



Coastal Societies and Urbanisation in the North Atlantic Rim

Many rural areas are exposed to situations where schools are being closed due to the declining number of children, local shops are disappearing in the smaller towns, while local governments are struggling with pressure on the local public budgets. Parallel to this new residential areas are shooting up in the urban areas. This is just a small glimpse of the visible consequences of the on-going global urbanisation trend. In the Nordic coastal societies the urbanisation is also visible and the consequences are often even more pronounced.

THE ON-GOING SOCIO-ECONOMIC changes in coastal regions all over the world can be characterized as a “double movement” (Holm 2001, Johnsen 2005)¹.

On one hand reduced options for access to fishery resources due to shrinking stocks, new technologies increasing the harvesting efficiency, and expanding national and international fisheries management systems. In addition, the expansion of fish farming activities should be included, as fish farming today cover around one third of the total seafood production. On top of that, recent years

have shown an increased focus on local, more environmental friendly and sustainable small scale fisheries adjusted to local needs.

On the other hand, however, the tourism sector has been expanding, leading to situations where communities previously dependent on fisheries are changing their focus towards an emerging recreational potential for coastal tourism. These potentials are primarily based on the specific qualities of the coastal landscapes and the opportunities provided in that connection. At the same time the –

otherwise vanishing fisheries communities – provide attractive settings both for short term visitors and for second homes where the small scale sustainable fisheries becomes an important part of the experience.

These changes involve substantial economic and social processes where issues such as economic, technological, social, political and cultural reconfigurations are decisive, and with demography playing a key role, and in many ways “paving the way” for to what extend plans and ideas may become realities!

In this context comparing the policies, processes, and the results in the North Atlantic Rim is considered being especially advantageous due to many similarities in relation to both background and contemporary characteristics. And with demography playing a pivotal role, a natural starting point would be to outline the contemporary demographic challenges in order to see what constraints these conditions may generate.



Map 1: The map shows the North Atlantic Rim connecting Europe with North America. The geographically strategic position of the West Nordic area in relation to Europe, Norden, Canada and the Arctic is obvious.

The policy recommendations presented here are building on the outcome of the workshop “Addressing demographic change in the North Atlantic Rim” which was hosted by the Harris Centre, Memorial University in St. John’s 17th and 18th of October 2011. The workshop was jointly organised by NORA, Nordregio and Harris Centre.

At the workshop twenty researchers and policy makers from Newfoundland and Labrador met with eight researchers and policy makers from the Nordic countries, primarily the West Nordic countries. The workshop gave the participants

an excellent chance to exchange knowledge and experiences in relation to the demographic challenges they are dealing with in the different parts of the North Atlantic Rim.

The discussion took its point of departure from four parameters:

- Retention
- Migration
- Generation
- Adaptation

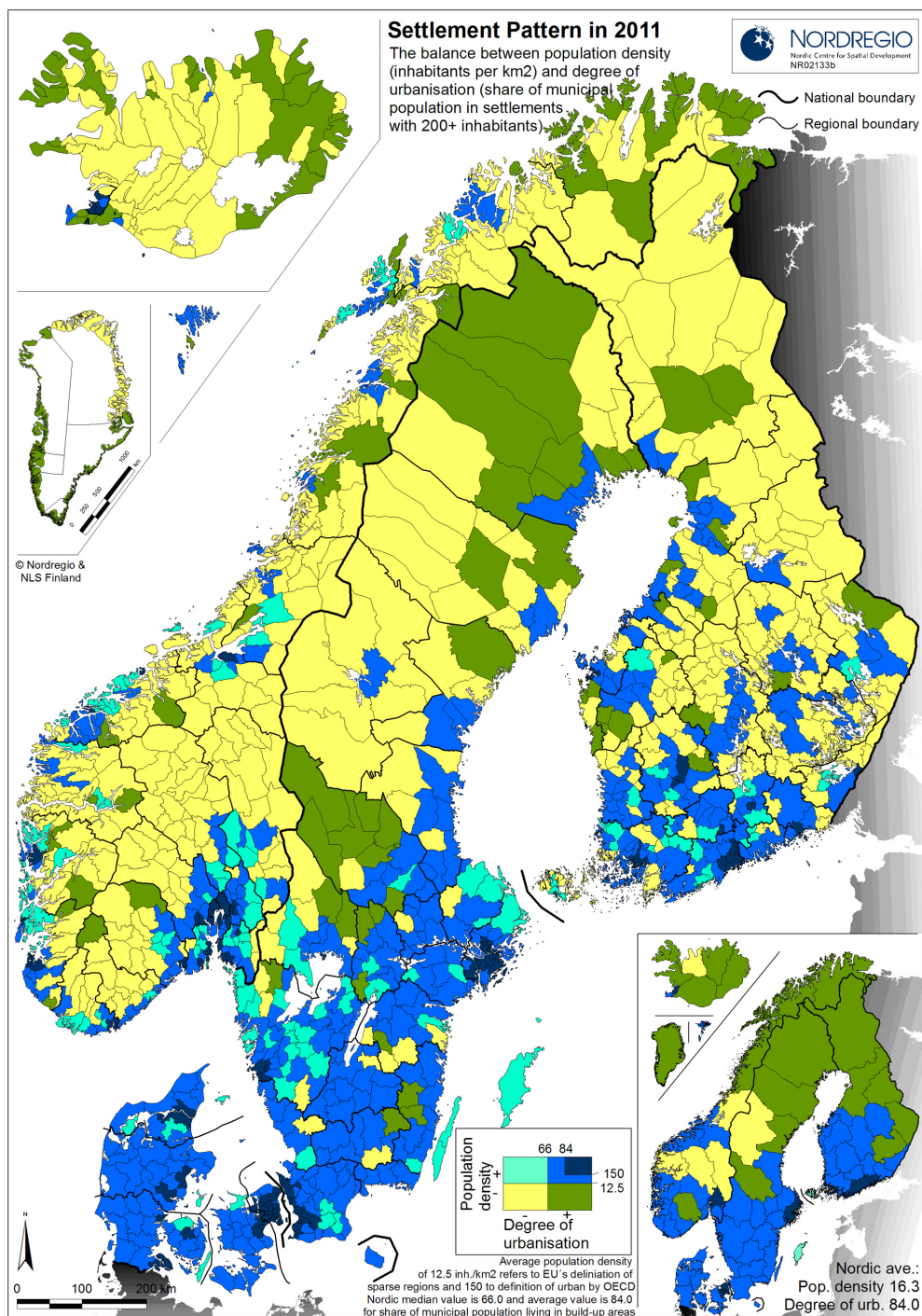
Within these four parameters policy options were identified and recommendations outlined. It was stressed that before

any recommendation can be converted into action it is necessary to have specific indications from the political level about where in the outlined range of policy options the practical solutions can find political support.

Basically three tracks of policy can be identified:

- A passive and laissez faire
- An active and accepting
- An active and interfering

These three tracks of policy are elaborated on page 4.



Map 2: Degree of urbanisation and population density in the Nordic municipalities and regions in 2011.

The map shows the balance between population density (measured as the number of inhabitants per km²) and the degree of urbanisation (measured as the share of the municipals population living in a settlement with more than 200 inhabitants). The threshold limit between high and low population density is 12.5 inhabitants per km², and the threshold limit between high and low degree of urbanisation is 66 % of the population in a municipals living in a settlement with more than 200 inhabitants.

The question of settlement pattern and the different aspects of urbanisation was a central part of the discussions at the workshop in Newfoundland in October 2011.

Policy recommendations pointing at a passive and laissez faire doing nothing

The workshop indicated a strong recommendation against a laissez faire and a “do nothing” policy. It was emphasized that this has been and is still a predominating political strategy in many of the countries and communities in the North Atlantic Rim.

By doing nothing, the politicians are turning their blind eye to the on-going demographic trend. And it was stressed that this strategy can only lead to an escalating set of unsolved challenges in the settlements experiencing the depopulation as well as in the towns experiencing a population increase based on migration not determined by their attractions.

Policy recommendations accepting the process through mitigating the negative effects

Accepting the general trend means facilitating a decent and planned transition into different types of settlements and eventually the closing of some of the settlements.

During the workshop formulations such as “shrinking with dignity” and “let the small places die a natural death” were articulated. In both Newfoundland and Labrador there are examples of the authorities helping small communities to close down permanently. It is in Newfoundland and Labrador more than in the Nordic countries a general perception that “we can’t save them all”.

The policy recommendation in this connection would be to plan for and subsidise communities to be able to diminish in a structured manner. Flexibility is one of the central keywords. It accounts for flexibility within the policy and for flexibility when it comes to adjusting an implemented policy as well as to the on-going changing conditions.

Policies implemented years ago under different conditions – such as social policies – can under new conditions act impeding towards rationalisation in e.g. fishery and farming. Often conditions change quicker than policies. Through a political willingness to act in new ways when new situations arise, vital support

can be provided in time towards the general trend and thus preventing potential mismatch between policy and trend.

Policy recommendations interfering with the process through different types of means and measures

When interfering with the general trend of depopulation it means supporting the maintaining of previous structures in order to ensure a status quo or even a growth of a settlement.

One of the most common policy recommendations in this field is to allocate funding to subsidise the hitherto existing structures. This has for instance been the case in Norway for the last 50 years with the “Distriktspolitikk”.

A central part of the policy recommendations are thus focused on funding, subsidies and other economically favourable initiatives with the overall purpose to maintain an existing state as well as improve attractiveness. The recommendations are especially focused on the financial incentives for staying, for retuning after having been away for some time, and for attracting newcomers, and this is in relation to as well population as businesses.

One of the dominating reasons for leaving a northern, coastal or rural area is education. In contrast to Canada, tuition is free in the Nordic countries. This is one of the obvious differences between West Norden and Canada. Thus, a policy recommending low or free tuition is in this context an issue mainly relevant for the Canadian part of the North Atlantic Rim.

On the other hand, all the countries are operating with student loans, so recommendations pointing at reduction in tax or student loans or living costs are valid in Canada as well as in the Nordic countries. And it is a policy that has been implemented in a number of variations. The political philosophy is to provide a personal and economical carrot for those who might wish to stay, move to or return to a coastal or rural settlement.

Another kind of carrot has been identified in relation to migration. Here it is not so much a personal, economical benefit that is in focus. Accepting foreign immigrants is a question of a politically

decided localisation policy. The level of national restrictions on immigration and the degree of decentralised settling of the immigrants can have a huge impact on rural and coastal settlements.

In continuation of this, a related set of policy recommendation are focusing on creating a positive discourse telling that it is ok to live in rural and small coastal settlements. This is a question of creating attractiveness for a specific type of areas as well as for a specific type of settlements.

One of the strategies has often been to make newcomers feel welcome when they arrive to the settlement. This is a very complex issue. On the one hand, small, coastal or rural communities have their identity through local tradition and long lasting and often family based, local network. On the other hand, to be attractive for newcomers the traditionally network will be dramatically challenged, if it has to be more open to the newcomers. It becomes even more complicated, if the newcomers are insisting at keeping to at least parts of their own culture.

It is a challenge to create a policy that aims at accommodating the traditionally close family based local network structure and at the same time aims at supporting the lifestyle of the immigrants who are moving into a small settlement.

A policy strategy, which is based on the principles of decentralisation of public institutions to rural and coastal areas, has been implemented in a number of variations in almost all the North Atlantic countries. A classic policy has been to distribute educational institutions. In the small and sparsely populated societies it has often turned out to be at the expense of professionalism and cost efficiency.

Bottom line says that for almost all the policy recommendations aiming at counter-balancing the general demographic trend of rural and coastal depopulation the main challenge is to find the funding to implement the recommended policies, as they usually are expensive. In addition, these policies often tend to neglect the fact that in spite of large investments it typically does not contribute significantly – if at all – to the gross domestic product of the society.

It is an important factor but this narrow economical point of view should not be the only focus for the policy recommendations. It must also be taken into consideration that at least for parts of the people living in the coastal and rural areas it is a conscious choice to live in these places. Any forced change might result in considerable extra costs on the social welfare account and often in solutions that only serves as delay mechanisms in the processes of change.

In a global perspective the indications are that the trend with increasing urbanisation will continue at least the coming decades. There are no indications that this trend should be different for the commu-

nities in the North Atlantic Rim. Therefore it ought to be a central part of the political considerations to what extend the costs of delaying the urbanisation process by interfering with the process through different types of means and measures is in the interest of the society.

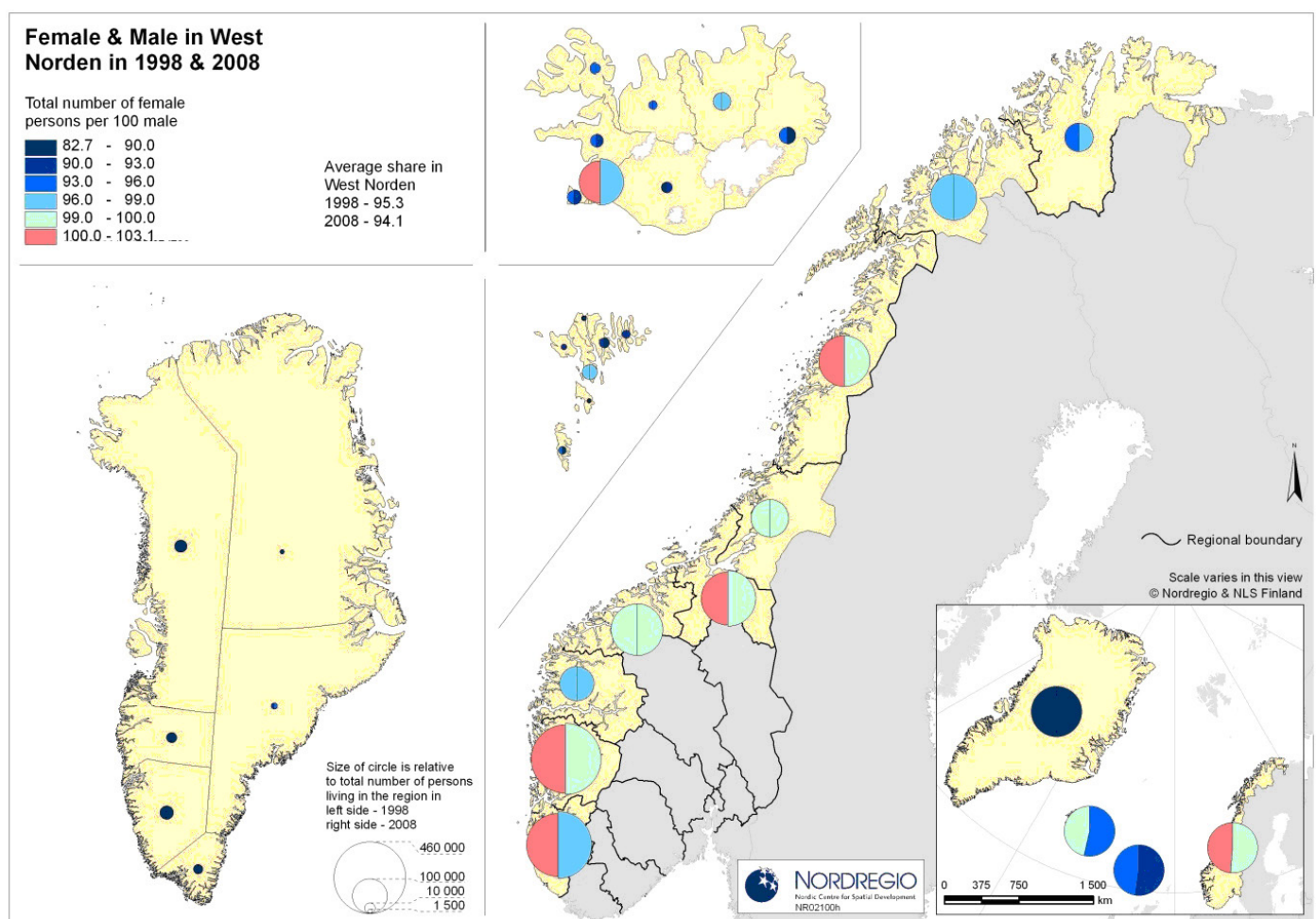
Balanced recommendations

Having lined up aspects of the two sets of active policy recommendations – one supporting the general demographic trend of rural and coastal depopulation and policy recommendations, and the other emphasizing interfering in the general demographic trend of rural and coastal depopulation – it is important

to stress that it is not necessarily a question of either or. As emphasized through the discussions it will almost always be a question of both and.

This means that in the societies on the North Atlantic Rim there are communities which are ready for policies supporting the general demographic trend, and there are communities which will benefit from policies interfering in the general demographic trend.

The choice of policy has to be based partly on the concrete political situation, partly on specific evidence based analysis of the area, settlement of community in question in order to determine what is politically possible and what is not.



Map 3: Gender distribution in the West Norden region in 1998 (left part of circle) and 2008 (right part of circle).

The Colour of the circle indicates the total number of females per 100 males. The size of the circle indicates the number of inhabitants in the area. Obviously Norway has a much larger population than any of the North Atlantic islands.

For all regions except one the share of females has either been status quo or a decline. The only region in the West Norden area which has experienced an increase in the share of females from 1998 to 2008 is the Finnmark Fylke.

As the surplus of men in almost all regions in the North Atlantic Rim is so pronounced it was a central subject during the discussions at the workshop in Newfoundland in October 2011.

Resources

Publications

Carson, Dean, Rasmus Ole Rasmussen, Prescott Ensign, Lee Huskey and Andrew Taylor (2011). *Demography at the edge – Remote Human Populations in Developed Nations*. Ashgate, Farnham, England.

Hansen, Klaus Georg, Rasmus Ole Rasmussen, Johanna Roto (2011). *Demography in the Nordic countries – A synthesis report*. Nordregio Working Paper 2011:9.

Hansen, Klaus Georg, Rasmus Ole Rasmussen and Johanna Roto (eds.) (2012). *Nordic perspectives on demography – A background report for the project on coastal societies and demography*. Nordregio Working Paper 2012:12. Nordregio.

Hörnström, Lisa, Klaus Georg Hansen, Johanna Roto, Liisa Perjo and Haukur Claessen (2012). *Att möta demografiska förändringar - En handbok för inspiration till handling i nordiska kommuner och regioner - 2012*. Nordregio Report 2012:4.

OECD (2011). *OECD Territorial Reviews: NORA Region 2011. The Faroe Islands, Greenland Iceland and Coastal Norway*. OECD Publishing 2011.

Rasmussen, Rasmus Ole (2011). *Megatrends*. Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers. TemaNord 2011:527.

Projects

Project title: *Coastal Societies and Demographic Challenges in the North Atlantic*. Materials from the workshop at the Harris Centre, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, 17-18 October 2011. http://www.mun.ca/harriscentre/policy/conferencesworkshops/nora_nordregio/index.php.

Project title: *Arctic Human Development Report II: Regional Processes and Global Linkages*. The project is aiming at providing a second assessment and synthesis report on the state of human development in the Arctic, beyond the AHDR (2004) baseline. It will contribute to our increased knowledge and understanding of the consequences and interplay of physical and social global change processes for human living conditions and adaptability in the Arctic, and to strengthen the competence and international leadership role in human dimension scientific assessments and research. The project will be finished by 2014. Contact: Joan Larsen, University of Akureyri, Iceland.

Project title: *Settlements at the edge – Remote settlements in Developed Nations*. This project is a follow-up to the project "Demography at the edge", analysing how the interplay between demography, economy and globalisation are reflected through the changes in settlement patterns and settlement structures. It will contribute to our knowledge and understanding of how processes of change have taken place through the 20th century and with focus on the contemporary challenges. The project will be finished by 2014. Contact: Rasmus Ole Rasmussen, Nordregio.

Endnotes

¹ Holm, Petter (2001). *The Invisible Revolution. The Construction of Institutional Change in the Fisheries*, Norwegian College of Fishery Science, University of Tromsø, Tromsø. Johnsen, Jahn Petter, Petter Holm, Peter R. Sinclair, and Stein Arne Raanes (2005). *The coming of the Cyborg Fish. How Resource management is made possible*. Paper presented to the Mare Conference People and The Sea III 7-9 July. Amsterdam.

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