



Hjørring harbour. Photo: Ágúst Bogason

V.6. HJØRRING IN DENMARK: Paying greater attention to what is already attractive and making it better

By Ágúst Bogason

Introduction

Why are some municipalities better than others at deploying their resources, attracting people and creating jobs? This was the key question studied in this analysis of the attractiveness of 14 rural municipalities in the Nordic Region.

The 14 areas selected are all defined as attractive in the sense that their populations and the number of people in work have increased in recent years. The nature of the boost to employment in some sectors has been identified by means of shift-share analyses to determine how much of the change is attributable to specifically local factors.

Interviews then probed key stakeholders about motivation, working conditions, job creation and living conditions. These interviews were with public sector representatives (e.g. mayors and heads of planning and development), business representatives and entrepreneurs, high school students and people from the education sector, as well as families. Combined with analyses of other data and information, the interviews helped us to understand why some places do better than others.

Hjørring is a Danish municipality in the North Jutland Region on the west coast of the island of Vendsyssel-Thy, at the top of the Jutland peninsula in northern Denmark. Hjørring municipality is

home to some 65,000 people. Hjørring town is by far the largest settlement within the municipality, with around 25,000 people or 40% of the total population. Around 20% live in the smaller towns – about 6,000 in Hirtshals, while Sindal, Vrå, Tårs and Løkken have between 1,500 and 3,000 each. Around 40% live in the more rural areas or smaller settlements of 100 people or fewer (Hjørring Kommune, 2018).

While Hjørring municipality is located in the far north-west of Denmark, and therefore by some definitions considered remote, others would say that it is centrally located near Vendsyssel, and is in fact right in the centre of Scandinavia and Northern Europe. With car and ferry connections to Oslo in Norway, Gothenburg in Sweden, Hamburg in Germany and the Danish capital of Copenhagen, all of these important centres can be reached within four to five hours. The main seaport is in the town of Hirtshals. It has ferry links to Norway, the Faroe Islands and Iceland.

Although Hjørring is by common definitions a rural area it also a hub for transport and travel between various regions and countries. Its geographical location, along with relatively close proximity to some of the larger urban areas in Denmark, provides Hjørring kommune with many opportunities.

The challenges Hjørring faces today are similar to those of many rural areas in the Nordic countries – a reduction in population, especially younger people, along with changes in the labour market that mean less employment in the more traditional industries of agriculture, fishery and other industrial activities.

The municipality has taken some initiatives to try and tackle these trends, making the region more attractive in the hope of attracting people to move there. Looking at demographic trends in the last few years, these efforts appear to have been fairly successful, although many challenges still lie ahead. Efforts are ongoing to try and attract more (and younger) people to the region, both by focusing on what makes it attractive outside the workplace while simultaneously seeking to appeal to businesses – by creating positive conditions for them to flourish.

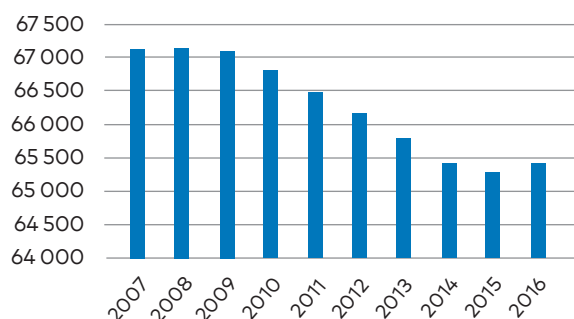
Demographic development

Overall, Hjørring municipality covers 929.58 km² (358.91 sq miles), making it the largest in Vendsyssel. It had a total population of 64,665 on 1 January 2019, compared with 67,121 at the start of 2008. After continued falls, a small population was detected from 2015 to 2016. However, over the last decade, the proportion of older people has gone up. The proportion of over 65s was 17.3% in 2008 but 23.1% in 2019 (Statistics Denmark, 2019).

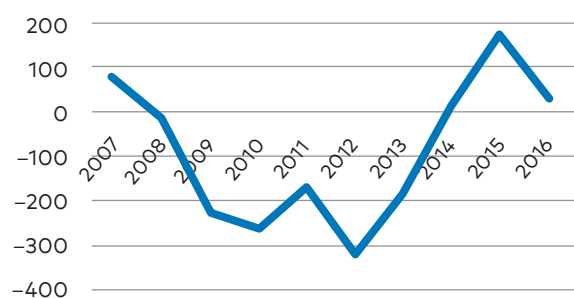
Hjørring, like so many other more remote Nordic communities, has to cope with an ageing population, while the younger generations move to the more urban settings for education and work (Andersen et al, 2017, and interviews). A new study conducted by the municipality and Erhverv Hjørring (Business Hjørring) shows that only one out of every seven people who moves away returns to the municipality before the age of 33 (Erhverv Hjørring, 2019). Even though the rapid population decrease has slowed down, overall the population of Hjørring dropped by 2.6% in from 2008 to 2018. On top of that, a population forecast from Statistics Denmark suggests that the population will fall by a further 4.2% in the next decade (Statistics Denmark, 2018).

According to specialists spoken to during the fieldwork for this case study in Hjørring, the outward migration numbers would be considerably higher (alongside the 'over-65 ratio') if younger people from abroad had not migrated into the region. This movement of people to Hjørring, mainly

Hjørring



Hjørring



Figures V.6.1a and V.6.1b: These figures show that from 2008/9 a trend of outward migration started, and a larger number of people moved away from Hjørring. This resulted in the population falling until around 2015, when the population seemed to stabilise and then to go up slightly.

Source: Nordregio's own calculations.

from other European countries, has countered outward migration by young people. This has curbed the overall outward migration trend for the municipality as a whole. A top priority for the next few years is, therefore, to attract some of those younger people back to their home communities. However, in order to do so, an attractive social, working and living environment must be created, one that meets the standards of the younger generation in terms of both employment and recreational opportunities.

Labour market & employment

Historically, Hjørring municipality has been dependent on traditional industries, fishing and agriculture. Those sectors are still noticeably visible in the region and play a particularly important role in the identity of some areas within it, especially smaller settlements on the coast and in rural areas. These sectors still contribute to the local economy while employing a relatively smaller

Hjørring, 2008–2016

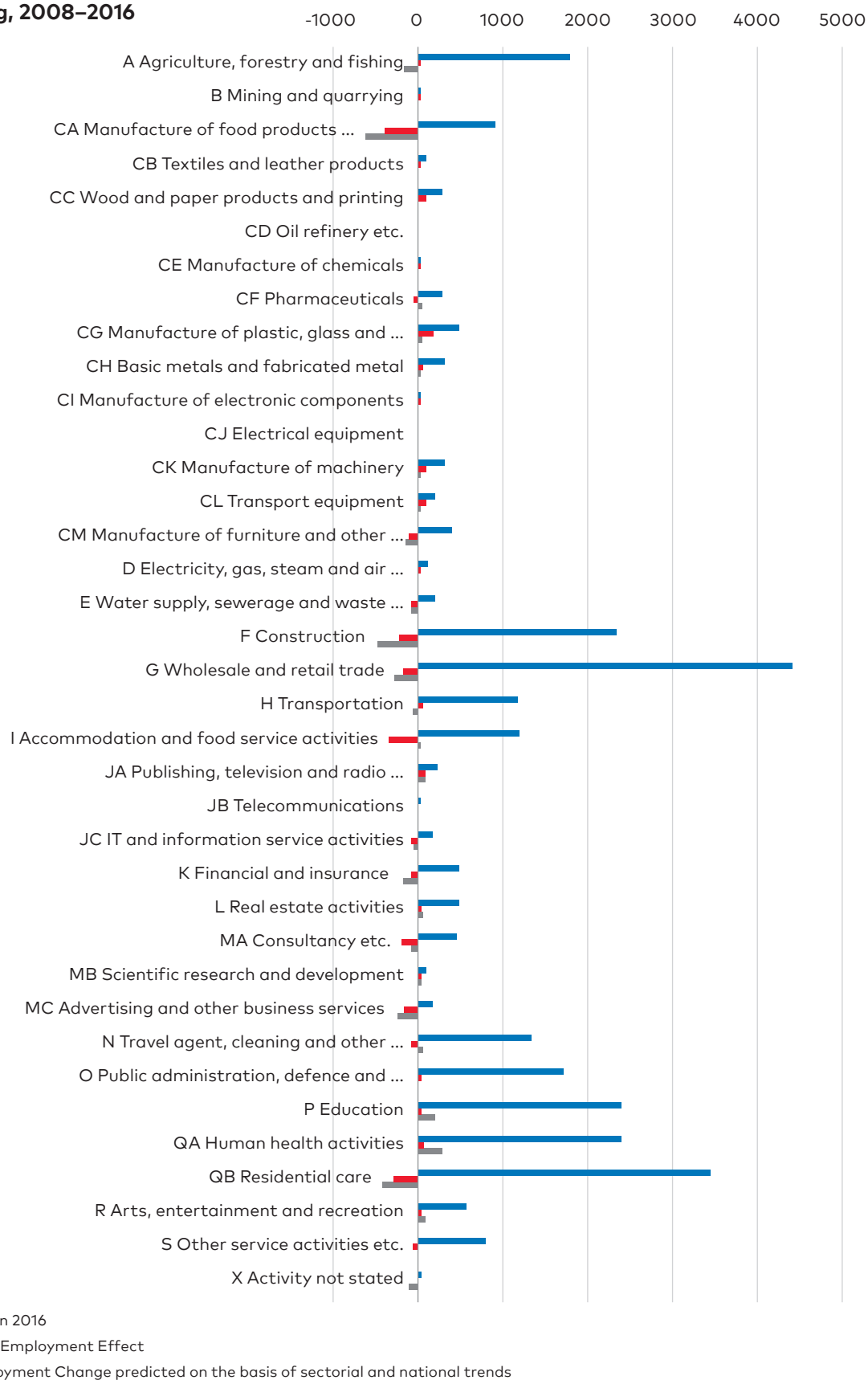


Figure V.6.2: The development of anticipated and realised changes in job availability at a sectoral level from 2008 to 2016, and the status of jobs for Hjørring in 2016. Source: Own calculations at Nordregio.

Employed (end November) by region, industry (DB07) and time

SIC Industry name	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Jobs in 2016
A. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2008	1949	1891	1846	1842	1881	1907	1907	1880	1798
B. Mining and quarrying	3	4	4	5	12	10	9	7	6	4
CA. Manufacture of food products, beverages and tobacco	1507	1546	1227	966	1142	1069	1034	890	808	924
CB. Textiles and leather products	50	93	84	75	75	75	71	76	79	82
CC. Wood and paper products and printing	394	323	302	273	262	295	269	300	299	303
CD. Oil refinery etc.	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CE. Manufacture of chemicals	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
CF. Pharmaceuticals	203	239	234	238	237	225	227	259	285	289
CG. Manufacture of plastic, glass and concrete	369	430	397	439	424	441	469	518	495	494
CH. Basic metals and fabricated metal products	290	307	260	255	219	260	276	287	289	322
CI. Manufacture of electronic components	23	0	0	0	0	3	7	6	4	4
CJ. Electrical equipment	1	1	0	3	0	0	1	2	0	0
CK. Manufacture of machinery	333	289	274	251	290	304	337	340	306	309
CL. Transport equipment	211	176	112	63	50	74	69	90	105	192
CM. Manufacture of furniture and other manufacturing	488	542	503	462	461	434	433	405	401	398
D. Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	108	132	120	117	154	133	129	124	131	126
E. Water supply, sewerage and waste management	280	298	308	339	361	263	259	225	203	212
F. Construction	3050	2817	2257	2373	2253	2244	2257	2084	2227	2345
G. Wholesale and retail trade	4559	4671	4451	4558	4410	4414	4307	4262	4329	4398
H. Transportation	1480	1230	1134	1158	1154	1099	1144	1279	1016	1182
I. Accommodation and food service activities	1311	1193	1083	1030	1093	1069	1147	1203	1207	1204
JA. Publishing, television and radio broadcasting	97	142	117	131	123	118	113	114	224	231
JB. Telecommunications	30	57	59	61	43	27	28	27	28	23



JC IT and information service activities	179	231	229	213	200	223	199	173	167	187
K Financial and insurance	658	656	608	631	607	574	515	500	469	492
L Real estate activities	431	414	442	441	467	434	459	475	473	481
MA Consultancy etc.	498	547	534	494	512	519	483	463	474	459
MB Scientific research and development	88	87	90	87	94	104	99	90	99	94
MC Advertising and other business services	473	420	410	407	411	375	332	165	193	183
N Travel agent, cleaning, and other operational services	1142	1270	1140	1163	1381	1306	1297	1311	1360	1342
O Public administration, defence and compulsory social security	1779	1731	1699	1674	1799	1662	1522	1422	1432	1716
P Education	2134	2184	2225	2211	2133	2193	2340	2417	2411	2394
QA Human health activities	1982	2109	2298	2340	2330	2326	2245	2232	2291	2386
QB Residential care	3812	3857	3942	3819	3769	3929	3649	3547	3390	3428
R Arts, entertainment and recreation activities	478	495	503	536	553	585	639	595	616	586
S Other service activities etc.	881	824	794	796	804	766	769	795	807	791
X Activity not stated	117	129	72	59	54	53	42	46	42	35
SUM	31456	31394	29803	29514	29719	29487	29083	28636	28546	29415

proportion of the workforce than they did decades ago. Overall, employment has declined in Hjørring by around 1% from 2010 to 2017. However, unemployment has also fallen significantly over the same period – from 7.2% in 2010 to 5.0% in 2017 (Hjørring Kommune, 2018).

When looking at the shift-share analyses for Hjørring kommune, taking into account the predictions for changes based on sectoral and national trends in Denmark as a whole, a slight increase in agriculture is detected compared with forecasts. This means that, despite fewer jobs in the agricultural sector in 2016 compared to 2008, there would have been even fewer if Hjørring had followed the trend in the rest of Denmark. Food manufacturing saw a substantial fall in overall jobs, with employment down from more than 1,500 jobs in 2008 to less than 1,000 in 2016. Again, based on share-shift data, the decrease would have been greater

if Hjørring had followed the national trend. Compared to the country as a whole, sectors like agriculture, forestry and the fishing industry are, therefore, proportionally larger in the Hjørring region, even though they produce fewer jobs than they did a decade ago.

Jobs within the construction sector, as well as the public sector, also constitute a larger proportion of the total job market in Hjørring than in Denmark as a whole. The biggest employers in Hjørring are in the public sector, mainly the health service and social care. In the private sector, jobs are mainly in the trade and service sectors, light industry, construction and transport-related activities. As mentioned before, overall jobs have decreased in most sectors over the past ten years, but hotel and restaurant businesses have had a proportional rise – a trend seen in many regions in the Nordic countries. Despite these tourism-

related sectors now making up a larger share of the overall job market in the Hjørring region, the municipality is still underperforming in the sector compared to forecasts based on sectoral and national trends. In other words, while tourism is growing and becoming more vital for the regional economy, there is still room for considerable improvement based on national and sectoral trends (Nordregio's own calculations).

The total number of companies in Hjørring feel by almost 9% from 2010 to 2015 – a trend also registered nationally and for the whole North Jutland region. The fall in the number of companies has been most evident in the fishery, agriculture and forestry-related industries as well as in transport. Hjørring also has a tradition of small companies. In fact, very few large companies are located in the region. More than 40% of registered companies in Hjørring have only one employee, and almost 70% have fewer than five. Companies with more than 100 employees make up less than 1% of the total (Hjørring, 2018 & interviews).

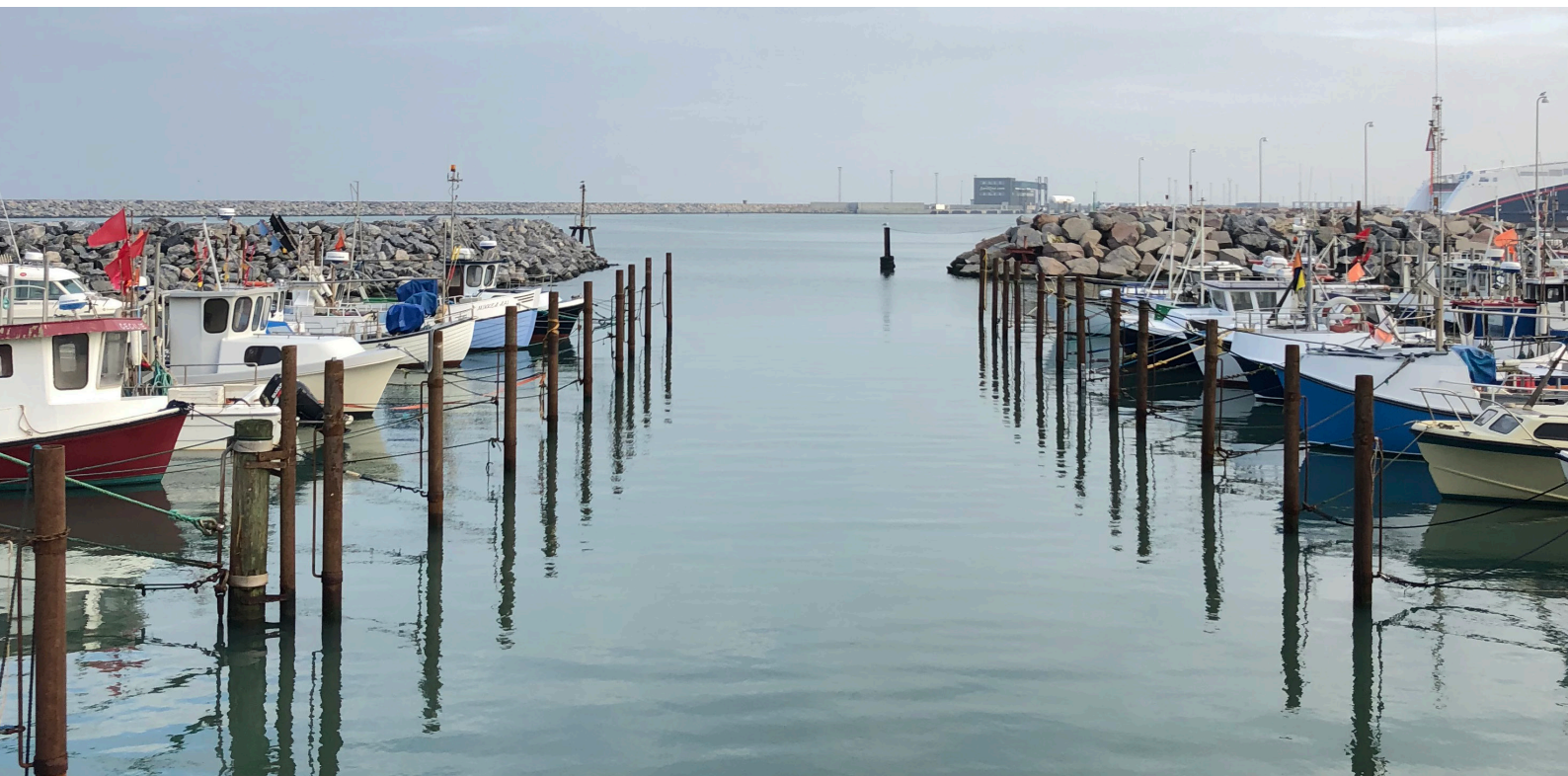
Some indicators of increased entrepreneurship and innovation can also be seen in the number of new companies and websites registered in the region. On average, 2.6 new companies per 1,000 people have been founded each year in Hjørring from 2015 to 2017, which is an increase of 0.5% compared with the three previous years (Hjørring, 2018).

Tourism and retail on the rise

Hjørring's geographical location is, and has been, utilised to a certain degree in furthering economic opportunities. With the increase in tourism and travel, retail in Hjørring municipality has strengthened its position in recent years. Measurable growth has occurred since 2010, despite the fact that stores and service providers are now fewer in number than previously. Hjørring town has enjoyed a relatively positive increase, with this growth being particularly concentrated on Frederikshavnsvej, which is located in the town on the way towards the city of Fredrikshavn (interviews). In this way, Hjørring town has strengthened its position as a shopping destination in the region, taking advantage of many tourists coming south from Norway through Hirtshals on their way to the rest of Europe, and other Europeans (mainly Germans) travelling in the other direction.

Hirtshals has also improved its position and is now the second largest trading centre within Hjørring municipality. It is estimated that tourists account for around 25% of the city's turnover in retail and other services (Hjørring, 2018). Looking at the town of Løkken, the number of shops there has grown by nearly 20% since 2010 and the revenue generated from these activities has also increased. Tourism is of great importance for positive economic and social development in Løk-

Traditional industries like agriculture and fishing are still important in the region. The smaller fishing boats in the smaller towns along the coastline are also a visually important aspect of the attractiveness of the physical environment. Photo: Ágúst Bogason





Tourism and transport are prominent in Hjørring. Many interesting sites are found in the area, for example those related to the Second World War. A challenge for Hjørring is to get those who pass through the region to stop longer, generating added value for the local communities. Photo: Ágúst Bogason

ken, with hotels, restaurants, grocery and clothing stores and tourism-related services becoming more important every year. In the coastal towns of Tversted and Lønstrup, tourism has also increased, and it is estimated that almost half of the revenue there is generated by tourists (interviews). While this development may be seen as a positive one, most of the tourism sector is limited seasonally to the midsummer period. Some initiatives have been taken by locals in the area to try to extend the season and provide different types of experiences during the whole year. They have had some successes. Even so, much tourism-related work is still limited to the summer, especially in the smaller villages on the coast.

Overall tourism in Hjørring municipality has increased by around 5% from 2008 to 2017. Hjørring is now Denmark's fifth most visited region, measured by overnight stays. There has been a decrease in domestic tourism, but visitors from abroad have raised the overall numbers (Hjørring, 2018). Norwegians are by far the largest group of visitors. Some 130,000 Norwegians visited Hjørring in 2017, compared to almost 80,000 Germans and 35,000 Swedes. Of those staying for a longer period in the area, Germans were the largest group. This perhaps indicates that Norwegians mainly pass through, or simply prefer short trips over the water to do some shopping before return-

ing home. As mentioned before, the municipality has tried to exploit, by strengthening its position as a retail and service region, locating services along the main roads used by tourists and travellers (Hjørring, 2018).

"We have experienced an overall increase in tourism, but many feel that the increased traffic in our region is not reflected in what is being left behind economically by our guests. We feel that we should be benefiting more. Our main challenge is to make more from all these people passing through by encouraging them to stay longer in the region," said one of our interviewees working at the municipality. Others made similar comments. This is in accordance with the share-shift data mentioned earlier, which shows an increase in the tourism sector, even though that increase has still been considerably smaller than for Denmark as a whole.

Development – double urbanisation and inward/outward commuting

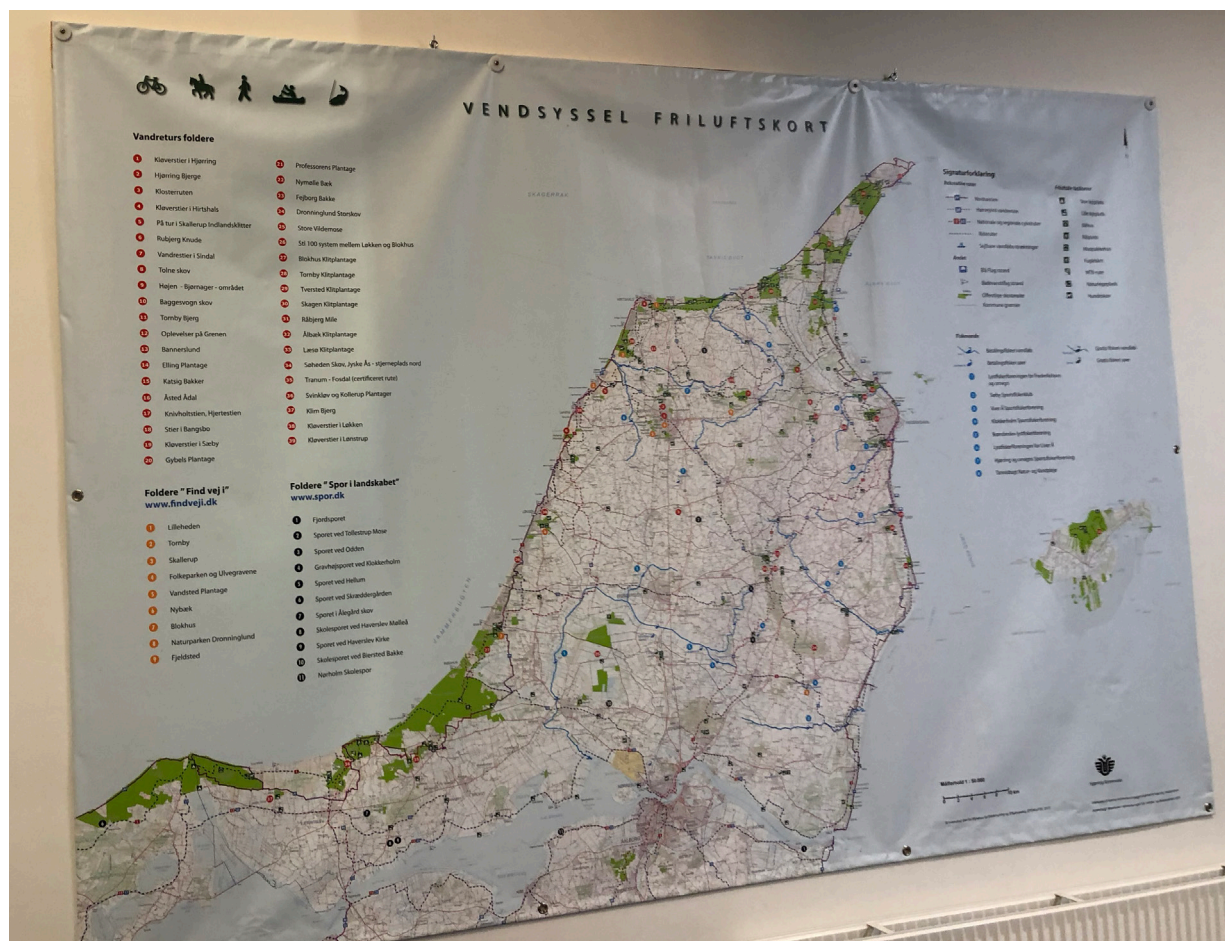
Hjørring's municipality's location and its relative proximity to the much larger urban area of Aalborg, located only 40 minutes away, has produced a healthy challenge in terms of competition for residents and businesses. Being located so close to a much larger urban area can also have benefits when trying to present it as an attractive place in which to live.

"Ideally, it would be good to be able to provide people living in Hjørring with appropriate jobs. But many of those working in specialised employment find more opportunities in the larger neighbouring regions," said one director in the municipality. He added: "We are therefore realistic in preferring to focus on the attractive things we can offer; things that the larger towns and cities cannot provide."

Naturally, Hjørring would very much like to be able to offer a more diverse job market. But since many more specialised positions are available in the larger neighbouring regions, it also wants to attract people from those places, even though they may still work outside the municipality. Speaking to people working on business development in Hjørring, and with people in different departments at the municipality, confirms the assumption that a significantly large portion of the population commutes for work into other municipalities. Statistics show that, in total, outgoing commuting has

increased from 2010 to 2015. Indeed, outgoing commuting is greatest to the neighbouring city of Aalborg and to Frederikshavn municipality, while there is also some inward commuting from those same areas, as well as from Brønderslev (Hjørring, 2018, and interviews). The whole of Northern Jutland is, in this way, an interconnected job market.

The movement of people in and out of Hjørring for work is a definite reality. Smaller municipalities like Hjørring have, therefore, increasingly focused on the things they can offer which are harder to come across in larger cities. However, migration in the past few years has not just been out of Hjørring, causing the declining population. On top of that there here has been substantial internal migration within the region as well. In its own way this has caused additional problems. The more rural and remote areas are experiencing the largest internal outward migration in recent history, as people are moving towards the towns –



Hjørring municipality spans a rather large area and is close to the urban area of Aalborg. Many people commute in and out of Hjørring for work each day, and the closeness to a large urban area produces healthy competition for attracting nre residents. Photo: Ágúst Bogason

mainly Hjørring, but also other towns within the municipality (Hjørring, 2018 & interviews). Hjørring needs to deal with what has sometimes been described or referred to as 'double urbanisation'. The outcome of this is that the municipal development plan has placed greatest emphasis on strengthening the towns of Hirtshals and Hjørring, while other more urban settlements have received less attention.

The university towns of Aalborg and Aarhus, as well as Frederikshavn, take the largest share of migrants out of Hjørring municipality. Almost three out of every four who move away do so to study. There are about 7,500 people living in Aalborg who are originally from Hjørring, more than half of them aged 20–29. In Aarhus there are close to 2,700 people from Hjørring, the majority under 30. In official surveys conducted by the municipality, fewer than half of these people say that they are considering moving back at some point. In fact only 10% are sure about moving back. (Hjørring, 2018).

In our interviews with people who had moved back to Hjørring, or who had migrated from other areas, the main obstacles that were mentioned in relation to moving was the lack of cultural life and other urban characteristics, and also paucity of relevant job opportunities. However, when asked why they had taken the initiative to move back, the main arguments for relocation from those who had done so were reasonable house prices, good service provision for children and families, the peace and quiet of the place and being close to nature.

Policies related to attractiveness

When it comes to creating a pleasant environment for people to live and work in, some of the municipality's initiatives have not necessarily been part of an actual attractiveness campaign. Instead, the focus has been placed on things that are functioning well in the region and trying to make them even better. The idea is to promote these positive aspects and then introduce them as particularly attractive in comparison to other regions. This includes highlighting the good quality of schools and daycare facilities, along with other public services, the visual and natural environment, short travelling distances, the feeling of safety, peace and quiet and a far less stressful everyday life than in the big cities.

Assistance to companies and to those developing business ideas has increased. Some public funds have been devoted to this, in an attempt

to promote Hjørring as an ideal place to start a small company. Generating more accessible public spaces, supporting cultural activities and focusing more on sustainable development are also public policies that can be categorised increasing attractiveness. Recently, a special campaign to try to get younger people from Hjørring to consider moving back has been planned. The campaign is called *'Husker du Hjørring?'* ('Remember Hjørring?') and it will run on social media. It is primarily aimed at young people who have been raised in Hjørring municipality and who are studying elsewhere or have graduated recently. These people are considered to be in the most important age-bracket, because they are close to the age where most people think about starting a family. The business community and the municipality are working on this project together. It will be three-year pilot.

The background for the project is that both private and public sector workplaces in Hjørring municipality have a high demand for qualified labour, and this will continue. At the same time, Hjørring municipality is struggling with a falling population and a rising average age. The business community and the municipality face a common challenge which requires action – getting young people to return after they graduate.

"The main advantages our municipality offers are, of course, safety, short distances, public services, sports, outdoors activities, nature and beaches – in many ways a good deal of what young families seek. Equally, housing here is much more affordable than in the cities, which makes a huge difference for many people," said one of the officials interviewed at the municipality. This focused on many different things valued by young people, but not including job opportunities. By concentrating on the things that work well in Hjørring, the plan is to make young people who have left aware of the municipality's many opportunities, plus the improvements made in recent years, in order to try to change what they think of the municipality. It is hoped that this will attract back some of the people with roots in the region and convince others to move there.

Given that Hjørring is a municipality which covers a large land area by Danish standard, and especially considering the size of its population, more attention has been paid to creating an attractive environment in the larger towns. Since the municipal reform a little over a decade ago, Hjørring has worked on a 'transition and adaptation' strategy. This has included bolstering the position

of the largest urban settlement, Hjørring town, as the main settlement, while Hirtshals has developed as the second largest. Great effort has been put into connecting these two towns, and into the links from them to other regions, including in Sweden and Norway. This has been done in part to meet trends within the municipality and the reality of the 'double urbanisation' mentioned earlier. The trend for the last decade has been that people are moving from more rural areas to the towns and cities. Now, however, the municipality has also included four other towns as cornerstones in its overall development plan, adding Løkken, Vrå, Sindal and Tårs to Hjørring and Hirtshals as the major focus areas.

Although a certain emphasis has been placed on developing larger settlements within the municipality, there has also been a strategy of trying to have "the best of both worlds" for the area. This means that Hjørring is also keen to highlight its more rural and remote qualities as attractive, pointing out to people that you can indeed live in the more remote areas of the municipality and enjoy the positive features of rural life while only traveling a short distance to Hjørring town or other larger towns for work, culture and social life. The municipal authorities have also promoted Hjørring as a nature-oriented region in recent years. This will probably increase in the next few years, with the added green policies of the new national government and the more sustainable trends preferred by younger generations.

Quality of life

"Hjørring is relatively close to larger places that have everything that is lacking here. At the same time, Hjørring has a lot to offer that is not provided in the cities; things which people value when raising a family. This includes short walking distances to schools and kindergartens, good and personal public services, nature and less day-to-day stress," said one couple who had moved to Hjørring after becoming parents. The things they highlighted are in accordance with what those working at the municipality have focused on, and which they consider to be Hjørring's most attractive features.

Similar answers were quite common when our focus groups were asked about what it was in their minds that makes Hjørring an attractive community in which to live. Safety, reasonable housing costs and good public services were considered the most important factors by many, while others

also mentioned job opportunities. That was particularly noticeable when speaking to people who had moved to Hjørring from other European countries. They highlighted the working environment and conditions as well as opportunities and considered both the labour market and society as a whole to be welcoming. In many ways the younger generations from other countries have filled in the demographic gap in Hjørring and have provided local businesses with much-needed employees who could not be recruited locally (Andersen et al, 2017). People from countries other than Denmark also valued highly the public services provided by the municipality, and the safety of life in a smaller community. They spoke positively of how welcoming the community had been towards them when they first arrived. This was definitely considered attractive in their minds.

"The quality of living here rests on the opportunity to build a decent life. There are plenty of opportunities for children to get an education. They can take part in sports, enjoy outdoor life without worrying, and there are plenty of jobs," said one family who were originally from another country, and who had lived in Hjørring for a little over three years.

Speaking to people involved with local business development, and at the municipality, they further confirmed the importance of immigrants for the community. "Without people moving here from outside the country our situation would be very different and a lot more serious. Companies in need of staff would have fewer options. That would mean less productivity, less revenue and less taxes for the municipality," said one director from the municipality. Others told similar stories.

Housing

Hjørring municipality is characterised by a high proportion of family homes and farmhouses, while the proportion of apartments is smaller than the North Jutland region as a whole. Many of the smaller towns are almost entirely made up of detached houses and have no apartments. The demand for housing has changed in Hjørring, as in other areas. In the larger towns, mainly Hjørring town, these new demands are being met effectively. That includes building more apartments – and smaller apartments at that, since the number of older people is going up, as well as the number of people living alone. The expansion in construction, both of commercial and residential homes,

was substantial in the years before the financial crisis of 2008. After that, it almost ground to a stop. In its own way, this can be seen in the shift-share data shown in Figure V.6.2, when looking at how important construction is for the regional job market. In 2007 there were just over 3,000 jobs in construction, but that number went down to almost 2,000 in 2014. Since then a growth in construction work has been noted. Employment is increasing, new construction projects too, again mainly in Hjørring town, with some in Løkken and also some commercial building in Hirtshals. Most of these new apartment buildings have been required to meet predicted increases in population, but also to satisfy the demand for different kinds of housing, and particularly for smaller, quality buildings, instead of larger family houses.

Solving problems: training unskilled employees to take on more responsibilities

The lack of people with the right competences, training and education for many companies in Hjørring has created a problem that the Business Development Centre has tried to solve in an innovative way, in cooperation with local companies.

Since it has proved hard to fill certain positions that require special skills, initiatives to educate and train existing untrained employees – those with some experience in the workplace – have been developed. In some companies, training programmes aimed at experienced workers capable of taking on more responsibilities have been created to solve the problem of not being able to find workers with the right competences. In this way, some companies have moved many of their employees one step up the chain of command, so to speak.

"By training an experienced employee to take on different tasks (which in an ideal situation would be filled by a person who has received formal education or training in that field), we have solved the problems of some workplaces, at least for the time being. This also opens up paths at the lower levels for people without any formal training to come in and to start working from the ground up," said one of our interviewees working with the Business Development Centre.

In the business development plan for Hjørring it is made clear that close cooperation between the Job Centre and local companies is crucial for the success of finding jobs for unemployed people. Training existing employees and making them take on more responsibilities also contributes to

this larger goal, because the unemployed can take the jobs left behind. Unemployment in the region has fallen from 7.2% in 2010 to 5.0% in 2017. Along with a better economic outlook this initiative has played its part, according to our interviewees (interviews and Hjørring Kommune, 2018).

As far as the private sector is concerned, some interviewees also expressed the view that cooperation with the public Job Centre and Hjørrings' Business Development Centre has created fresh value for them and has proved beneficial in expanding and growing their businesses.

Education

In general, people in Hjørring municipality have lower levels of education than in the North Jutland Region and in Denmark as a whole. More people only have a basic and vocational education here than in the region and nationwide. The number with a higher education is also lower (Hjørring Kommune, 2018). In 2016, 22% of young people aged 25–29 in Hjørring municipality had no education other than lower-secondary school. This number is higher than in the north of Denmark (18%) and in Denmark (16%) (Region Nordjylland, 2016).

Some initiatives to reach out to young people who lack education and training, to encourage them to learn have been developed in recent years. The idea is to enhance the competences of the potential workforce in the area. *'Brobygning til uddannelse'* (A bridge to education) is one such initiative. It was first tried in 2017, and the experience of putting inactive youngsters on the path to an education was positive, so the project was continued in 2018. This initiative is a link between the Job Centre and educational institutions. It supports the desire to give more young people an education that meets the needs of local businesses (Hjørring Beskæftigelsesplan, 2018).

EUC Nord consists of the combined technical schools in Hjørring and Frederikshavn, with four departments located in Hjørring town. EUC is a Vocational Education Centre, offering a wide range of learning opportunities that meet the needs of the regional labour market in many ways. However, as in many other regions, the ambitions of a number of youngsters lie in directions other than what the local business market needs. Therefore, a situation exists in which people move away to educate themselves in sectors that are under-represented or non-existent in their home region. This causes quite a number of young people to



EUC Nord technical school offers a wide variety of vocational education and training opportunities in Hjørring. However, many young people move away from the municipality to go to university, and few of them return after they have completed their studies. Photo: Ágúst Bogason

continue living in the larger towns and cities, where they have more opportunities to find work directly related to their field of study.

Young people's perceptions

A panel group of young people in Hjørring provided some insight into how these youngsters view their home region, and how they see their future, whether inside or outside of Hjørring. Most of them were enrolled in programmes at the vocational EUC school or the high school. They came from different places in the municipality. One was raised on a farm and was determined to continue living there, eventually wanting to take it over from his parents. He said: *"Living here is the only thing I can think of. Of course, there are many things in Aarhus or Aalborg which are fun, but for the everyday life I know and want to continue living, this is the place for me. It only takes an hour to drive to Aalborg if I want to go out, to shop, to go to a concert, or whatever. Being here I can enjoy the best of both worlds."*

Others were determined to move away for university and were uncertain if they would return. *"I like living in Hjørring. But I have to move for uni-*

versity. Commuting every day isn't possible, but being close to home is also an advantage; being able to go home at weekends, and so on," a girl in her last year at high school told us. When asked whether she would move back after university, she was not sure: *"I have not put much thought into that. It depends on what happens. Thinking about it now, I guess that I would have more opportunities to find relevant, interesting work in a larger place. But you never know."*

Most of our focus group of youngsters considered growing up in Hjørring a positive experience overall. They were quite happy with the opportunities for recreation outside school. A common discussion point was that the distance to larger cities was not that great, so if events interested them it was not too much hassle or too costly to get there. The overall impression from the young people was that they appreciated their home region and were open to moving back. They praised activities like sports clubs and opportunities for outdoor activities. However, in neighbouring larger towns and cities, the possibilities would be greater for finding interesting work and social life. Moreover, being close to home was also seen as an advantage.

Conclusion

The variety of problems that Hjørring municipality faces is very familiar to those in any Nordic rural setting: a decreasing and ageing population, limited job opportunities for people with skills and a higher education, and difficulty in finding competences for other sectors. The rapid decrease in population has, however, halted in recent years. A vital part of that development has been increased migration of people from outside Denmark to Hjørring. Families with children from other countries have filled an existing demographic hole in part, while providing much needed labour for both the private and public sectors.

Emphasis has now been put on attracting back emigrants from the area, focusing on reaching younger people who have moved away to study. Some of the more attractive aspects of Hjørring are highlighted in this campaign. Things like affordable housing, a more stress-free life, proximity to nature and the quality of public services seem to attract at least some people to the region, while the lack of job opportunities seem to be a hinderance in the eyes of others.

While the municipality has focused on developing the largest towns in the region, others have expressed a feeling of being left out. In some ways the authorities have tailored their policies to demographic trends caused by double urbanisation, so the spotlight has been on the areas that are thriving well, making them attractive for people to stay in, and hopefully attracting newcomers. It will always be a difficult task to manage such a complex situation, developing particular areas while others are in decline. But this is the path Hjørring

has chosen in its efforts to sustain (and ideally grow) its population.

Promoting itself as a region for nature, with close ties to outdoor activities, and emphasising the need for green business transition, is something that seems to suit the national policies of the new Danish government. This might be beneficial for the municipality. In recent years, the state has moved a great many public-sector jobs from the larger cities like Copenhagen to more rural regions. Some of those positions have been moved to Hjørring, although the effects are relatively small in the bigger picture. Nevertheless, it creates a much-needed new culture of introducing more specialised work for highly skilled people into the community. While outside competition for residents is great from the larger neighbouring communities, every little initiative that diversifies the labour market counts for a municipality like Hjørring. So even more opportunities in the labour market would improve Hjørrings' competences and ability to attract substantially more people to live there.

While that would be the ideal development for Hjørring, people within the municipality are also well aware that the things that already make the area attractive in the eyes of many people must be nurtured carefully. That is why they continue to focus on the values that so many of the local people appreciate, such as an attractive physical environment, safety, outdoor activities and nature, personal public services and an overall friendly atmosphere. They do this in the hope of making the place even more attractive in the future.

Table V.6.1. Attractiveness in Hjørring and obstacles or challenges to overcome

Good practice and reasons underlying attractiveness	Obstacles and challenges
<p>Access to public services Hardly any waiting lists for child daycare, good schools within short walking distance.</p> <p>Culture, sport, recreation Many amenities, including sports, history, culture, unique beaches.</p> <p>Education Guaranteed training positions for vocational education and a variety of opportunities at EUC.</p> <p>Entrepreneurship culture Many small companies and workplaces create a tradition of entrepreneurship, and can help increase resilience.</p> <p>Employment and Jobs Opportunities for job advancement through training programmes supported by Business Hjørring and the municipality.</p> <p>Housing Housing is less expensive, both residential houses and those designed for possible business ventures.</p> <p>Infrastructure and transport Reasonable distances by car to more urban areas makes commuting in/out for work possible. Good links to Norway, mainland Denmark, Sweden and the rest of Europe through Germany. Even ferries to Iceland and Faroe Islands.</p> <p>Location Reasonable distances by car to more urban areas, makes commuting in/out for work possible.</p> <p>Quality of life and local community A safe place to live. Attractive physical environment = proximity to nature and outdoor activities.</p>	<p>Employment & Jobs Shortage of labour in specialized sectors, e.g. carpenters, electricians, social workers, teachers. Lack of job opportunities for many higher educated sectors, shortage of labour in others. Lack of larger companies - pillars for regional and local economies. Lack of employees possessing the right skills and necessary training for certain jobs.</p> <p>Housing Lack of smaller apartments to meet today's needs.</p> <p>Education Limited availability of higher education. Universities in Aalborg and Aarhus are relatively close, but not ideal for daily commuting.</p>

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