



Youth perspectives on their future in the Nordic Arctic

The questions of how to retain and attract young populations are central issues for regional policy development in the Nordic Arctic. Nordregio and the Nordic working group on sustainable regional development in the Arctic have carried out an analysis to uncover young people's own perspectives of their future possibilities in Arctic communities. This policy brief summarises the main findings of a number of qualitative case studies about young people living in remote locations. The aim is to voice the ambitions and future expectations of the young generation.

MOST RURAL COMMUNITIES in the Nordic Arctic share their fate with Europe's Northern periphery in that demographic development is characterized by a population decline that has been going on for decades. It is often difficult to get skilled young people that have moved away and obtained an education to come back to help create growth and optimism. In many cases, there is also a deficit in women, both because of the limited job opportunities and because they consider

the opportunities for personal expression and recognition to be insufficient.

The purpose of this policy brief is to present how participating youth from the Nordic Arctic see their future and perceive changes in the local communities in relation to their own development. Based on the views of young people from Iceland, Greenland, Faroe Islands, Northern Norway, Sweden and Finland participating in the study, the following sections will present the main findings of the study.

Education and work expectations

Many young people across the Arctic region imagine themselves holding secure and well paid jobs in the future, and they see education as one way to achieve this. Some young students from the Faroese Islands argue that future education will be even more ambitious than it is today. These students expect longer school weeks together with an extended curriculum because they believe that the requirements will need to be much higher for

"Young people are those who will carry out future development and therefore their preferences in terms of education, employment opportunities, and cooperation around the region are also important perspectives when planning for the communities".

(Youth Survey in South Greenland, 2007. Jørgen Væver Johansen – Mayor of Kujalleq Municipality).

eighth graders if they are to catch up with technological development in the coming 20 years or so. The idea that the young people in the future have to learn much more than today indicates that learning is seen as a means of societal development.

However, a challenge concerning educational opportunities is related to vocational schools, which in many smaller urban settlements are only able to enrol a very low number of the students applying. This is linked to the requirement to get a trainee position at a company before attending the vocational school. The options to attend vocational schools and become a trainee at a company increase if the young person is willing to be mobile. However, a lack of contact networks can constitute a barrier to organising such arrangements. For youth it is a challenge to navigate in a system where some educational opportunities are dependent on the wellbeing of companies and the economy in the region.

Coming from rural communities, it is likely that educational options will determine the settlement choices of many young people in the future to come. The main reasons that youth move around are embedded in the settlement structure, as some of the smaller villages do not have schooling for pupils older than 13. This is particularly striking in Greenland, where a small survey illustrates how the majority of young people in Kujalleq Municipality moved more than three times during the last six years. Other material confirms that the older generation seem to move less and it can therefore be argued that the degree of mobility is life-phase dependent and connected to education. This is also the case for most of the other Nordic countries.

The youth from smaller and more rural communities imagine themselves as spending their future time in urban areas and larger towns. Some intend to move to urban areas and stay for the next 20–30 years, whereas others plan to pursue outside education and work mostly within the next 10 years or so. Many of them foresee that smaller settlements which will thrive in the future are those that have grown to be more urban. This includes the youth from Steigen in Northern Norway. Here, young people expect to be moving to larger villages or cities to educate themselves, but articulate that they might wish to settle more remotely when they reach an older age.

Mobility and multi-locational lifestyles

In ten years' time, the geographical frame of reference for living or working is as much foreign as domestic according to the study. Mobility has become a basic condition for young individuals to realize themselves. Many have to move physically to get the job or education they want to pursue. Among the young persons it is also assumed that you can become wiser and more mature by experiencing different places. The popularity of different mobility programs is also an indication of that. A desire articulated by many of the young people is a multi-locational lifestyle where they try to live different places for both education and work. Some anticipate that they will be a commuting workforce who might enjoy living and settling in smaller communities but at the same time work elsewhere than their place of residence.

In the long term of 20–25 years ahead, a large proportion of the participating rural youth see themselves going back to urban areas in their region of origin.



Drawing by AH (young girl from Iceland)



10 years reunion for Husavik 9th graders

Communication, Social media and new technology habits

Most of the young population in the study explains how technological communication is an embedded part of life. Not one day passes without spending time browsing on the internet, checking updates on social media or being active in different network games and/or discussions. Experiences from young Sámis illustrate how social media platforms also can be used for empowerment purposes in policy issues concerning land use in Northern Sweden.

Examples among youth in other countries demonstrate how social media plays the role of maintaining and nurturing relationships between friends and family who live far away. This also includes the elder generation. As explained by some pupils, they have far more contact with their grandma now than before the time of connecting through social media.

Together, the internet and social media serve as a window to a wider world which now more than ever is a source of inspiration and reference in the daily lives of young people. The ideals emerging from here, through e.g. role models, amplify trends of urbanisation by often displaying youth lifestyles that take place in urban settings.

Besides many advantages of extended technological communication, one problematic dimension of the technology is also identified. In Faroese Island, students articulate how they foresee a shift in communication habits where conversations with parents become more limited because it appears easier to just ask Google when they have questions.

Main messages from the youth study

■ Faith in the democratic process is articulated as being in decline. Many of the young people feel their voices are only of concern close before elections which sometimes discourage them from voting.

■ Education is seen as an important activity to ensure future prosperity and in most cases involves moving for schooling, which increases mobility for this population group.

■ Enrolment at vocational schools is severely limited due to a lack of internship training available at local companies.

■ Being mobile has become a basic condition for the youth when pursuing education and work, and the idea of a multi-locational lifestyle appears attractive for many.

■ Social media and the flow of information on the internet is a big source of inspiration but also a challenge in terms of ensuring presence among family and friends.

■ Traditional family ideas are expressed by many of the young people. They expect to be part of a nuclear family with a mom, dad, kids and possibly pets.

Democracy and political involvement

The future development of our society will be the responsibility of the coming generation. But why not include young people now to hear their voice and opinion in, e.g., community planning? Field studies suggest that the more young people from rural areas experience to be included in community development, the happier they are to live there. Consequently, it is also more likely that they will move back to a region or area after some years away pursuing education or jobs.

Being included is also a matter of attention in terms ensuring there is space for youth activities and help available for young people who need it. Many of the young people feel their voices are only of concern closely before elections. Still, even in the election period, many of them feel it is useless to use their right to vote. What future impact will this mistrust in the democratic processes have? The following policy recommendations (see grey box in left corner) can be seen as an inspiration for involving young people in the local and regional decision-making process.

Family relations and gender roles

Many of the young people have quite a conventional idea of what their families will be in the future. For most part it involves a mother, a father of different sex and children (and maybe pets). Their imaginary family fits the idea of a nuclear middle-class family, and this is particularly important for the participants from Northern Finland, Iceland, and Norway, whereas on the Faroe Island the importance of accepting LGBT relations was mentioned.

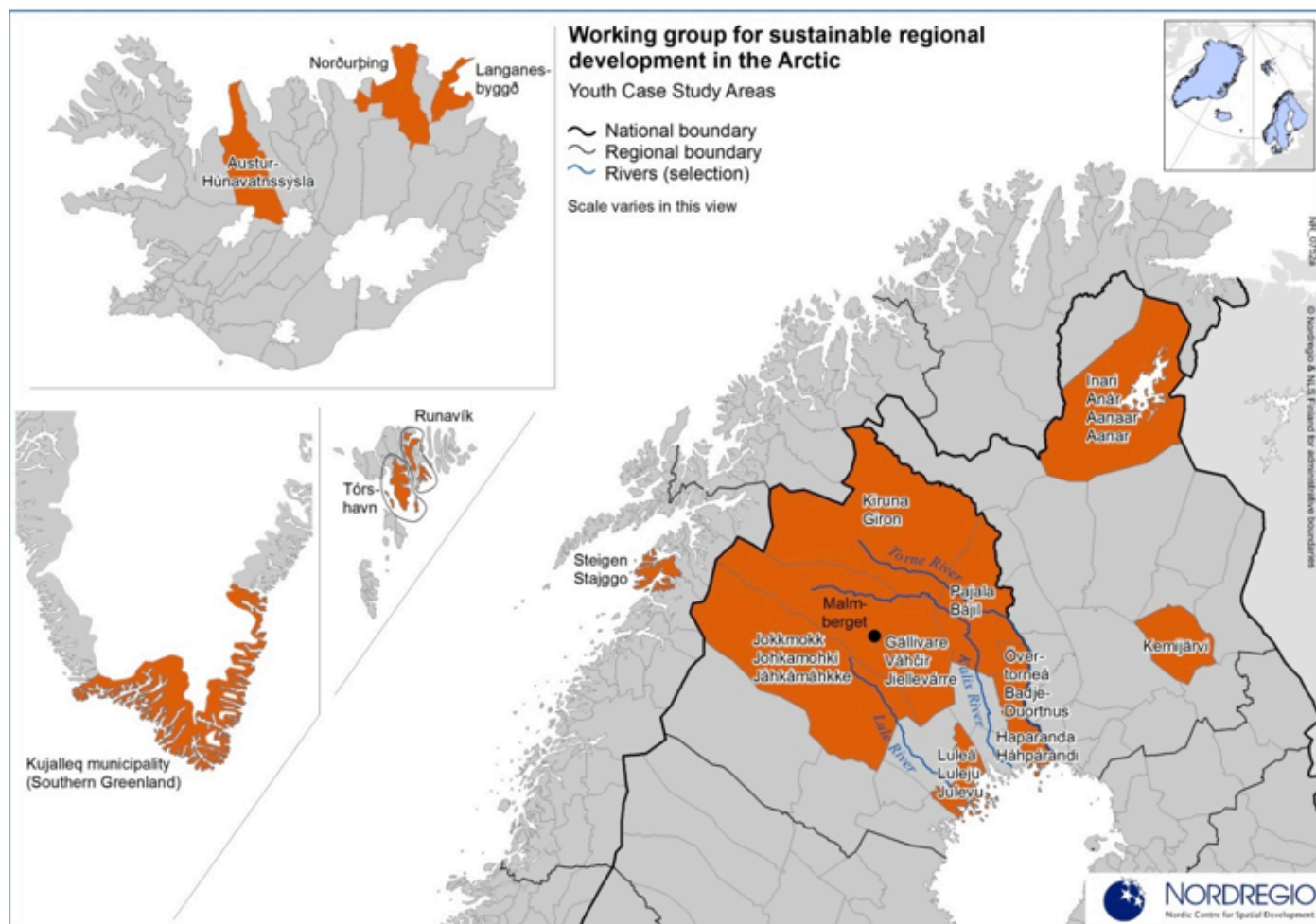
Taking into account the young people's visions, they are likely to carry with them

Policy recommendations for youth involvement:

- Establish a youth council at the community level and ensure a facilitator and contact person from the municipality who can be responsible for the contact and development of the youth group.
- Organise youth meetings at a regional level (e.g. age group between 12–17 years).
- Identify resource persons in the community who can lead joint activities for the youth and make a budget allocation for these activities.
- Invite the oldest school classes to a yearly trip to the municipality on a day where they can 'play' as regional planners and experience the dilemmas which can occur in local and regional development.



Young employee welding heavy machinery for the forest sector in North Karelia in Finland.



Empirical study sites. Map by Linus Rispling.

the concept of nuclear families. Current shifting demographic patterns of the family as an institution being dissolved by divorces, mixed families, and single households are not reflected as part of the youths' future visions.

Gender equality issues are, according to many of the youth groups participating, central in future societal progress and should be highly prioritized in all political strategies and daily processes. Yet, it is striking how traditionally gender roles are envisioned in Northern Finland. Here, many portray women as those primarily taking care of the house as well as kids. Also, the articulations about equality show that young males and females don't have same type of focus. Generally, it seems like many of the female youth are more concerned about relational aspects of development in terms of health care, child care and

equal access to education for all, while men take a more individual stance in their perceptions about the future.

About the research:

This policy brief is based on a study about future perspectives among young people in the rural and/or remote areas of the Nordic Arctic. The study was initiated and funded by the Nordic working group on sustainable regional development in the Arctic.

A group of scholars from Iceland, Norway, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Sweden and Finland were asked by the working group to contribute to the study. See the map above for the empirical study sites. Nordregio has been the project coordinator for the overall project.

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Pictures by:

Anna Karlsdóttir (10 years reunion, Husavik).
 Leneisja Jungsberg (Skater boy playing in the mountains, Nanortalik).
 Rasmus Ole Rasmussen (Graffiti in Reykjavik and Young employee, North Karelia).

Nordregio conducts strategic research in the fields of planning and regional policy. We are active in research and dissemination and provide policy relevant knowledge, particularly with a Nordic and European comparative perspective.