Sámi society is similar to Norwegian society in terms of equality and gender, and there has been a clear pivot towards female dominance in Sámi politics.

Like Stubberud, Olsen also describes a Sámi culture of silence in flux. We are gradually seeing milieus, gatherings and events where it is easier to talk about being queer and Sámi. Within Laestadianism, too, there are signs of change. Olsen concludes that there is reason to state that there is greater and growing acceptance of being a Sámi queer, although there are significant variations between different milieus. He points out that experiences of being a double minority not only entail double and/or compound discrimination, but can also be a double joy (Olsen & Sæther, 2025).

9.4 Young people and health

The report "Den eneste skeive i bygda?" (Stubberud et al., 2018) is based on interviews with 13 healthcare workers and 12 young people living in small, medium-sized and large municipalities in four health regions of Norway, including municipalities in the Sámi administrative area. In addition, the analyses are based on close reading of municipal action plans in the LHBT field. The study is discussed in this chapter because it concerns young people who identify as Norwegian, Sámi and/or Kven.

One important finding in the report is that the queer Sámi and Kven participants mentioned many of the same things as the Norwegian participants: few people speak with public health nurses about gender, sexuality and being queer. The young people interviewed do not perceive public health nurses as being easily accessible and have little trust in their expertise concerning gender and sexuality. Moreover, they spoke of sex education as an important arena for knowledge but perceived it to be heteronormative. It was usual to search for information on gender, sexuality and being queer on the internet instead.

As well as the similarity between Norwegian, Sámi and Kven participants, the young Sámi stressed the importance of religion and family in the process of coming out as queer. They spoke of a strong desire to be role models for other young queer Sami and of a supportive fellowship among young Sámi. The young people who were interviewed described different experiences with coming out as queer, from unproblematic to negative reactions and broken family relationships. Some associate both positive and negative experiences with being queer. Some emphasise the Sami aspect in their narrative, while for others it seems less central

and relevant. Several recounted an experience of silence surrounding gender and sexuality in the Sámi community, and a lack of role models and other queer people in the local area. Some of the participants contributed to visibility and the existence of role models by themselves coming out in local and regional media. They spoke of mainly positive reactions, and that other queer people had subsequently made contact.

When it comes to visibility and role models, pride gatherings in Sápmi, Sámi festivals and the Queering Sápmi project (Bergman et al., 2013) were highlighted as positive and important events. One Sami participant spoke warmly of their hometown as creative, open and accepting, but thought this was in contrast to a number of other places in Sápmi. Some of the Sámi -speaking young trans people who took part in the project brought up that they experienced less misgendering in Sámi because the Sámi languages do not have gendered pronouns in the same way as Norwegian. Several spoke of generational differences between older and younger people in rural areas. While some older people may represent a culture of silence, heteronormativity and homonegativity, several found that other young people in the rural area played an important role as supporters and by providing fellowship.

Conservative religiosity and Laestadianism were highlighted as factors that can make it difficult to come out and be visible as a queer person. Expectations of passing the language and culture on to the next generation can also affect young Sámi people in a different way from young Norwegians. Several of the participants in the project had experience of moving, and the authors point out that being young and new in a place, whether you have moved from a small place to a larger one, or from a town to a small village, can put someone in a particularly vulnerable position.

9.5 Violence

The Swedish research report "Våld mot samiska kvinnor" (Brandén et al., 2024) also includes information on queer Sámi's exposure to violence. The report's analyses show that HBTQI Sámi are significantly more exposed to sexual, psychological and physical violence than other Sámi. Three in five HBTQI Sámi stated they had experienced sexual violence, while the figure among Sámi as a whole was one in three. Four in five HBTQI Sámi reported psychological violence, compared with three in five Sámi in the sample as a whole. Two in five HBTQI Sámi reported physical violence, compared with one in four among the heterosexuals in the sample (Brandén et al., 2024, p. 57). The report therefore shows that queer Sámi are significantly more exposed to violence than other Sámi, and the authors recommend more research on health, living conditions and experiences of violence among queer Sámi, as well as assistance needs.

9.6 Silent and invisible as queer Sami?

In 2009 the Fafo research foundation in Norway published the report "Lesbiske og homofile i Sápmi: en narrativ levekårsundersøkelse" (Grønningsæter & Nuland, 2009). The report is based on eight life story interviews with lesbians, bisexuals and gays in Sápmi. The participants in the study were mainly open about their sexual orientation. They spoke of tough experiences but also of having emerged stronger from challenges.

The authors highlight four themes in the report: 1. silence and gossip, 2. religion and experiences of religiously motivated condemnation, 3. identity, and 4. ostracism and social exclusion.

The participants spoke of different experiences of coming out to their families, with some experiencing tacit acceptance while others had a complicated relationship with their family. The participants described upbringings where homosexuality was never mentioned and how this made it difficult to understand themselves as queer when they lacked the language for these experiences. This silence can be perceived as a form of exclusion.

Several of the participants had chosen to move away from villages to distance themselves from the gossip. For some, moving southwards from small rural communities could be a strategy for getting away from being Sámi. Others said they had discovered their Sámi identity as adults and chosen to develop this part of their identity. The participants spoke of a change of identity from hetero to gay and from Norwegian to Sámi (Grønningsæter & Nuland, 2009).

The master's thesis "The Silence in Sápmi - and the Queer Sami Breaking of It" (Løvold, 2014) is based on eight interviews and ethnographic fieldwork at Luleå Pride, the launch of Queering Sápmi and at Pride house in Oslo, all in 2013. Løvold primarily investigates the silence surrounding being queer in Sápmi, but also the silence surrounding being Sami in the queer community. According to Løvold, Laestadianism and the ideals of masculinity are two important aspects of heteronormativity in Sápmi. She finds that participants use different strategies to challenge this. Firstly, she finds that references to the Two Spirit Movement in Canada and the USA are one strategy for verbalising what it means to be queer.[22] Participants in the study interpret both conservative religiosity and ideals of masculinity as things that came with colonialism and were imposed on Sámi by the colonial powers. As a counter-reaction, people highlight Sámi words and concepts linked to creating spaces to talk about being queer and Sámi.

22. The Two-Spirit Movement is a movement rooted in indigenous communities, particularly in North America, which recognises and makes visible people with gender and sexual identities who have traditionally had special cultural and spiritual roles in their societies.

Løvold also focuses on the fact that Sámi local communities differ, and that different rural areas in Sápmi can be both safe and unsafe spaces for queer people. One of the participants described a Sea Sámi area as a place where "popper opp skeive overalt der nå om dagen" [queer people pop up everywhere these days], but that he would have thought twice about being openly queer in Kautokeino (cited in Løvold, 2014, p. 55). At the same time, Løvold also found accounts of people who moved to Oslo or bigger towns to be able to be themselves as queer people.[23]

9.7 Multiple minority positions

The article "En minoritet i minoriteten. Homofile i samiske miljø og samer i homofile miljø" (Giertsen, 2003) is referred to as the first research contribution that explicitly thematises what it means to be gay and Sámi. Giertsen points out that being queer and Sami is not discussed in either the research on living conditions for lesbians and gays, or in the first Report to the Storting on living conditions and quality of life for lesbians and gays in Norway. The studies that addressed being gay and coming from an ethnic minority background concerned people with an immigrant background; there was also no particular research on being gay in rural communities. Giertsen refers to the short film "Lesbisk i Kautokeino" as the most comprehensive documentation of the theme available in the early 21st century. The article focuses on Kautokeino and Karasjok on the Norwegian side, and refers to a church conflict in Kautokeino where the congregation "renounced" the Norwegian bishop because he had a more accepting view of gays, something that was seen as heresy. This theological understanding has links to Laestadianism, where sex without a reproductive purpose is considered sinful and degenerate. Giertsen points out that the Sámi nation-building project means there is little point in focusing on how they discriminate "own" minorities. The article refers to the challenges of living in small places that lack gay milieus. Giertsen describes three possible strategies for Sámi gays. The first is to adapt to the Norwegian gay subculture. The second is to minimise contact with other gays and emphasise the Sámi identity and affiliation instead. The third possibility is to identify with both the gay culture and the Sámi community (Giertsen, 2003).

The master's thesis "Å være en dobbel eller trippel minoritet - Samiske skeive personer i Norge" (Sollien, 2023) is based on interviews with queer Sámi living in Oslo and Tromsø. The thesis hence explores queer Sámi experiences in two Norwegian cities, but the participants' accounts also refer to experiences of being queer and Sámi in rural areas, and of feeling a strong affiliation to parts of Norway other than where one lives. Sollien finds that there are Sámi milieus in the cities that can be seen as a form of diaspora, and that kinship is important, including outside the core Sámi areas.

23. Løvold has also written the text "Skeiv i Sápmi" in *Melk*, the journal of queer culture (Løvold & Johansen, 2016). The text has not been peer-reviewed and is not available digitally, and has therefore not been reviewed here.

Sollien describes experiences of silence, discrimination, everyday racism and minority stress. Several of the research participants are from Norwegianised families/local communities and are involved in a revitalisation process where they have found meaningful fellowship in queer and/or Sámi milieus. The participants describe a culture of silence in Sápmi and breaking the silence by coming out as queer and Sámi. The participants describe coping strategies in the form of humour, silence and avoidance. They also describe the enrichment that comes from belonging to two minority groups, as well as experiences of discrimination and encounters with cis- and heteronormative expectations (Sollien, 2023).

Some of the participants said they found it easier to be visibly Sami in Oslo than in North Norway because they experience less Sámi hate and everyday racism there. Some also said it was easier to be visibly queer in Oslo and other cities. For some, belonging to a double minority was an important reason for moving to a town: they found it easier to be both Sámi and queer there. In addition, the town represented a place where they could start with a clean sheet because of not knowing so many people. Urban areas also offer an opportunity to seek out Sámi milieus and find a sense of belonging in a Sámi "diaspora". Hence moving to the town can be part of a revitalisation process: it does not have to mean losing the culture or the language. Nevertheless, some found they had to choose between queer or Sámi milieus in the towns too (Sollien, 2023).

All the participants in the project had moved from small places to towns, and Sollien asked all of them why. A recurring theme was feeling safe and greater acceptance of diversity in an urban setting. They said it was difficult to find fellowship in the country, and it can be difficult to relate to Laestadianism and conservative religious attitudes. Others described open and inclusive rural areas but spoke of this as the exception rather than the rule (Sollien, 2023).[24]

9.8 The Sámi Parliament's report on equality

In 2020 the Norwegian Sámi Parliament published its report on equality, "Sábme jállu – Sametingsmelding om likestilling". Sexual orientation and gender identity are thematised in section 2.2 of the report. This states that "Seksuell orientering og kjønnsidentitet har for mange vært særlig utfordrende i samiske samfunn" [Sexual orientation and gender identity have been particularly challenging for many in Sámi communities], and that it is important to develop terms in the Sami languages that make it possible to talk about this (Sámi Parliament, 2020, p. 18). Terminology in a Sámi context can contribute to language for experiences that have previously been difficult to articulate, at the same time as existing categories cannot automatically be transferred to Sami frameworks of understanding. The report also describes

24. The master's thesis "Garra boját ja fiinna nieiddat – Heteronormativitehta sámi čáppagirjjálašvuođas" (Oskal, Berit Margrete, 2015) is also relevant in this context. However, it has not been reviewed here because it is only available in Sami (see Chapter 2. Method regarding linguistic limitations).

how many Sámi do not feel welcome or at home in the Sami community because of their gender identity and find themselves met with silence. The report states: "Dette kan vi som fellesskap ikke akseptere. Vi må tørre å snakke om kjønnsidentitet i samisk samfunn. Både om det å være mann, om det å være kvinne og det å ikke føle seg helt hjemme i noen av de to kjønnskategoriene – eller å føle seg hjemme i begge" [As a community, we cannot accept this. We must dare to talk about gender identity in Sámi society. Whether that is about being a man, being a woman, not feeling completely at home in either of these gender categories – or feeling at home in both of them] (the Sámi Parliament, 2020, p. 21). The report met with both praise and criticism from Sámi queer organisations. Garmeres pointed out inter alia that the work on language and categories is not followed up in other parts of the report, which reflect instead a dichotomous understanding of gender and equality between men and women (cited in Olsen & Sæther, 2025, pp. 3–4).

10 Sweden

In this chapter we review research on being queer in rural districts of Sweden. Swedish research on being queer in rural contexts usually portrays this in opposition to metronormativity, i.e. an understanding of the town – and particularly the city – as the natural, actual or most authentic setting for queers (see Liliequist, Lööv and Wimark, 2019).

10.1 Settlement and moving patterns among queers

Thomas Wimark, currently associate professor at Uppsala University, has contributed to Nordic research into the relationship between queer identity, place and mobility. His doctoral thesis, *Beyond the Bright City Lights* (2014), which problematises the gay migration myth, is a key piece of research in the Nordic context. The thesis does not examine living conditions for queer people in rural areas as such but studies settlement patterns among lesbians and gays compared with heterosexuals. Like populations elsewhere, large parts of the Swedish population live in major urban areas. Wimark used quantitative data to study the settlement patterns of gays and lesbians in Sweden, and found that they live in higher concentrations in Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg than heterosexuals. However, this applies above all to single gay men, and to a lesser degree to women and people living in established couple relationships. In addition, Wimark investigated the hypothesis that more negative attitudes in rural areas explain the settlement pattern, but his statistical analyses did not support this (Wimark, 2014b). Wimark argues that it is rather the belief that urban areas are more tolerant that makes gays and lesbians move there.

As well as undertaking quantitative analyses of settlement patterns, Wimark also interviewed gays and lesbians in Malmö about why they had moved to the city (cities). Many of the older gay men said they moved from their home area before they dared to come out. There were fewer such anecdotes among younger people: when younger people explained why they had moved, it was largely a question of education and training, the same as for young people in general. There is a greater expectation that lesbians and gays in the younger cohorts will live the same type of life as heterosexuals (Wimark, 2016).

The thesis documents a clear tendency for lesbians and gays in Sweden to live in higher concentrations in urban areas than heterosexuals. Furthermore, the study uses qualitative interviews to explore how lesbians and gays living in Malmö talk about and explain their decision to move to one of Sweden's largest cities, and whether their accounts can be linked to a dominant cultural narrative that it is difficult or impossible to live good queer lives in rural areas (see also Eggebø & Stubberud, 2022a). In this way, the thesis sheds light on how lesbians and gays who

have moved to Malmö perceive the living conditions for queer people in the rural areas where they grew up.

A registry study also reveals differences in settlement patterns between married same-sex and heterosexual couples in Sweden (Wimark & Fortes de Lena, 2022). The analysis breaks the data material down into 12 types of neighbourhood, and not exclusively according to a rural/urban dimension. The results indicate that, compared with heterosexual couples, same-sex couples are more concentrated in metropolitan areas and avoid remote rural areas. However, this tendency is less apparent for lesbian than gay couples. Women in same-sex couples are relatively well represented in the type of neighbourhood that the authors call "rural towns", i.e. densely populated areas that are not a city (Wimark & Fortes de Lena, 2022b).

A study (Nyegaard et al., 2022; Wimark & Östh, 2014) based, among other things, on data from an internet forum and including registry data, shows that there are lesbians and gays living in every municipality in Sweden, but that the groups are concentrated in the big cities.

In the article "Migration motives of gay men in the new acceptance era: a cohort study from Malmö, Sweden", Wimark (2016) uses qualitative interviews to investigate how gay men in Malmö talk about migration from rural areas to the city. The study includes two birth cohorts with both groups having grown up in rural areas – one in the period before and one in the period after general acceptance of homosexuality – and therefore casts a light on changes over time. The older cohort's narratives overlapped to a significant degree with narratives of escaping to the town and perceived the town as synonymous with gay life. The narratives of the younger cohort, on the other hand, showed a clear distinction between narratives of gay identity and narratives of the town. They did not emphasise the town as the venue for gay identity to the same degree, but rather the opportunities it offered in terms of education and training, for example. Through the course of their lives, the older cohorts had moved between different towns and cities, while the younger cohorts were more open to moving to smaller towns and villages, something that may reflect a more pressured labour market and the need to be mobile and flexible to get a job. The older cohorts emphasised friends and friendship as an important reason for moving, while for younger people the core family had again become important in decisions to relocate. The study concludes that motives for moving among gay men have become more similar to the population as a whole.

The studies by Wimark and colleagues document that gay men in particular are concentrated in urban areas, while lesbian and same-sex couples to a greater degree also live in rural towns and villages. Historically, some gay men have spoken of "escaping" to the town, but more recent cohorts emphasise education and training, work, and family in their narratives. Accordingly, motives for moving among queer people are increasingly aligning with those of the majority population, at the same time as the perception of the town as an essential sanctuary is being challenged.

Wimark reflects in his thesis (2014a) on moving from the place where he grew up, and how relocating to London and Stockholm was important in the process of coming out as a gay man. Similarly, Liliequist (2022) describes how her own journey to a university town was to be both an intellectual homecoming and a step up the social ladder. The starting point is the migration narrative and metronormativity, and like Wimark she reflects autoethnographically on her own feelings and experiences. The chapter describes one participant's experience of being out of place both in queer urban contexts and as a lesbian in her home village. This resonates with the double outsiderness that Eggebø and Stubberud (2022a) highlight in accounts from queer people with an immigrant background, who experience exclusion both from nationality-based and queer milieus.

Liliequist shows how class and spatial power hierarchies, which assign the town a higher status, contribute to constructing a longing for the urban space and the queer urban life, irrespective of whether or not that is where someone lives (Liliequist 2022, p. 458). Liliequist also articulates a sense of shame that she had not succeeded in living a queer life in her home village, together with feelings of having failed and abandoned her place of origin and of outsiderness because she had failed to share in the idyll. Is it possible to highlight negative experiences in a narrative on happy queer lives in the country? Eggebø et al. (2015) discuss some aspects of this in "Skeiv på bygda", concerning informants who describe how it is difficult to be believed and understood when talking about serious cases of discrimination in your hometown.

Swedish researchers show that the established narrative of "coming out and moving to the city" both shapes and limits conceptions of where and how queer lives can be lived, problematising the narrative of the "intolerant country" and the necessary "escape" to the town. Nordic research indicates more complex life courses, varying migration patterns, and different material and legal conditions etc. At the same time, it shows how queer experiences are defined by strong local affinity and ambivalence when it comes to moving from the district and into the towns (Liliequist et al., 2019).

10.2 Etablishing queer spaces in the rural

Another element that some of the Swedish research contributions have in common concerns how different types of spaces in rural areas become important arenas where queer people negotiate visibility, belonging and risk.

In her thesis *Digitala förbindelser: Rum, riktning och queera orienteringar*, Evelina Liliequist thematises the use of digital milieus and digital meeting places for queer people, and the importance of these in a rural context. Based on qualitative interviews with 15 queers living in northern Sweden and digital ethnographic observation on platforms such as qruiser.se, Facebook, Grindr and Instagram,

Liliequist analyses how digital media are part of the everyday lives of queer people. The thesis thematises both challenges and opportunities relating to openness and visibility, and how social media platforms help to challenge established narratives between geographical space and queer identity.

Liliequist describes how heteronormativity and metronormativity constitute two sets of norms that are important for the informants' constructions and conceptions of digital and geographical spaces (Liliequist, 2020, p. 200). The internet and apps facilitate new forms of queer fellowship irrespective of physical location, but also make visible the effect of distance, urban norms and other power structures. She is interested in how digital connections through the internet create new opportunities for fellowship on the one hand but also new arenas for risk on the other. Visibility on social media carries a risk, for example of friends and family gaining an insight through platforms such as Facebook into a queer life that someone does not wish to share.

A key concept in the thesis is "digital closet". Digital platforms take on a double function: they can both facilitate fellowship and belonging, and simultaneously create new forms of vulnerability and exposure.

For her part, Lööv (2020) explores queer activism in a rurally rooted context in Sweden, based on ethnographic material from fieldwork conducted at a Pride festival in 2015. The organisers described local expectations that the festival would be similar to Stockholm Pride, and emphasised how difficult it was to design their own festival with Stockholm Pride as both a prototype and antitype, as well as pointing out the different conditions facing urban and rural Pride festivals.

She places particular emphasis in her analysis of the organisers' explicit wish to do Pride in their own way in their local community. One of the informants describes it as follows:

> *Det är väl det här med läderbögar på lastbilsflak, disco, massa såna grejer. Det vi ser från Stockholm. Att applicera det på [ortsnamn], jag menar det går ju inte. Det funkar ju inte. Logistiskt sett så funkar det ju inte heller. Jag menar man, just det, jag tror det är Prideordet som har gjort att många har den föreställningen. Så det är väl bara det att man ska spräcka hål på den bubblan och visa att vi gör det på vårat sätt. [Well it's this thing with leather gays on truck beds, disco, all that stuff. That's what we see in Stockholm. But doing that in [place name], I just don't think it's right. It doesn't work. Logistically, it doesn't work either. I think it's precisely the word "Pride" that means many people now have this conception. So we simply have to burst the bubble and show that we're doing it our own way.] (Lööv, 2020, p. 91)*

Löov believes the rural Pride festival represents a "paradoxical space". By adapting Pride to everyday life in rural areas, the festival became a space that focused on other themes relevant to the region, and a space where urban understandings of LGBTQ struggles and Pride were challenged. In a region where there are considered to be few openly queer people and few established meeting places, the festival was designed as a broad and inclusive event. The programme foregrounded themes such as suicide, substance abuse, domestic violence, shame and outsiderness; issues that were understood to be pressing in the local community in general, not just for queer people. By de-urbanising Pride, the festival became less normatively urban but also less LGBTQ-centred. An example of this was elements such as classic car cruising to make the event recognisable and socially acceptable. However, this meant queer perspectives were given less space in the programme and potentially also decentred (Lööv, 2020).[25]

Lööv (2020) uses the term "*bygd" [*country], which is inspired by the Swedish activist network "Queer*bygd" [Queer*country], where "*bygd" [country] is understood as an analytical, queer umbrella term for non-urban places. The asterisk indicates openness and a break with fixed definitions, in the same way as the concept of "trans". "*Bygd" [*country] is not to be understood as a single type of place but as a relational concept that makes visible power relationships between centre and periphery, and between different non-urban contexts. See also Liliequist and Lööv (2019).

10.3 Experiences of young queers in rural areas in Sweden

The study by Wänerlund et al. (2020) examines young people's experience of clinics for young people in North Sweden. The source data is a questionnaire survey of 1,110 young people who have used 20 clinics in the four northernmost counties. The analysis reveals skewness in terms of gender diversity and sexual orientation. In particular, young people who identify outside the established categories of hetero-sexual, gay or bisexual – for example queer, asexual or "other" – together with young people with trans experience, give generally lower scores, especially in areas such as sexuality, respect and access.[26] The study shows that although the North Swedish youth clinic model generally functions well, young queers from minorities find the services less young person-friendly, raising issues of equal access, rurality and intersectional marginalisation. This is important in a rural context, where young people often have fewer alternative facilities and greater geographical distances to

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26. Young people with non-Swedish backgrounds also report lower satisfaction with the health service.

travel to services, and are therefore extra dependent on the local clinics being perceived as safe, inclusive and relevant.

Odenbring (2022) interviewed ninth-grade students in a rural area of Sweden. The article takes the key informant "Hugo", who identifies as bisexual, as a particular starting point but also draws on a number of group interviews with young people. The findings show that students who are perceived as "different", and who break with heteronormative and masculine ideals, are in an extremely exposed position. Sexual minorities are subjected to homophobic use of language, threats, physical violence and ostracism. One particular group of boys ("the pack") spreads fear and upholds a heteronormative and gendered power structure. The article concludes that there is a need for further work to tackle homophobia and to create a more inclusive school environment.

In their study of young queer people's attitudes to being queer in rural contexts in Sweden, Sotevik and Nordin (2025) highlight how young people both relate to a strong urban norm and, at the same time, articulate a resistance to this, a resistance that the authors consider contributes to decentralising queerness and creating new queer spaces outside the cities. The study is based on interviews with 19 young queers (aged 18–26) who have grown up in the country or small places in Sweden. They say it can be difficult to be queer outside the cities, partly because of long distances, poor public transport and few places to meet. Many feel that they miss out on opportunities that exist in urban areas, and that there are narrower frameworks for how they can express themselves. At the same time, they often describe their hometowns as more conservative. Nevertheless, the study also shows that the young people take initiative themselves: several organise festivals, meeting places and activities for queer people locally. In this way they challenge the conception that queer life only exists in the city and help to create new communities in smaller places too. The authors identify that resistance to the urban norm can be divided into three strategies: 1) *counternarratives*, 2) *criticising current conditions*, and 3) *organising queer spaces*.

Research on young queers in rural areas makes visible both marginalisation and resistance. Young people who break with hetero and gender norms describe homophobia, violence and ostracism, and find key services to be less accessible and less safe. At the same time, young queers are mobilising themselves – through local initiatives, events and critique of urban norms – and creating new queer spaces outside the big cities. In this way, Swedish research is giving nuance to the image of the "intolerant country" and the "liberating town", and highlighting instead ambivalence, belonging and different conditions for living queer lives across geographies.

10.4 Service provision

The report "På väg mot jämställda och attraktiva kommuner i Norbotten" (Lindberg, 2021) analyses the work on equality and development in five municipalities in Norrbotten County (Gällivare, Haparanda, Jokkmokk, Kalix and Övertorneå). The starting point is an initiative to improve equality between men and women at local and regional level, using a strategy for gender mainstreaming. This means that equality should not be a separate side project but be incorporated in all ordinary management, planning and service development. The work is based on an intersectional perspective where gender is understood in interaction with, for example, age, ethnicity, functional impairment, socioeconomic conditions and sexual orientation. Where sexual orientation is concerned, the report underlines that this constitutes a central dimension of discrimination on a par with the other named grounds. The theoretical part of the report emphasises that intersectionality should help to prevent equality initiatives from entrenching other norms, such as whiteness, heterosexuality and secularity. This means that the work must have a norm-critical perspective, including on heteronormativity, and ask questions as to which conceptions of gender and sexuality are taken for granted in municipal services, working environments and policy. At the same time, the report points out that intersectionality is often perceived as difficult to deploy in practice, which may explain why, in reality, "sexual orientation" has little visibility in the actual work.

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10.5 Hate crime and discrimination

The book chapter "Queering the rural: Tales from Poland and Sweden" (Ceccato & Bogacka, 2025) describes the prevalence of hate crime and experiences of discrimination among queers in Sweden and Poland. The chapter is based on data from a European survey of queer people conducted on a regular basis by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020). The chapter focuses on differences and similarities among queers living in rural and urban areas respectively in the two countries. More queer people living in rural areas of Sweden report online harassment than those living in urban areas, and the opposite when it comes to harassment on the street and public transport. Also in Sweden, more people living in urban areas report that they avoid being open in public and with healthcare personnel (Ceccato & Bogacka, 2025, pp. 328–329). It must however be emphasised that the authors of the chapter do not report on significance testing, and it is therefore difficult to assess whether the differences expressed in percentages between queer people in rural and urban areas reflect genuine differences or coincidences.



11 Discussion

In some of the Nordic countries – primarily Denmark, Norway and Sweden – living conditions for queer people and queer history are becoming established as a research field, but as Nyegaard et al. (2022) have pointed out, there is a lack of research examining queer history on the Nordic periphery such as the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland. This literature review shows that the observation made by Nyegaard et al. also applies to the Nordic periphery understood as places in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland that are far from the capitals and other big cities.

What can the existing research tell us about living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region? In this last section of the report, we highlight what we consider to be the central themes illuminated in the literature we have reviewed:

1. Settlement patterns
2. Experiences of young queer people
3. Queer organisation
4. Christianity

At the end of the chapter we discuss what characterises existing research on queer people in rural areas and identify the research requirements in the field.

11.1 Settlement patterns

Studies from several Nordic countries show that queer people live in higher concentrations in the big cities than the population as a whole (Andersen et al., 2024; Frisch & Hviid, 2006; Wimark, 2014a; Zahl-Olsen, 2024). This applies particularly to gay men, and to a somewhat lesser degree to lesbian women in established couple relationships. Nevertheless, there is also a clear tendency for same-sex couples to have a more centralised settlement pattern than heterosexual couples. These studies are based on analyses of registry data and questionnaire surveys, and some of the authors interpret the figures as an expression of the higher level of acceptance for queer people in the towns and cities than in less central areas. A more recent Danish study shows that negative attitudes to queer people are more widespread in Denmark outside the capital areas (Andresen et al., 2025). In contrast, Wimark (2014a) argues that the concentration of queer people in larger towns and cities cannot be explained by lower tolerance in rural areas, but rather because of the assumption that urban areas are more inclusive and hence better places to live for queer people.

11.2 Experiences of young queer people: coming out and being accepted

Stubberud et al. (2022) have identified some common features in the lives of queer people across variations in age, generation, place of residence, ethnicity and gender identity. These include a feeling of differentness, exploring gender and sexuality, experiences with coming out and experiences with being accepted in queer communities. These four themes also recur in the research on queer people in rural areas, particularly in the studies investigating the experiences of young people (Aspheim, 2017; Odenbring, 2022; Sotevik & Nordin, 2025; Stubberud et al., 2018; Thorsteinsson et al., 2022; Tokle & Stefansen, 2026; Wänerlund, 2020).

One recurring theme in these studies is that breaking with gender and sexual norms can be challenging, and that many explain this in terms of living in small places that are usually defined by heteronormative gender and sexual norms, a lack of queer role models and few queer networks. Young people who link heteronormativity to the rural in this way generally express a longing or a desire to move to the urban.

They perhaps see greater opportunities for living good queer lives and finding fellowship with other queer people in towns and cities. Interview studies also show there is a tendency for coming out as queer to be linked to moving to new places and finding new milieus, irrespective of where people are moving from. But the existing literature also includes young people who offer counternarratives that portray the country as inclusive and open, and a place where they feel safe and a sense of belonging. Others speak of a commitment to being the role model in the local community that they themselves lacked, and establishing the communities and arenas they want their hometown to have. Several research participants problematise the dominant cultural narratives that it is difficult to be queer in small places, and the research shows that rural and urban areas are diverse and influenced by different local cultures. The experiences of several young queer people are characterised by strong local affinity and ambivalence when it comes to moving from rural to urban areas (Liliequist et al., 2019).

Experiences of feeling different, challenges linked to the process of coming out and a wish to be accepted in queer communities are recurring themes among young queer people who live or have grown up in villages and smaller places. But other research indicates that these are common experiences among queer people generally, wherever they live, and that coming out is linked to moving and finding new milieus and social relationships. Hence the feeling of being different and encountering challenges in the processes associated with coming out and being accepted in queer communities can be said to be experiences that are found in rural areas, villages and small towns, but by no means exclusively in such places. There are, however, a number of distinctive features of small communities that in some cases may amplify the challenges, for example the fact that rural areas tend to be

close-knit communities where people often have multiple relationships with the same individuals, there are fewer people and everyone knows everyone (Christie 1982, cited in Eggebø et al., 2015).

11.3 Queer spaces and organisation

Another central theme relating to feelings of differentness and processes associated with coming out and being accepted in the queer community, is the importance of queer organisation and spaces. Several of the research contributions we have reviewed while working on this report show that establishing queer spaces outside the urban is important for many queers, for example young people and queer Sami. Evalina Liliequist's thesis (2020) focuses on the importance of digital spaces and shows that digital queer communities can be very important to queer people in rural areas and be an arena for alternative representations of rural areas as idyllic places, including for queer people (Liliequist, 2020). The digital spaces may be enabling but may also create new forms of vulnerability and exposure.

The authors of the report "Skeiv på bygda" point out that digital spaces cannot replace face-to-face relationships, and this is supported by several other studies where participants highlight the importance of village pride, Sápmi Pride, and other events and festivals that provide queer spaces (Bergman et al., 2013; Sotevik & Nordin, 2025; Stubberud & Akin, 2018; Stubberud & Vassvik, 2024). Local pride celebrations can contribute to openness, inclusivity, feelings of belonging and community, and provide visible role models in the local community. At the same time, pride events can also represent a paradoxical space intended to embrace many different interests to fit a specific context (Lööv, 2020). This shows that queer spaces, both digital and physical, are complex arenas that can simultaneously strengthen community and visibility, and create new forms of vulnerability, tensions and conflicting expectations.

11.4 Christianity

The importance of religious norms, specifically Christianity, is a recurring theme in some of the literature on queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region. Several studies that explore what it means to be queer emphasise the importance of Laestadianism and conservative Christian theology, which interpret homosexuality as a sin and unnatural. Religiously motivated condemnation of homosexuality is present in many different places in the Nordic region, for example it is thematised in studies from the Faroe Islands, Finland and Norway.

Conservative religious gender and sexual norms are present in many rural areas, but also in urban areas, and in both Christian and other religious milieus. For some queer people, religious faith and milieus can be difficult to reconcile with living good

queer lives, and there is little doubt that religion and religious norms are stronger in some countries, regions and local communities than others. A new Danish study based on a questionnaire survey of more than 60,000 respondents shows that homophobic attitudes are significantly more widespread among religious people, and particularly among Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Inner Mission in Denmark (Andresen et al., 2025).

11.5 Perspectives and methods in the literature

We have not identified any comparative studies of living conditions for queer people in the Nordic countries. The existing research largely exists within the framework of the nation state, with research funding, data collection and references primarily from and academic environments in the same country. Little research into gender and sexual diversity has been conducted in the Faroe Islands, Greenland or Åland, and we have not identified any studies that analyse variation between regions within individual countries in a systematic way.

There are also few studies that systematically compare differences in living conditions for queer people based on where they live, but two recent Danish studies show that unhappiness among young queers and homophobic attitudes in the population are more widespread among Danes living outside the capital area (Andersen et al., 2024; Andresen et al., 2025).[27] There are also several existing data-sets that can be used to carry out such comparisons (Anderssen et al., 2013, 2021; and FRA 2020, cited in Ceccato & Bogacka, 2025).

Most of the studies identified that shed light on queer lives in rural areas are case studies based on qualitative interviews and, to some degree, ethnographic field-work. These studies provide rich and nuanced insights into what it is like to live as a queer person in rural areas, and describe how life experiences are connected to local factors. A number of qualitative studies show how, in different ways, the participants' narratives are shaped by the dominant cultural narratives on town and country, whether they align with the dominant narratives or are read as counternarratives. Some studies collect narratives from people who live in different rural locations and others focus on a specific place. For anonymisation reasons, it is unusual to provide concrete information on which specific villages or small communities are being studied, and if narratives of "the country" are completely detached from the specific context, this can contribute to reproducing the rural as something uniformly and distinctly different from the urban.

As we mentioned in the introduction, there seems to be a widespread conception that it is difficult to live good queer lives in rural areas (Eggebø & Stubberud, 2022b). Problematisation of the urban/rural dichotomy itself is another recurring

27. Data-sets facilitating statistical comparison of differences between different groups of queer people, including queer people living in different parts of the country, are also available in other Nordic countries.

theme in the research we have reviewed. In their respective theses, both Wimark and Liliequist reflect on how their own experiences of moving from the country to the town as queer people became the starting point for critical studies of the relationship between queer and rural, and how there is a diversity of experiences linked to place and moving. Most of the studies we have reviewed include critical perspectives on how narratives of the rural and the urban shape experiences, informant narratives, choice of study subject and analyses. Nevertheless, the research can end up reproducing the town/country dichotomy by retelling the dominant cultural narrative and failing to sufficiently examine and compare differences and similarities between different rural areas and between different urban areas, or more differentiated categories that make a distinction between, for example, rural villages, sparsely populated rural areas, small towns and different national contexts. As Wimark argues, a more granular geographical differentiation would make it possible to analyse different types of local communities without reducing them to either urban or rural.

11.6 Research requirements

Based on analysis of the existing research literature on living conditions for queer people in rural areas of the Nordic region, we would highlight four priority areas for future research:

11.6.1 Comparative studies

There is a striking lack of comparative studies of living conditions for queer people in different countries of the Nordic region. Both qualitative and quantitative studies of living conditions for queer people in the Nordic region mainly take the nation state as the frame of reference. A literature review such as this, based on national case studies, can risk giving the impression that rural areas in Norway, for example, are the same as rural areas in the Faroe Islands, and hence contribute to reproducing the urban/rural dichotomy, where "the country" is construed as something uniform and diametrically opposed to "the town". We recommend that comparative studies of living conditions for queer people in different areas of the Nordic region be carried out, for example across nation states, autonomous areas, regions, towns and local communities.

11.6.2 Studies of queer lives on the Nordic periphery

Existing research addressing queer lives, organisation and history in the Nordic region has so far focused on Norway and Sweden, and to some extent Finland and Denmark. As this report reveals, some research has been conducted into being queer in Sápmi but, as Stubberud points out, there is still little knowledge in this area and what there is in the process of becoming outdated. We recommend that

both historical and contemporary studies be conducted in rural and more densely populated areas of the Nordic periphery, for example Greenland, the Faroe Islands and different parts of Sápmi.

11.6.3 Analyses of available data-sets on living conditions for queer people

A good number of quantitative data from the Nordic countries are gradually becoming available that can be used to analyse living conditions among different groups of queer people. However, these data are under-analysed (Suvisaari & Lehtonen, 2026). For example, there is potential to explore variations in living conditions for different groups of queer people, based on place of residence among other things, in three Norwegian data-sets from 2013 (Anderssen et al., 2013), 2020 (Anderssen et al., 2021) and 2026 (in preparation) respectively.[28] We recommend that the analytical potential of existing quantitative data be exploited to a greater degree, for example to explore the importance of location for living conditions and quality of life for queer people.

11.6.4 Studies of queer organisation

Queer history has tended to focus on what has happened in the big cities in connection with the emergence of the modern gay rights movement. Queer organisation has mushroomed over the last ten years in the form of pride events in more peripheral areas of the Nordic region. The literature we have reviewed shows that organisation of this kind has great significance for queer living conditions, but the theme remains little documented and explored (see however Hacioglu & Juuhl, under publication; Lööv, 2020). We recommend undertaking studies of queer organisation on the Nordic periphery, including "village pride", Sápmi Pride, local interest organisations and events.

28. The data is made available and loaned out by Sikt, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research.

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Appendix: Search blocks and search strings

Search blocks

Search block 1: rural areas

Search block 2: queers

Search block 3: the Nordic region (used in the international databases)

Search string in Scopus and Web of Science (English)

(“sparsely populated area*” OR rural* OR “small town*” OR village* OR Greenland OR “Faroe Islands” OR Sapmi OR Lappland OR Lappi OR Finnmark* OR Åland OR Aland) AND (LGB OR LGBT* OR asexu* OR Bisexual* OR crossgender OR gay* OR "gender change" OR "gender dysphoria" OR "gender expression" OR "gender identit*” OR "gender minorit*" OR "gender nonbinary" OR "gender nonconfirming" OR "gender transformation" OR "gender transition" OR genderqueer* OR heteronorm* OR heterosexis* OR homonegativ* OR homophob* OR homosexual* OR intergender* OR intersex* OR lesbian* OR "men loving men" OR "men who have sex with men" OR "nonbinary gender" OR "non-heterosexual*” OR pansexual* OR queer* OR "same sex couples*" OR "same sex relation*" OR “sexual and gender minorities” OR "sexual minorities" OR "sexual orientation" OR Transgender* OR transnegativ* OR transphob* OR transsexual* OR "trans female*" OR "trans male*" OR "trans man" OR "trans men*" OR "trans woman" OR "trans women*" OR "trans people*" OR "trans person*" OR "women loving women" OR "women who have sex with women") AND (Norway OR Norwegian OR Sweden OR Swedish OR Finland OR Finnish OR Denmark OR Danish OR Iceland* OR Åland OR Aland OR Greenland OR “Faroe Islands” OR Faroese OR Scandinavia* OR "Scandinavian and Nordic Countries" OR “Nordic countries” OR “Nordic region” OR Sapmi)

Search string in LIBRIS and SwePub (Swedish)

(glesbygd* OR “glesbefolkade områden” OR landsbygd* OR rurala OR Sapmi OR Norrland* OR Finnmark* OR Västerbotten OR Norrbotten OR Jämtland OR Åland OR Grönland OR Färöarna) AND (HBT OR HBTQ OR HBTQI OR LGB OR LGBT OR LGBTQ OR asexu* OR bisexu* OR bicurious* OR heteronorm* OR heterosexis* OR homofob* OR homosexu* OR icke-binär* OR ickebinär* OR Intersex* OR

könsidentitet* OR könsdysfori OR lesbisk* OR lesbianism OR pansexu* OR queer* OR "sexuell läggning" OR "sexuell minoritet*" OR "sexuell orientering" OR transfob* OR transkvinn* OR transman* OR transmän* OR transperson* OR transsexu*)

Search string in ORIA (Norwegian)

(kyst* OR bygd* OR spredtbygd* OR rural* OR Sapmi OR utkant* OR utkantstrøk* OR landsbygd* OR Finnmark* OR Nord-Norge OR Nord-Noreg OR distrikt OR Grønland OR Færøyene OR Åland) AND (LHBTQ* OR LHB OR transkjønnet OR transseksu* OR transkvinn* OR transmann OR transmenn OR transperson* OR homoseksu* OR lesbisk* OR homofil* OR biseksu* OR skeiv* OR lesbigay OR interseks* OR interkjønn OR likekjønn* OR panseksu* OR "identifiserer seg som kvinne" OR kjønnsskeiv* OR kjønnsskifte OR kjønnsendring OR kjønnsovergang OR skeivkjønnet OR kjønnsdysfori OR ikke-binær OR "ikke-binært kjønn" OR genderqueer OR "binært kjønn" OR kjønnsuttrykk OR kjønnsidentitet* OR kjønnsminoriteter OR "seksuelle minoriteter" OR "seksuell orientering" OR kjønnsidentitet" OR "menn som elsker menn" OR "menn som har sex med menn" OR "par av samme kjønn" OR "forhold av samme kjønn" OR "kvinner som elsker kvinner" OR "kvinner som har sex med kvinner" OR ikke-heterofil OR homofob* OR homonegativ* OR transfob* OR heterosexis* OR heteronorm*)

Search string in the Royal Danish Library and Research Portal Denmark (Danish)

(landdistrikt* OR "tyndt befolket område" OR rural OR landsby* OR Grønland OR Jylland OR Færøerne OR Åland OR Provins* OR Lolland OR Falster OR "uden for region hovedstaden" OR "Kalaallit Nunaat") AND (LGB OR LGBT OR LGBTQ OR aseksu* OR transkønnet OR transseksu* OR transkvinde* OR transmand OR transmænd OR transperson* OR homoseks* OR lesbisk* OR bøsse OR biseksu* OR binysgerrig OR queer* OR lesbigay OR interkøn OR intergender OR panseksu* OR "identificere sig som kvinde" OR kønsbekræft* OR genderqueer OR kønsdysfori OR "non-binær kønsforståelse" OR "ikke-binær kønsforståelse" OR "binær kønsforståelse" OR kønsidentitet* OR kønsmindretal OR "seksuelle mindretal" OR "seksuel orientering" OR "seksuel orientering og kønsidentitet" OR "mænd der elsker mænd" OR "mænd der har sex med mænd" OR "par af samme køn" OR "forhold mellem par af samme køn" OR "kvinder der elsker kvinder" OR "kvinder der har sex med kvinder" OR ikke-heteroseksuel OR homofob* OR homonegativ* OR transfob* OR heterosexis* OR heteronorm*)

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Helga Eggebø and Fredrik Langeland for Nordic information on Gender, NIKK

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