



Photo courtesy of the municipality of Jomala.

V.8. JOMALA AND THE ÅLAND ISLANDS: Positive migration, high quality jobs, services, amenities and time as key resources

By Michael Kull & Hjördis Sigurjonsdottir, 2018/2019

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.

The municipality of Jomala is located in the Åland Islands. Åland is an autonomous, self-gov-

erning demilitarised, and Swedish-speaking region of Finland. The archipelago consists of more than 6,700 islands. Yet, most of the population of 29,789²⁸ "live on only 65 of them. Over 40% of the inhabitants live in the only town, Mariehamn, which is one of Åland's 16 municipalities" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland 2019). The main island of Åland makes up 70% of the archipelago's total land area and is home to 90% of the population. The longest distance from north to south is 50 km and from east to west 45 km. Despite its relatively small size, there are 912 km of public roads in Åland (Government of Åland). Of the total area of 13,325 km², more than 11,000 km² is water (Statistics Åland 2019). Jomala, our case study municipality, is neighbour to Mariehamn, the capital of Åland. The distance to the capital is only around 10 kilometres. Covering 142 km², Jomala is the second largest by size (Jomala.ax., n.d.). There are 32 villages in the municipality. In 2019, 5,055 people lived in Jomala (Statistics Åland, 5 April 2019). Åland's main airport is in Jomala.

28 Official figure from Statistics Åland, as of 31st December, 2018.

There are several reasons for this positive overall picture according to our interviewees from the public and private sectors, both families and high school students. The labour market offers many opportunities, not least for those with high qualifications (working in banks, insurance companies, IT, etc.). People are attracted to move to Åland and enjoy living there on account of the high quality and availability of services, such as schools and kindergartens. Interviewees stress the open-minded and welcoming society, with more time available compared to urban areas due to shorter travelling distances between job, home and leisure time activities. Most islands in the archipelago are also covered by high speed internet. Jomala's mayor, John Eriksson, explains: "People come from everywhere. They are often Swedish speaking and they find good jobs here in Åland".

Looking at Jomala, development there, according to some interviewees, is helped by good local government – "quick and easy decision-making and processing of building applications", as one of them puts it. Progress in Jomala also relates to the structural limits of neighbouring Mariehamn, which is running out of space, both for housing and for companies. As a result, new buildings and businesses, including company chains, are opening in Jomala. This, of course, has an impact on smaller stores and companies and on Mariehamn as well.

Development in Åland should probably be viewed as a whole. For some interviewees it was not too easy to single out any one municipality. Instead they suggested seeing the benefits of the islands in a holistic perspective. Moreover, small archipelago municipalities and islands are all affected by a trend towards outmigration. As a result of this, we will also need to reflect on the overall pattern this generates.

Positive migration and demographic development – in Åland overall and Jomala in particular

Demographic statistics for the period 1980 to 2018 show an overall population growth for Åland, for the capital Mariehamn, and for its rural areas. During that period, the population in the six archipelago municipalities decreased by nearly one-fifth (Table V.8.1).

In Jomala, the population increased every year between 2007 and 2016 (Figure V.8.1). Between 2016 and 2019 the population increased by 407, from 4,648 to 5,055 (Statistic Åland, 5th April 2019).

Table V.8.1. Population development in Åland*

	1980	2000	2018
Åland in total	22,783	25,776	29,789
Females	11,509	13,076	14,919
Males	11,274	12,700	14,870
Mariehamn	9,553	10,488	11,743
Rural municipalities**	10,778	12,940	15,973
Archipelago municipalities ***	2,452	2,348	2,073

*Figures (Statistics Åland 2019a).

**Eckerö, Finström, Geta, Hammarland, Jomala, Lemland, Lumparland, Saltvik, Sund.

***Brändö, Föglö, Kumlinge, Kökar, Sottunga, Vårdö.

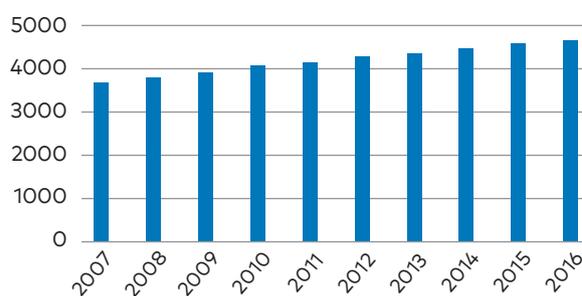


Figure V.8.1. Population in Jomala, 2007-2016.

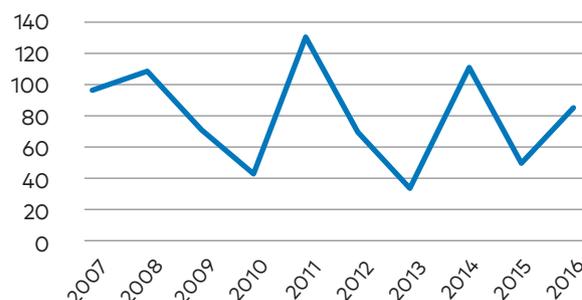


Figure V.8.2. Net migration in Jomala, 2007-2016.

Between 2007 and 2016 net migration in the municipality was always positive, allowing for fluctuations between 40 and 130 newcomers p.a. (Figure V.8.2).

Interviewees explained the fluctuations in terms of the changing availability of houses and plots (see also below). Mayor John Eriksson stresses that the vision of 'framtidskommun' ('future municipality') worked well as a basic stimulus to growth. Further, the area is not a "busy place".

Availability of time is a dimension of its attractiveness, too. It is fairly easy to get everywhere, both to reach jobs and access recreation and amenities. It is also a safe place to live, many interviewees stressed.

A significant number of young adults come to the islands. Studies show that it is easier to integrate as a migrant in Åland compared with Sweden and mainland Finland. The employment rate is relatively high, even among migrants from outside the Nordic countries (Statistics Åland, 2017a). Not least on account of the centuries' old shipping tradition, people have learned to be open minded. Another reason for the openness of the islands towards immigrants is the relatively small economy. "You have to link to other cultures," Katarina Fellman from Statistics and Research Åland (ÅSUB) stresses. Therefore almost 40% of the population are born outside Åland. John Eriksson stresses that while the islands are open for migration, there is also a common perception that immigrants have to learn Swedish, the only official language in the Archipelago (Själavstyrelselag för Åland 1144/1991). According to ÅSUB, in 2018, 86.8% had Swedish as mother tongue, 4.7% Finnish and 8.5% other languages. The comparison with 2000 is interesting, i.e. 93.8% Swedish, 4.8% Finnish and 1.4% other languages (Statistics Åland, 2019). Some interviewees expect that, in the future, the Finnish language will become more important for finding qualified jobs. Regarding languages (using Swedish and Finnish) and digitalisation, it was important for interviewees to keep a specifically Åland identity and not become locked into solely Finnish systems. They stressed that IT systems are not necessarily localised into Swedish. Hence it was felt that the government of Åland should raise the Swedish language issue in a Finnish political and institutional context. Overall, interviewees stressed a strong Åland and Swedish-speaking identity.

Looking at migration and demographic trends in Åland overall, the number of inhabitants in the archipelago has been decreasing. According to Fellman some public sector representatives are even going abroad to attract people to move to the islands.

The Åland Government's Labour Market and Study Service Office also operates a service called 'Åland Living', with the purpose of increasing Åland's status as an attractive place for both working and living. Åland Living forges a link between migrants and the authorities, companies

and organisations (<https://www.alandliving.ax/en>). In addition to information about living and working in Åland, or starting a business there, the portal lists available jobs and has space for uploading your resumé.

Refugees and asylum seekers are present both in the archipelago and in Jomala. According to one interviewee the quota is very (if not embarrassingly) small. Yet, apart from one MP in Mariehamn, politicians are in favour of refugees.

An attractive place for business development

The labour market – structure and transformation

Åland has an open economy and is dependent on trade with neighbouring regions. It is located midway between southern Finland and the Stockholm region in Sweden (Aland.ax, 27th August 2013). The service sector is the leading one. Also particularly strong is the maritime industry, which accounts for about 20% of local GDP. It is close in size to governmental and financial services/real estate (Table V.8.2.).

Table V.8.2. Åland's Gross Domestic Product in 2016.

Industry	MEUR	%
Agriculture	26	2,3
Manufacturing	87	7,4
Construction	58	4,9
Trade, hotels	102	8,7
Shipping	229	19,5
Other transports	46	4,0
Information and communication	37	3,2
Financial services, real estate	245	20,9
Professional, scientific and techn.	22	1,8
Public services	10	0,8
Pers. services	39	3,4
Industries, total	901	76,9
Government services	252	21,5
Non-profit institutions	20	1,7
GDP at basic price	1172	100
Indirect taxes	159	
Subsidies	-56	
GDP at market price	1276	

Source: Statistics Åland (2019a).

Changes in the shipping industry could pose a threat to the island's economy. The tourism sector is also important, with around 2.1 million visitors a year according to statistics from 2018 (Statistics Åland, 2018a). Many tourists arrive and stay in their sailing or motorboats in harbours around the islands. Åland also has an interesting high-tech plastics industry which maintains worldwide exports, as well as metals, engineering, carpentry, printing and electronics businesses. The employment situation has been good since the mid-1990s. Due to the large influx of tourists during the summer, the islands are dependent upon seasonal workers during that period (Aland.ax, 27 August 2013, Statistics Åland, 2019b).

Based on the labour market survey for 2018, developments in the market through to 2019 appear to have been characterised by positive volume growth and a relatively high recruitment level. This year, the need corresponds to 681 jobs or 5.8% of the workforce, compared with 772 (6.6%) a year ago (ÅSUB, 2018:4).

Table V.8.3. Employed persons				
Industry	Total	F	M	%
Total	14598	7319	7279	100
Agriculture	525	130	395	4
Manufacturing	1106	263	843	8
Construction	989	62	927	7
Trade, hotels	2022	1028	994	14
Transport	1629	511	1118	11
IT and communication	527	164	363	4
Financial services	614	340	274	4
Professional, scientific and techn.	871	431	440	6
Public services	4778	3700	1078	33
Personal services	1020	559	461	7
Unknown	517	131	386	4
Employment rate, %	1276			

Source: Statistics Åland (2019a).

Looking further into Åland's labour market, high paid jobs, such as those in the banking, insurance and IT sectors, are also available (Table V.8.3.). Since Åland is an autonomous Finnish region with its own government, many qualified jobs are also available in the public sector.

Home office working is increasing in Åland. People also work outside the islands on some days, while spending others in Mariehamn. Ålanders work on ferries connecting Finland and Sweden, with a stopover in Åland, too. There are also high-quality jobs available in the justice and medical fields. It is important to recognise that Åland is a small place. The island cannot maintain the full range of specialist care facilities at the hospital in the region, and therefore patients are sent to top specialists in Turku and Uppsala University hospitals in severe cases – as is common with other smaller regions. While there is a shortage of labour in the health services, different investments have been made in telemedicine and further education for health personnel to counterbalance this (Statistics Åland, 2018b).

Employed in Åland by sector and sex 2016

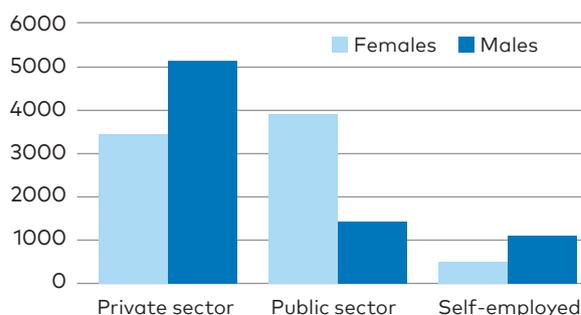


Figure V.8.3. Employment in Åland by sector and sex, 2016. Source: Statistics Åland (2019a).

Figure V.8.3. also shows that the majority of women work in the public sector and public services, while the majority of men work for the private sector and in transport (with almost as many as in trade, hotels and public services).

Shift-share analysis for Jomala – visualised in Figure V.8.4 (next page) – shows that the wholesale and retail trade, along with vehicles, transport and storage, remain the two largest sectors in the municipality. Together, these sectors created close to 800 jobs in 2015. This is far beyond the growth predictions based on Finnish sectoral and national trends. Other large sectors in Jomala, also growing beyond expectations measured against na-

tional and sectoral trends, are those involved with construction, the arts, entertainment and recreation, health, social work, education and manufacturing.²⁹

There are many industrial areas, including Viking Line's storage, the postal depot and the airports. The strong numbers in the construction sector are substantially in line with the growth of the municipality overall, and the high demand for housing (see also below).

The municipality is one of the largest employers in the region, with some 195 employees (at the end of 2017). Other large employers are Åland Telephone Cooperative, Åland Post, the gaming company PAF (operating with a license from the Government of Åland), Medimar healthcare clinic, and Oasen home care centre (Jomala.ax, n.d.).

Mayor John Eriksson emphasises the fact that most people in Jomala have jobs that pay well.

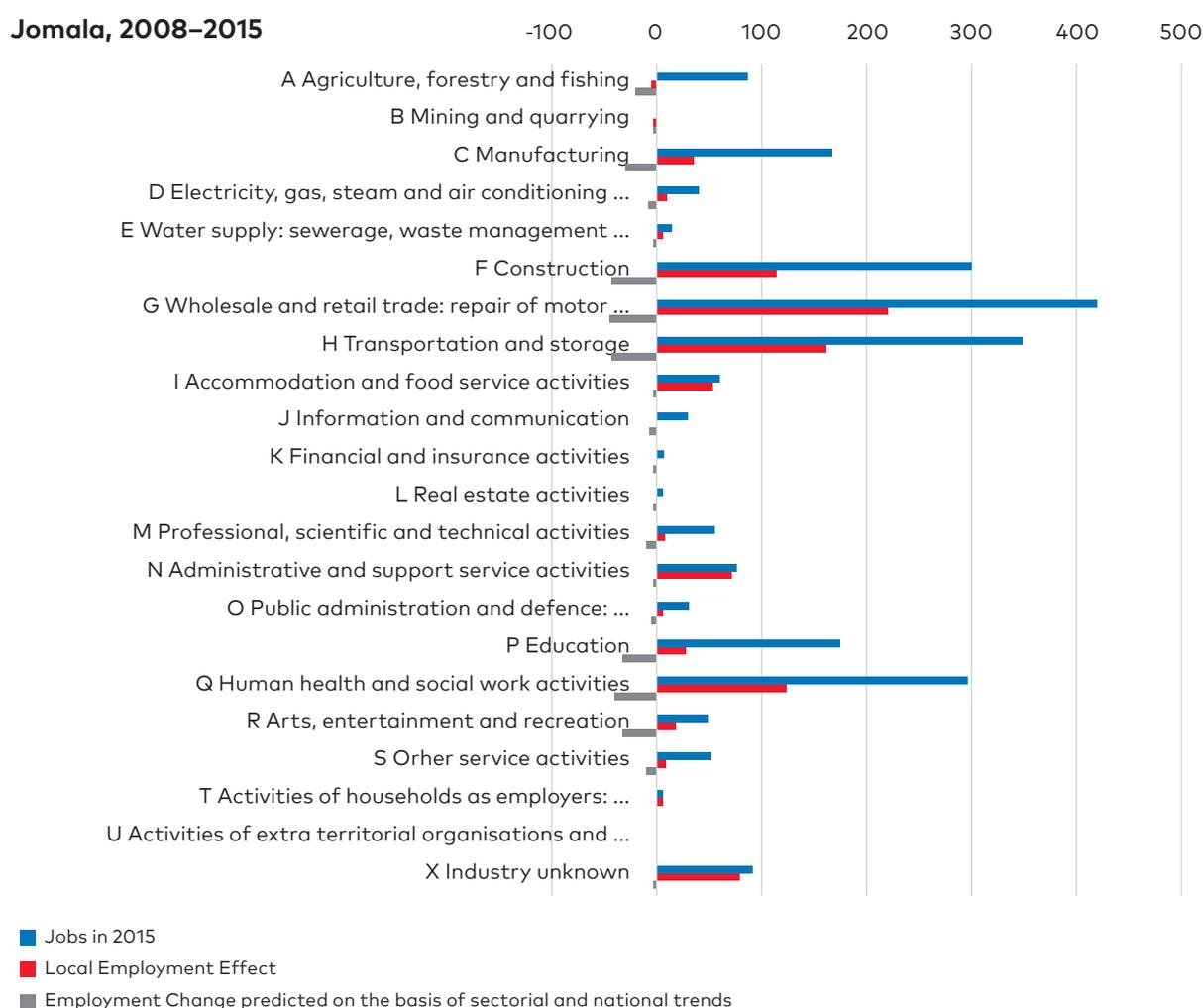


Figure V.8.4. Employment and local employment effects in Jomala. The blue bar shows the number of jobs in the area in 2016. The grey bar shows the employment change as predicted on the basis of sectoral and national trends. The red bar shows the local employment effect, a reflection of the change in jobs (growth or decline) at municipal level over a period of time, which can be attributed to local factors (e.g. local policies, and local natural or institutional conditions). Where it is positive, the local development in that particular industry is better than would have been predicted based on national and sector trends. This means that industry in the area is stronger, or else that specific policies are in place. Qualitative methods of data collection (e.g. interviews) have helped us to understand the reasons underlying these statistics.

29 For changes in the number of jobs in Jomala from 2007 to 2015, please see the appendix.



The largest shopping centre, along with most car or vehicle dealers, is located in Jomala. Photo courtesy of the municipality of Jomala.

Another positive development is the number of start-up companies (nystartade) in Åland (Statistics Åland 2018c)³⁰. Following the 2007/8 recession, and in 2010, the fall in their numbers stopped, started to rise again and reached a peak in 2013 (Figure V.8.5.). The number of companies that closed (nedlagda) also fell during the recession, but in 2012–2014 it rose sharply. The average figure for companies wound up 2013–2014 was actually higher than the number of start-ups. In 2014, the number of start-ups and closures was almost identical – 211 start-ups and 210 businesses wound up. In 2016, 202 new companies were set up, 141 closed. Following a peak in the latter part of 2015, the number of start-ups has remained steady (just over 50 per quarter).

One interviewee mentioned that, as well as working on attracting more qualified jobs, there is also “a need to get the message across to the young kids that something is going on here, that there are good jobs”.



Figure V.8.5. Number of start-ups and closures, 2005–2018.

Figure source: Statistics Åland (2018c).

30 For a comparison with mainland Finland, please visit Statistics Finland at: http://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/sv/StatFin/StatFin__yri_aly/statfin_aly_pxt_11yq.px/.

A strong culture of entrepreneurship – what and how to improve, including returns on investments and “getting the brains and talent back”

The tradition of local entrepreneurship is a long one. At the end of 2017 there were around 2,600 businesses on the islands. The majority of these enterprises were in the trade, hotel and restaurant business (595), in finance, insurance and real estate (539) and in construction (502). Most businesses employed up to four employees (2111) and only four companies employed more than 250 people. (Statistics Åland, 2018c).

Interviewees describe the culture of entrepreneurship in Åland as both “strong” and “special”. Mayor John Eriksson explains the essence of the entrepreneurial spirit in this way: *“People are looking for solutions not problems; you need to think globally and cooperatively. There is a willingness to take risks and to be flexible.”* Another interviewee added that people are able to combine three or four roles at the same time, as well as taking on different roles altogether. There is a tradition and a mentality which enables people to do different things simultaneously. Interviewees also talked about the trend towards starting your own company. They said that the many entrepreneurs start businesses that require lower skills levels.

Qualitative information about the current

state of entrepreneurship, the future needs of the business sector and the overall attractiveness of the area was provided by interviewees from Eriksson Capital and Optinova Group, two examples of locally-based companies which operate globally (Info Box V.8.1.).

One interviewee made specific reference to statistics concerning returns on investment, suggesting that the Åland Islands are not as good as mainland Finland in this respect. *“We shouldn’t simply lie down and see what happens next. We should tackle this issue head on,”* she argues. Info box V.8.2. (next page) contains further practical recommendations made during the interview.

From the perspective of running a business, energy and infrastructure (including electricity, water, waste and food) are all fairly expensive. For instance, electricity comes from Sweden and is taxed more highly. This is because Åland is not a country on its own, but at the same time it is also not part of the subsidised Finnish grid.

Information (in Swedish) about entrepreneurship, aimed at those planning to start a business in Åland is available at <https://www.naringsliv.ax/startaagetax>. This page comes from a collaborative project involving Åland University of Applied Sciences, the Government of Åland, Företagarna på Åland (Business Åland) and Confederation of Åland Enterprise.

INFO BOX V.8.1. EXAMPLES: Companies based in Åland that operate globally

Eriksson Capital AB is a family-owned company which began in the construction contracting business. Over several years the company has invested in a broad range of business sectors and enterprises. It aims for long-term ownership in the companies in which it invests. There are some 34 subsidiaries and 11 associated companies included in the overall group. They employ eight people at the main office in Mariehamn and around 1,300 people across the whole group, including its subsidiaries.

Among these subsidiaries is the Optinova Group, one of the leading global suppliers of advanced tubing solutions for the global medical device industry, as well as fluoropolymer

tubing for challenging industrial applications. Optinova (including ScanTube since 2015) is a Finnish group of companies with manufacturing bases on the Åland Islands in Finland, Minnesota in the USA, and near Bangkok in Thailand.

Another subsidiary is ViskoTeepak Holding AB, a world leading international manufacturer of cellulose, fibrous and plastic casings for the food industry. Its headquarters are in Mariehamn. Six production and conversion plants, together with five sales offices, are located around the world.

Source: <http://www.erikssoncapital.com/en/>.

INFO BOX V.8.2. Recommendations from companies based in Åland that operate globally*

Tourism

The Nordic countries should team up to develop strategies for improving concerted action to encourage and guide Asian tourists towards remote(r) areas. "Tourists come to Helsinki and Stockholm, but they should also visit Åland," Höglund argues. There is a need to develop more Chinese language material for social media, and to incorporate more references to rural areas in the literature, she says.

Nordic internship programme for entrepreneurship

One concrete recommendation which would help companies in Åland is a Nordic internship programme for entrepreneurship. Companies signing up could offer opportunities for talented students to visit them. Companies would also be encouraged to join forces. Such a programme should be supported by Nordic cooperation.

Improve the risk capital system and mentorship on investments

Eriksson also stressed the need to improve the risk capital system, which is "challenging on Åland". There is some focus on "families, friends and fools". The situation for those who do not come from the islands getting investment is different. The money available is sometimes used for social development, rather than being based on calculations about a return on investment and outcomes. A clearer understanding is needed about the purpose of investment. Additionally, Eriksson suggests mentorship on the use of investments and risk capital, especially when funding start-ups, and guidance for ambitious people who want to do more than simply earn enough for their own family, but who don't want to grow too large (a fine balance). But it is also important to attract (and attract back) those individuals who really do want to grow and make a difference – "people that want more, not just comfort, yet who fear that growth could be painful".

*Recommendation from Annette Höglund and Rebecka Eriksson.

Public policy, infrastructure and high-level public services

The government of Åland, as per its autonomous status, is responsible for the following:

- Health and medical care
- Upper secondary and tertiary education
- Trade and industry
- Local road and ferry traffic
- Police
- Postal services
- Radio, television, culture and museums.

Municipalities are responsible, among other things, for comprehensive schools, for childcare and for care of the elderly. The quality of such services in Åland is high. Schools, for instance, are among the best in the world (Harju-Luukkainen et al, 2014; Nya Åland, 2014). Kindergarten services are similar to those in Sweden and mainland Finland. By law, municipalities have to offer a place for each child. "Good kindergartens and good schools attract people," John Eriksson argues. The school system in

Åland and Finland gets positive coverage in the news and in published articles (e.g. Nya Åland, 2014). This even extends as far as China (Lifeweek China, 2017).

The "Jomala model" for organising public services "resembles that of a company which has done away with unnecessary committees," John Eriksson explains. Its sleek organisational model is great for quick decisions but would probably not work in a larger municipality where, as result of democratic decision-making and the sheer number of issues being handled, more people inevitably need to be involved. So far, "Jomala is the only municipality in Finland with this style of organisation", Eriksson says. The municipality also has a stable economy and the lowest municipal tax rate in Finland. It finally managed to become debt-free in 2013 (Jomala.ax, n.d.). While the municipal board and council director are influenced by different political parties, collaboration works very well, according to Eriksson. He explains that over 90% of his suggestions go through the board to the council. Schools perform well, as seen in the Pisa studies. There are 1,011



Photo: Hjördís Sigurjonsdóttir

children in the various schools and kindergartens. The municipality offers many other amenities, including cultural services (Jomala.ax). The remainder of this section will examine the public services highlighted in our interviews.

Transport

Public transport is the responsibility mainly of the government of Åland, while school transport is a municipal task. Many interviewees, especially those who commute to Mariehamn for work, or who are attending school, said that public transport leaves room for improvement. Hence, many people still own a car to commute to work.

Connections to mainland Finland can be expensive. As a professional in the public sector who relies on public transport to mainland Finland, Koskinen-Hagman says: *“Transport provision is okay, but not good. Flying is bad and expensive. The boat is all right, but it’s rather time-consuming to get to appointments in Helsinki. More flights are needed. There used to be three or four flights a day to the mainland. While Skype can be used, you need face-to-face meetings as well.”* Other interviewees added that plane connections can prove problematic if people from Central Europe are not able to reach Åland within a single day. On the other hand, it is possible to reach Nordic countries and other locations if you leave early in the morning via Arlanda airport.

Families stressed that for visitors Stockholm is a good place for shopping and cultural activities.

It was seen as easy and cheap to get to, but travel needs some planning. Most interviewees were satisfied with the connections, especially the cheaper ferry ones. As far as connections to Helsinki are concerned, there were different perceptions. But everyone agreed that it is fairly time-consuming to get there.

“You need to plan your vacation according to the ferry timetable, and Arlanda airport is the main international hub for Ålanders,” John Eriksson explains. He sees transportation to and from the islands as pretty challenging, too, especially vis-à-vis mainland Finland. While the government tries to support air travel, this is *“an ongoing struggle, with Air Åland going bankrupt and being succeeded by a start-up company.”*

One idea was to treat flying as service of general economic benefit, and therefore to subsidise it. Other interviewees said that, based on business needs, they would want a railway/metro connection between Stockholm and Kapellskär in Sweden, connecting goods and people with the ferry line between Sweden and Åland.

Concerning transport on the islands themselves, a somewhat speculative but innovative alternative to buses raised by some of the interviewees was self-driving vehicles (on rails). While cycling infrastructure is well-developed, according to Höglund it needs to be better used. *“People are spoiled for short distances; they need to change their habits.”* What about car-sharing? In the view of some interviewees *“people don’t want to be de-*

pendent on others, so they usually use their own cars. Many people drive between Jomala and Mariehamn, so it should be easy to drive together. Yet they prefer not relying on others for this."

Housing and infrastructure

The municipality of Jomala is located approximately 10-15 minutes' drive away from the island's capital, Mariehamn, where many high-quality jobs (and the high school) are situated. Living space in Mariehamn is limited and various kinds of apartments and houses are in high demand. As a result, "many people live in Jomala and go to work in Mariehamn", Fellman explains. At the same time there is business development in Jomala, partly due to the lack of space in Mariehamn.

Jomala benefits from the fact that, in terms of building space, Mariehamn cannot grow much more. Jomala has planned areas for building and even larger plots of land. Building activity includes single family houses, terraced houses and apartments. "People who want to live in a house come to Jomala," as one interviewee stressed, adding that "you can't even buy an apartment in Mariehamn for the price of an entire older house in Jomala."

In order to explain particular fluctuations in population distribution, and positive net migration overall (Figure V.8.1. and V.8.2.), we need to remem-

ber that the new settlement areas in Jomala are mainly for single family houses. The pace of planning also seems slower than demand, which probably explains why there has been a smaller increase in new settlement in some years than in others.

Looking at the current situation in Jomala overall, Mayor Eriksson believes that there is a good mix of different housing types. He notes that people do not have to pay land tax, and that the area has the lowest municipal tax rate in Finland, at 16.5%. According to Eriksson, people are aware of this, along with the low water rates. Water comes from Åland. Most electricity comes from Sweden, and about 20% of it is from Åland. Eriksson sees the availability of land and a well-ordered planning process, together with the presence of entrepreneurs, as among the most significant drivers of growth. "We have good entrepreneurs as drivers of these developments," he says. "They're building streets and infrastructure, kindergartens and more. They need to follow buildings standards, and fines are levied if they don't. Our technical chief monitors the situation closely, but the actual level of investment is minimal." The main challenge is therefore to keep up with high demand and developing liveable areas which meet the demands of people moving here, Eriksson says. He adds that "we seem to keep on growing fast".

Photo courtesy of the municipality of Jomala.



Looking at the general situation in Åland, some interviewees are concerned that there are empty buildings at the same time as there are people needing to find flats for rent for a couple of days or weeks – especially serviced apartments. Better use of buildings and improved provision would help to open things up for those coming into the area. According to some interviewees, it is not easy to find housing when moving to Åland. There is a shortage of rental housing for new residents. Overall, however, interviewees stressed that housing is generally cheaper compared to Helsinki and Stockholm.

People moving to Åland usually make their first home in Mariehamn. They might then move again locally if they need a larger house or more space.³¹ When relationships break up, people face the problem of finding suitable alternative living space. Large apartments are more expensive than houses, while new houses are also costly (Statistics Åland, 2019c).

Interviewees also pointed to a mismatch between people thinking that it was impossible to buy land or housing in Åland, and the actual reality. According to the regulations, "Real estate and land ownership on Åland usually requires a so-called right of domicile. To obtain this you need to be a Finnish citizen, to have lived in the islands for five years, and to have an adequate knowledge of Swedish. However, it is still possible to buy property, even if you do not have a right of domicile in Åland, provided that the property is part of an approved planning area" (Åland.ax).

Health Services and care of the elderly

Interviewees describe the availability of health services as generally good. Åland has a decent hospital, considering that it is a relatively small place. Compared to other locations in mainland Finland and Sweden, waiting times for getting an appointment in one of the healthcare centres are fairly short. There are specialists available in some medical fields, but not in all.

Care of the elderly in Jomala is provided through cooperation between different municipalities, and at different stages it can be established as a joint venture with those other municipalities.

³¹ Statistics concerning relocation in Åland's municipalities, including migration to and from other parts of Åland, Sweden, Finland and beyond, are available from Statistics Åland (2018d, 33).

The University of Applied Sciences – Högskolan in Åland

Högskolan in Åland provides education in four main subject areas – business and politics, technology, health and welfare, and services. Table V.8.4. lists the number of male and female students per subject area.

Table V.8.4. Students at University of Applied Sciences – Högskolan in Åland

Industry	Total	Female	Male
Total	455	183	272
Business, adm., law	95	64	31
Info., comm. techn. (ICT)	69	17	52
Technology	120	4	116
Health and welfare	49	44	5
Services	122	54	68
Home Country			
Åland	292	142	150
Finland	112	29	83
Sweden	48	12	36
Other	3	-	3

Source: Statistics Åland (2019a).

Figure V.8.6. (next page) shows the changing student numbers from 2003 to 2017, differentiating between students from Ålanders and those from outside.

Some interviewees were concerned with the educational reform process, including the issue of offering shorter courses and being what they called "to-the-point" and "hands-on". They felt that it was not wise for Högskolan to try to compete with universities or to offer topics found in curricula elsewhere. "We should make education happen in a distinctive way, not repeat something that is already done elsewhere," Höglund suggests. One example is in marine and navigation education and research. Considerable amounts of money have been invested on research into these areas in mainland Finland. They need to be looked at specifically in Åland, too. Both interviewees suggested strong international connections, shorter courses

Students at Åland University of Applied Sciences by residence

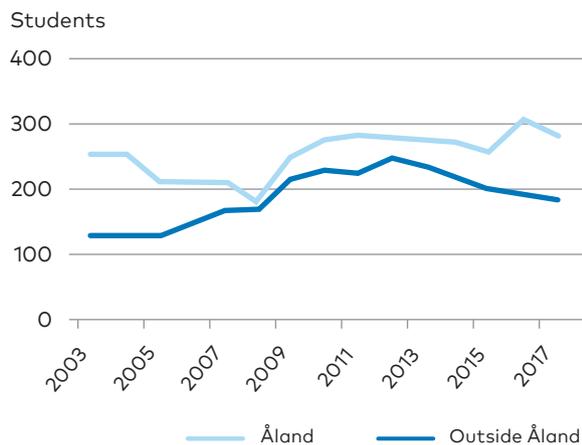


Figure V.8.6. Students at Åland University of Applied Sciences, 2003-2017.

Source: Statistics Åland (2019a).

and guest professors as potential positive strategies. People in Åland are somewhat torn about the future of the Högskolan, and so a futures study has been carried out by Djupsund, Wolff & Karlsson (2018).

Municipal mergers

There have been discussions about the possible merging of municipalities, including how to deal with certain challenges and questions that could be solved together with, or through cooperation between, different municipalities. According to Fellman, the principal issues concern location, the infrastructure in Jomala, and services delivered in Mariehamn. According to a survey by ÅSUB, a significant proportion of those who simply want to make everyday life easier do not care too much about which municipality they live in. (For further reading on this, see Statistics Åland, 2017b.) For politicians opposing such mergers, things might look rather different. The 'Kommunernas socialtjänst' service reform would be to their disadvantage, reckons John Eriksson. He explains: "There are higher costs and fewer services in Jomala. Hence, we would probably need to raise taxes, as we would still have increased costs for schools and kindergartens that are not included in the reform."

Eriksson is also rather critical of the way the planned municipal reform ('Kommunstrukturreformen') is not being carried out in sufficiently close coordination with the service reform, 'Kommunernas socialtjänst' – or indeed through discus-

sions involving the municipalities and their inhabitants. "Are both reforms really necessary at the same time? Or are the purposes of reform best met through just one of the reforms? Another question is about whether the municipalities in Åland have the actual resources and personnel to carry out both reforms at the same time," he says.

Overall, municipal mergers were pretty controversial, based on discussions with a number of interviewees. For some, they were not acceptable. Those opposing mergers also highlighted public sector cooperation in the fields of schools and care of the elderly, and the fact the government of Åland finances Åland's Gymnasium. Another said: "I want to live in the countryside, and Jomala should remain rural but with functioning services. Merging with another rural municipality would be OK". It is important to note, in this connection, that according to the law on mergers adopted by parliament, Mariehamn cannot merge with Jomala or any other municipality. Jomala would instead need to merge with other rural municipalities.

Other interviewees, surveying the situation in Åland overall, see improved operations and funding as the beneficial outcomes of any potential merger. The thinking goes that service levels could be improved, and "the right people" recruited. Another argument was that a merger might improve the functioning of democracy. The contention here is that, in the past, it was people from different areas of a municipality and its villages who were represented on municipal boards. Nowadays, the interviewee argued, party political thinking tends to dominate.

Investing in the future

From the perspective of environmental and economic sustainability, Jomala has decided to become fossil-free. According to Eriksson, it is the only municipality in Åland to set this goal and to follow it. The aim of becoming fossil fuel free was taken in 2017 and Jomala has now set new environmental targets for the future. Work has been based on a government project, the goals "seemed simple to reach", and as a result the municipality has already made substantial cost savings.

Among the upcoming infrastructure projects under consideration are renovation of schools, a meeting house, kindergartens, new sports facilities, and a library. Some of these services will be offered in one building. Mayor Eriksson recognises that investment is really needed, especially be-

cause the school needs to be rebuilt, and also because of the increasing demand for services. When more people move to Jomala, there are inevitably greater demands. Eriksson sees some similarities to other parts of the Nordic Region here. There is an increasing expectation in terms of what public services should be able to deliver to the population.

In this connection, one interviewee criticised the municipality for being too focused on keeping its taxes low and suggested moving the focus on to improving care for elderly people.

An attractive place to live – amenities, nature, island time and young people's perspectives

Perceptions of locals

What makes Jomala attractive? What is the competitive advantage of Åland over other parts of Finland (and Sweden) and why do people move there? These questions were put to all of our interviewees.

One of them, working for the government and collaborating closely with the municipalities, stressed that she is happy that people move to Åland. She believes it is both good for jobs and for high quality schooling and kindergarten provision for children. *"If you are from Sweden or from Finland, you know the language and can work in Swedish,"* she says. Compared with a larger city in Sweden, where one of the interviewees lived for 15 years, there are better services, including more staff and a higher quality of food in the day-care centre, she believes. *"There is much less traffic, it is less stressful to arrange your days,"* the interviewee adds. She and other people we talked to also reflected on long commuting times from the suburbs to the centre, and back. For her, moving back was clearly positive, but decent job openings for her and for her Swedish husband had to be found first.

What makes Jomala particularly attractive? *"We have very good schools and kindergartens. It is easy to live here, as everything is close at hand, including the cultural and sports amenities."* This is how Mayor Eriksson summarises the desirability of the place for many. Other interviewees stressed the municipality's good day-care and schools' facilities. As an example of another appealing resource, Ålanders have very good sports options. Hockey and football are especially strong. *"Overall, we have quite an impressive array of possibilities,"* one of the interviewees said. *"Football does quite*

well, but also martial arts and boxing. There are three gyms in Mariehamn, and one in most municipalities. There is at least one team sport for everyone, at least one football team in each of the municipalities," another interviewee added.

Among the other notable sports and leisure activities in Jomala are riding and riding schools. *"You can even afford your own horse,"* one person observed. People are also able to attend dance classes, and similar. The natural environment and the sea are always close by, too. *"I take my boat, have a swim, sail, and head off to a small cottage in the archipelago. When I was a young boy, moving to Åland, the sea was not seen as freedom, but it soon turned out to be just that,"* another interviewee said. There is rich cultural life here too, including music, arts and crafts, those we spoke to stressed.

Interviewees also highlighted political participation. *"You can make things happen here and influence the development of the place. There are active NGOs with different activities and focuses".*

"It's easy to live here, as you have more time on account of shorter distances to travel," another person noted. The drawback, interviewees explained, is that you need to own a car, and cars are expensive. Also, there is no subsidy for electric cars (yet). Overall, the place is *"close to town but still in the countryside, conveniently located but remote, so you have more space."* With a twinkle in the eye, another interviewee added: *"You need more space in order to have a big garage for two cars, but at least you get building permission more easily here than elsewhere!"*

These comments neatly summarise the combined impact of good jobs and services, the ability to influence the development of the municipality, and a sense of being close to nature – enabling people to wind down after work.

Another key resource which helps people to make the most of this combination of advantages is, as Höglund puts it, *"island time"*. Short distances to work and the proximity of leisure activities mean that more time is available to appreciate what is on offer. Even with long working hours, people have spare time. That is, they might have tough and lengthy days at work, but they still have time to enjoy themselves. Koskinen-Hagman similarly sees time as one of the most attractive dimensions of life here – based on comparatively short distances between work and leisure activity, as many mentioned in their interviews. *"This is one of the reasons that you choose to move here."*

Interviewees also argue that people moving here become part of “social networks”. Integration takes place both at work and in private life, where newcomers and returnees also meet up with other migrants.

Integration in Åland

The biggest reason for the population increase in Åland between 2000 and 2013 was immigration from beyond the Nordic countries. This amounts to around 1,400 people. As a proportion of the population, that is an increase from less than 2% to over 6% of those living here (Åland Statistics, 2014). In 2018, 8.5% of the population in Åland had a language other than Swedish or Finnish. The highest ratio was among those between 25 and 49 years of age. Åland Statistics (2014) conducted a survey among the foreign-born outside the Nordic countries, in order to better understand their experience of moving to Åland. Almost every respondent felt safe, or fairly safe, living in the islands.

Most said that they had Ålandic acquaintances, and the most common place to get to know these new contacts was at work or in the neighbourhood. For women, it was also common to meet Ålanders through their children, while men named hobbies as a good place to meet local people. However, one third of the respondents had found it difficult to get acquainted with native residents. More men than women said that they did not have any native acquaintances (Åland Statistic, 2014). A Master’s degree thesis on refugee’s integration in Åland shows that there is a welcoming atmosphere for people newly arriving. Neighbours, pensioners



Photo: Hjördis Sigurjonsdottir

and the local Red Cross are seen as an asset, helping to establish friendship and social networks in the community. Measures to encourage integration, building bonds with other community members: all of this creates a real feeling of inclusion. However, despite the warm welcome, refugees claimed that they did not actually have much contact with other groups in society, and that it would take a long time to be accepted as part of the local community (Lindman, 2017).

Young people’s perspectives – life in Åland and life after high school

To understand the current situation of young people, seven students from Ålands Lyceum in Mariehamn were interviewed as a group in August 2018. Ålands Lyceum and Ålands Yrkesgymnasium (the vocational high school) are part of the administrative unit known as Ålands Gymnasium, with a total of 1,000 students in both schools.

Marcus Koskinen-Hagman, the principal of Ålands Lyceum, says that roughly 80% of young Ålanders attend Ålands Gymnasium (including both Ålands Lyceum and Ålands Yrkesgymnasium). The Lyceum had 432 students enrolled in 2018, more than 40% of young Ålanders.

What makes Åland and Jomala attractive for young students from the Lyceum, what are their plans for the future, and what are the challenges of the place for them? These were key questions posed.

Only one out of seven students interviewed was born in Mariehamn. The others either commute by bus or by moped (or, if older, by car) from the nearer municipalities. If they previously lived in the archipelago, then they moved to Mariehamn for school. Fellman points out that students from the six municipalities in the archipelago region, especially, might need to move to Mariehamn, because it has the only high school in Åland. “*Everyone from the archipelago has done that,*” one of the students noted.

How is social life as a student? “*Everybody knows everyone, there are no secrets, in a sense we are fairly rural,*” one of the students said. “*Among younger students everyone has a moped, but you cannot be that spontaneous here. Winter changes things quite a bit,*” another added. They tend to think that there is much more to do than there was a few years ago. Many now work on Åland, especially during the summer break, when a lot of tourists come, and there are more events taking



Photo: Hjördis Sigurjonsdottir

place. While it is a small community built on trust, things “gets dramatic” during the annual rock festival, ‘Rockoff’ – “a bit of drama for nine days, when we find ourselves doing stupid things and enjoying the fact that the ‘big shots’ are coming!”

There was some disagreement about the overall convenience of the location and its connections to mainland Finland and Sweden. Some felt it was easy to travel abroad, while others said that when flying to Helsinki it was necessary to plan a long way in advance, especially if you wanted to keep costs reasonable. Boat tickets, in contrast, are often free. “The boats are our life-line”, one student said, and with a smile his friend added, “Yes, and we have the highest snus consumption in Finland”.

All of the students emphasised Åland as a good place for raising a family. It is a very safe area, there is decent day care provision, and the educational facilities are very good. Spare time and leisure activities are easily accessible, too, including sport and culture.

What about their own future after high school, both as students and as returnees to the islands?

When it comes to studying for a higher degree, most Ålanders were enrolled at Swedish universities in 2018, according to ÅSUB. Since 2008 the proportion of students choosing to study at Finnish universities has increased by 14% to 33% in 2018. At the same time, the proportion of students in Sweden has decreased from 76% to 63% (Statistics Åland, 2019d).

Koskinen-Hagman refers to statistics showing that a majority of young Ålanders leave to go to Sweden for study. In relation to this trend, he stresses that it has become harder to gain entry to Swedish universities. One reason is that, if going to Sweden, the mean of all 75 courses attended is looked at. In Finland, it is the final grade that

counts. Depending on individual universities, the entrance exam applies to roughly half of the students.

When considering studying for a higher degree, all students from our small interview sample emphasised that the current (very positive) availability of jobs does not solely define the choice of subject matter for their studies. Some want to study law or economics in Helsinki. Some also wish to study in Finnish, but stress that their classmates might be of a different opinion, because many are more interested in studying health-related subjects or engineering in Sweden. “Overall, Finnish people are more fun to hang out with, so I would like to study in Finland”, one of them says – and all the others nod. On the other hand, another student argues that “many people are also scared about Finland, with the language and so on.”

What about returning after your studies? “If you want to make a difference you shouldn’t be here”, one of the high school students declared. The place was simply too small to offer good opportunities, this person thought. According to others, those opportunities, such as working as a journalist, are best found in a larger city, such as in mainland Finland or in Stockholm. However, almost all interviewees said that they might eventually come back. But they added that, as a young person, you want to see the world first. “You will encounter a different culture, recognise that it is probably less safe and more stressful, and then you might choose to return”, one student explained.

Discussing the issue with families in a group interview – some of whom also had children finishing high school soon – there was general agreement that it can be important to move away, to learn and to experience life in different places. Also, many families we interviewed said that they had “bigger plans for bigger cities” when they left to study abroad. Later they thought life on Åland, with a family, “is more attractive, due to its safety, the security of employment, the small distances to cover, and strong social bonds”. One interviewee believes that the life planning of young people might have changed a fair bit compared to when she left the islands in the mid-1990s. According to her, “for the majority it is clear that they will return”. Koskinen-Hagman was among those who thought about not returning, especially as he got a good job offer elsewhere after completing his PhD. Yet, for family reasons, he went back to Åland, as did 90% of his friends. He is also convinced that young people should see the world and then return. He

strongly recommends an active policy to motivate young graduates to return and adds that *“there are good companies here, people find the infrastructure good, and it is cheap – especially sports amenities and participating in team sports.”* When compared with many other rural areas in mainland Finland and the Nordic countries, there is virtually no unemployment. *“Young people get the jobs they want,”* Koskinen-Hagman says.

Attracting people with a good level of knowledge and skills – both returnees and new residents – is one of the concerns that Mayor John Eriksson agrees needs to be tackled. *“While people study abroad and come back, maybe we should go out and make a stronger pitch for the place, following the Faroese example,”* he says.

According to Höglund and Rebecka Eriksson, one of the keys to the future of Åland is attracting people (back), especially “people who want to make a difference”. This means attracting not only those who want to return for “a more peaceful life (the ‘step-down society’)”, but particularly those individuals who are up for “big challenges”. Several initiatives have been established to “get the brains back” and to prevent further attrition of “the best people”. In this regard Höglund stresses one special event – an Entrepreneur Day which involves going directly to the school. He says it is important to talk to young people shortly before they leave Åland to study, making them aware of the advantages and job opportunities that will exist for them when they come back. Åland has a very good school system and considerable investment is made in the area, so it is a real pity to lose talent and brains. Creating an alumni link is another opportunity to form lasting bonds. Interviewees said there was, in their view, a fairly high return rate, but added that there is a continuing need to improve it, not least in those sectors that require people with a higher level of educational attainment. *“We always need people to move back and pay taxes,”* Eriksson added, admitting that he is a bit scared about the future in that respect.

Distance learning is probably not the best option for most, and if distance learning is undertaken then this is preferably done after basic university education. As interviewees emphasised (and this perception was widely shared with others), it is important that young people want to move away for a time and that they do so. Equally, they can and should be encouraged to return.

Conclusion

This study has sought to combine quantitative analyses of demographic and local employment patterns with qualitative interviews involving business representatives, the public sector, headmasters, school students and families. Through this mixed method, we have been able to identify different factors underlying positive economic trends and the attractiveness of the place generally, as well as a number of challenges that lie ahead.

Our case study of Jomala, and the Åland Islands as a whole (with the exception of some of the archipelago municipalities) demonstrates very positive demographic developments and job growth over recent decades. This growth in the municipality of Jomala is due both to a high standard of services and job availability, and also its close location to Mariehamn, a place of work for many who live in Jomala. In contrast to other case studies, jobs are also available for people with a higher level of education – such as those working in banks, insurance companies, Information Technology (IT), justice and the medical science field. There is a mismatch between job opportunities and the perception of young high school students about those opportunities. But positive initiatives are in place to showcase the real prospects and possibilities that exist, and to “get the brains back” to the area. Except for public transport, families in the group interview said that “services are fine and very good; those who complain have never seen other places.” Moreover, there is a lack space for housing and for certain types of businesses in the capital, Mariehamn – space that is available in neighbouring Jomala. Overall, there is good provision of culture and sports facilities. The place is perceived as a safe one and nature and the sea are close at hand. We can see that there are already many attractive resources to attract new islanders and to encourage young people to move back after they leave for a period in higher education.

Table V.8.5. (next page) summarises a variety of good practice and key factors underlying the attractiveness of Jomala Åland, as well as a number of obstacles and challenges which have been identified through interviews and through an examination of the secondary literature.

Table V.8.5. Attractiveness of Åland/Jomala, and obstacles or challenges to overcome

Good practice and reasons underlying attractiveness	Obstacles and challenges
<p>Access to public services Availability of different public services, including schools.</p> <p>Education Kindergarten services are of a high standard, similar to mainland Finland and Sweden. Schools are among the best in the world.</p> <p>Culture, sport, recreation Many amenities in the fields of sports, recreation and culture are available in Jomala and nearby.</p> <p>Employment and jobs Attractive jobs are available for people with a higher education, e.g. in banks, insurance companies, IT, justice and medical science. Åland is an autonomous territory, so senior and other positions are available in the public sector.</p> <p>Entrepreneurship culture Strong culture of entrepreneurship and local companies operating globally.</p> <p>Immigration Good integration of migrants.</p> <p>Location Closeness to capital Mariehamn providing jobs and amenities.</p> <p>Quality of life and local community Perception of safety and the absence of criminality.</p> <p>Young people – living, staying and returning The public and private sectors work together to “get the brains back”, i.e. to inform students about opportunities to return after studying outside the islands.</p>	<p>Education Perceived understaffing of education administration, and aligning teaching plans to both Finnish and Swedish systems</p> <p>Employment and jobs Perceived shortage of labour in health services but cooperation with Uppsala and Turku hospitals for more severe cases Negative perceptions of young people about their job opportunities after higher education.</p> <p>Housing Living space in Mariehamn is limited and there is a lack of housing > this benefits Jomala, as building plots are available.</p> <p>Young people - living, staying / returning Further effort is needed to “get the brains back”, especially those who are willing to take risks as entrepreneurs. Negative perceptions of young people about job opportunities after higher education.</p>

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Appendix

Jobs in Jomala, 2007–2015									
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Jobs in 2015
A. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	120	112	110	114	104	96	102	95	87
B. Mining and quarrying	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
C. Manufacturing	144	162	162	166	195	194	177	196	168
D. Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	36	38	38	36	36	37	42	38	41
E. Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	12	14	10	12	12	12	11	23	16
F. Construction	232	228	231	238	264	297	276	293	300
G. Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	227	248	263	268	310	332	385	408	421
H. Transportation and storage	241	230	333	338	352	316	308	331	349
I. Accommodation and food service activities	13	10	7	21	22	17	8	27	61
J. Information and communication	28	35	33	36	34	32	38	37	31
K. Financial and insurance activities	3	8	4	1	1	2	15	10	7
L. Real estate activities	4	5	4	4	6	6	6	8	6
M. Professional, scientific and technical activities	42	60	66	47	54	51	54	53	55
N. Administrative and support service activities	6	4	7	13	21	37	33	27	75
O. Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	29	32	34	44	46	47	51	33	30
P. Education	160	180	116	186	180	169	182	201	175
Q. Human health and social work activities	187	212	200	224	267	258	328	316	295
R. Arts, entertainment and recreation	150	178	143	136	146	143	151	206	215
S. Other service activities	35	52	52	57	61	65	68	70	51
T. Activities of household	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	5
U. Activities of extra-territorial organisations and bodies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
X. Industry unknown	19	17	42	35	28	23	25	86	91
SUM	1691	1828	1855	1978	2139	2134	2266	2464	2479