



Photo: Tomas Salinka

V. 11. NÄRPES IN FINLAND: Where “Green Growth” contributes to attractive and inclusive development, for and with the people

By Michael Kull, 2018/2019

“ It is the ideas of the people that made this place successful. It might have been hard at the beginning, but now you can find products from Närpes even on international markets.

MAYOR HANS-ERIK LINDQVIST

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 un-

derstand why some places do better than others. Närpes (Närpiö in Finnish) is on the Finnish West Coast, in the region of Ostrobothnia. Of the 9,473 inhabitants (31.12.2018), around 80% have Swedish as their mother tongue. 5.5% speak Finnish and 14.9% other languages.

Närpes covers 970 km² of land. The length of the coastline is 45 km, but the many sea bays and the islands mean that the shoreline's length is about 700 km altogether. The city centre has dozens of general and specialist shops and supermarkets. In addition to the centre, there are nine bigger villages, offering basic services such as a school, shop and post office. The population is concentrated partly on the coastal villages, partly on the river valley around Närpes river. The distances to bigger cities are as follows: Vaasa 80 km, Pori 120 km, Helsinki 350 km and Turku 270 km.

Administratively, Närpes is part of the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, consisting of 15 municipalities and four sub-regions. Several state and municipal institutions are in the immediate vicinity of the centre. Essential services including schools and childcare are growing. This had led to construction projects, as has the influx of immigrants. The age structure is as follows:

- 0–14 = 5.2%
- 15–64 = 56%
- 65+ = 28.8%

Närpes has had a continuous positive net migration pattern since 2010 (figure V.11.1.).

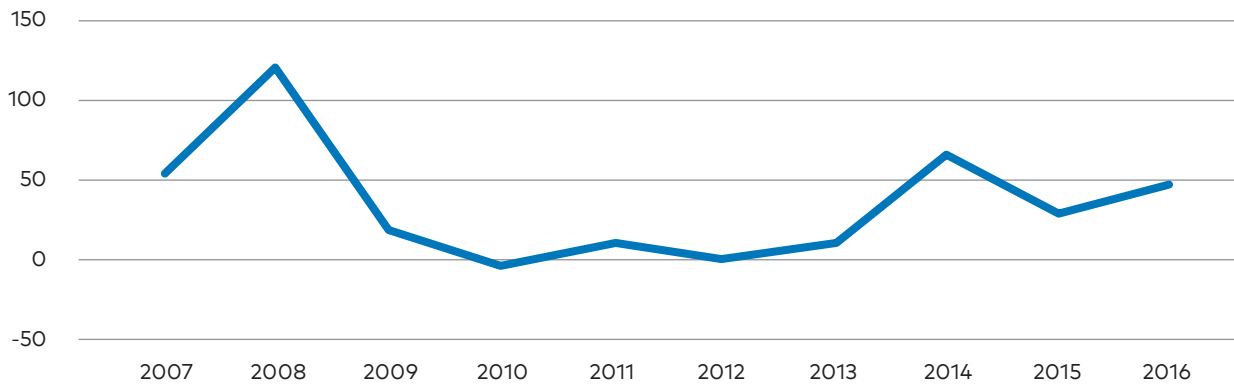


Figure V.11.1. Närpiö – Närpes Net migration 2007–2016

The employment rate in 2017 was 81.6%, compared to an average 70.5% for Finland as a whole (Statistics Finland). The unemployment rate is very low, too, only 3.1% compared to a national average of 9.1%.⁴⁸ There is also a strong local employment effect⁴⁹ in the fields of agriculture, manufacturing and other sectors, with most of the jobs in the agriculture and manufacturing sector (Figure V.11.2.).

To better understand the factors underlying these quantitative findings, we conducted several interviews with a long-term developer, the mayor, businesses, heads of schools and pupils, and an immigrant family. This gave us an enhanced appreciation as to why Närpes had developed in this positive way. Among the reasons behind these positive indicators are:

- An immigration policy that works well and what could be called 'Model Närpes'
- A good education system/vocational school – answering the needs of businesses and integrating immigrants
- Healthcare provided in cooperation with neighbouring municipalities
- Närpes seen as an attractive place for developing and maintaining businesses – the greenhouse sector is worth looking at here
- A collaborative and entrepreneurship-related culture
- Being an attractive place to live – culture, sport and healthy 'social spaces'

48 These figures are for March 2019; Source: Municipality of Närpes.

49 The local employment effect reflects a change in jobs (growth or decline) at municipal level and over a period of time, attributed to local factors (e.g. local policies, local natural or institutional conditions). Compared to national or industry trends, this development was more positive.

- Related to the previous point, young people's perception of the place as an attractive one, inclusive of immigrants
- Being a safe place.

Some of the challenges are:

- Road and rail connections to access other parts of Finland and beyond
- Switching jobs from the greenhouse to other sectors
- Availability of jobs for more highly educated people
- The feeling of being 'overlooked' by decision-makers in Helsinki and Brussels.

This chapter starts with a reflection about the current situation and the challenges, as seen through the eyes of a long-term developer. We will then seek to shed light on public policies supportive of attractiveness, including healthcare, education and particularly the way the vocational school answers the needs of businesses and integrates immigrants. Immigration policy a-la-Närpes, and the perspectives of an immigrant family, will be outlined next. We will then look at Närpes as a place for developing and maintaining businesses with a specific focus on the greenhouse business, and the culture of collaboration and entrepreneurialism. The third section discusses Närpes as an attractive place for living, including culture, sport and social spaces. The viewpoints of young people and consideration of their future plans play a key role in this section.

Närpes-Närpio 2008–2015

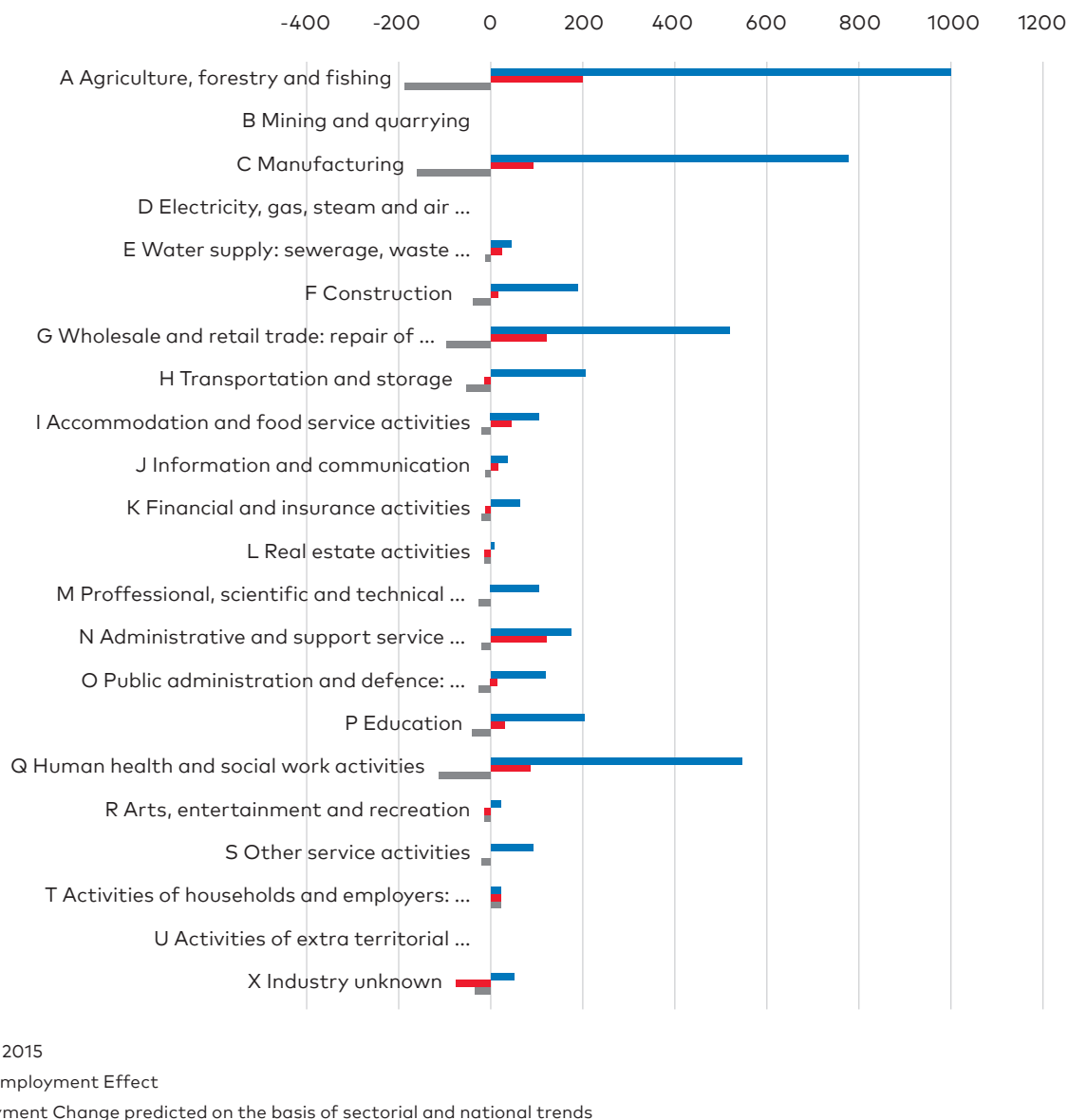


Figure V.11.12. Närpes: Employment and local employment effect. The **blue bar** shows the number of jobs in the area in 2016. The **grey bar** shows the employment change as predicted on the basis of sectorial and national trends. The **red bar** shows the local employment effect, a reflection of the change in jobs (growth or decline) at municipal level and over a period of time, attributed to local factors (e.g. local policies, 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 that specific policies are in place. Qualitative methods of data collection (e.g. interviews) help to understand what underlies these figures.

Current situation and challenges, as seen through the eyes of a long-term developer

Håkan Westermark has worked in the field of business development for private companies for more than 20 years, and in city development for around six years. Twenty-five years ago, he reflects, there were more than 400 greenhouses in operation. Now there are about 130. Yet the number of square metres used in this way is actually the same as 20 years ago. Many younger people were in a position of not wanting to take over greenhouses. Investment was needed, including in the types of energy to use. Some took the risk, others did not. In the late 1980s, the first wave of incoming refugees came into employment (see below). Many of them found jobs in the metal industry later on.

The biggest change was when Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995. Most owners opposed joining the EU because they feared a lowering of prices for their products. After 1995, the EU single market brought about real change. More employees were needed, and different types of contracts were able to be offered. Jobs in the greenhouse business and in the metal industry have been well-paid for people with a comparatively low educational level, according to Westermark. Jobs in the greenhouse business require better knowledge and experience, but not higher levels of education overall.

Can this positive development, with low unemployment and positive net migration, be sustained? Håkan Westermark points to innovation statistics being rather low for the two core sectors in Närpes – greenhouses and the metal industry.

Photo: Tomas Salinka



Moreover, there are many small companies and it can be a challenge if they lack a long-term perspective and vision for how they intend to grow. Since there are no larger companies, no big schools or universities, *"We have to show that we believe in the place"*, Westermark argues.

Collaborative networks are also needed, and people need to be using them. Håkan Westermark refers to one factory producing beds and employing around 100 people, as an example. One individual was particularly active and received investment from the region, from the government and from abroad. Attracting investment often depends on very small factors. In this case it was also due to good connections with a German, who helped to sell their products to a larger retailer in Finland and in Germany. Another good example is the LEADER programme, which funded the planning of a multi-use building in Närpes (see below).

According to Håkan Westermark, foreigners do pretty well in the greenhouse sector, some of them opening shops and starting up new companies. In that sense, he also perceives differences between Närpes and other places. An important question concerns what the situation will be for their children in the future? Will they stay in Närpes or move elsewhere?

Many people, including those with a higher level of education, commute from Närpes to Vaasa to work, travelling by bus for example. Physical infrastructure still requires improvement, according to Westermark. He and his company Dynamo, together with the Regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY-Centre), have supported the development of digital infrastructure and have fought for investment for broadband facilities. *"If the market mechanism is not sufficient, the town needs to step in"*, he argues.

Public policy and public-private collaboration to foster attractiveness Healthcare – provided with neighbouring municipalities

The provision of healthcare and care for the elderly is working quite well, according to Mayor Hans-Erik Lindqvist. To provide these services, a new organisation was established in 2009. This is the K5 Social and Primary Healthcare Council of Coastal Ostrobothnia. K5 organises social and primary health care in the municipalities of Malax, Korsnäs, Närpes, Kaskö and Kristinestad.

In consultation with its member municipalities, K5 determines the scope, quality and production method for each service. Most of the services are ordered by the member municipalities. In addition, the municipal council can arrange services through procurement involving third parties. The joint municipality is bi-lingual, with Swedish as the administrative language. K5 organises a service centre for the elderly. Psycho-social facilities, drug advice, psychotherapy, and so on, are also organised under the auspices of K5. Telemedicine has been in use for several years already. Serviced apartments were built in various villages to enable elderly people to go on living where they are, instead of being forced to move to the centre. (This is currently under evaluation.) Overall, according to Lindqvist, the per capita costs are fairly low compared to the quality of service provided.

Among the concomitant challenges is a shortage of doctors. At the end of 2018, four out of six positions were filled. Sometimes doctors come from Sweden. There was an expectation that if healthcare and regional reforms (known as SOTE – which were not implemented in the end) were placed under the auspices of regional councils, the situation might improve, it is believed. Mayor Lindqvist fears that decision-making might suffer in these circumstances, but that, correspondingly, things might improve from an organisational perspective.

Infrastructure and housing

A recurrent issue raised by most interviewees is the need for maintaining and improving road and rail infrastructure. Both of these are of vital importance for the economy. *“We need good connections for a living rural area and all investments will come back”*, Hans-Erik Lindqvist, Närpes' Mayor, stresses. Many interviewees referred to highway 8/E75 and to the train connections to Seinäjoki, both in terms of commuting and for the transportation of products produced in Närpes. The former needs to be improved and there is collaboration across regions to raise the funds. Proposals by the former Centre-party led government to discontinue the train link to Kaskinen harbour was met with a great deal of misunderstanding by many interviewees.

While school bus services are good, the bus system could still be improved, according to Mayor Lindqvist.

Elderly people have been moving to centre, while immigrants buy their houses in less central areas of Närpes. Families are also finding plots on which to build houses for themselves.

Education and the vocational school – answering the needs of businesses and integrating immigrants

There are seven primary schools, one secondary school and one upper-secondary in Närpes. Further education is also provided by a vocational school, the Närpes Adult Institute, and the Legato Music Institute.

The Vocational College of Ostrobothnia has around 2,200 students, with 400 at the Närpes campus. The curriculum includes logistics, metalwork and welding, construction, business and administration, information technology (IT), and homecare. Students can apply all year round, but the courses on offer vary. For example, logistics is offered twice a year, while other courses are provided almost every week. There is also a dormitory attached to the school. Study programmes last two to three years. One out of the three years will usually be spent on practical work and/or at companies. The timetable is made as flexible as possible, and students have individual study plans. Around half of students are in adult education and this proportion is expected to grow.

With around a quarter of students foreign-born, the school also plays an important role in integrating immigrants into the local labour market and community. Many of the adult students work in the greenhouses and are preparing for a new profession. While non-EU residents have a work permit to work in greenhouses, and cannot work in other professions, they are allowed to take an education in another area. Also, while language issues were a potential problem in the past, the school has now started to offer fast-track education and students are not required to master Swedish anymore. In late 2018, a pilot project on welding techniques was initiated by the national government. The purpose was to satisfy high demand from the Närpes Trä & Metall (NTM) company, which was in urgent need of welders. So, while national legislation and language have been initial obstacles, there are high hopes that the pilot study will help in overcoming these problems, and that this will enable people employed in greenhouses to find alternative jobs.

This pilot study was the result of close collaboration between the school, Närpes municipality, the Regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY-Centre) and the company NTM. The ELY-Centre helped with the development of the pilot and the Finnish government has supported it financially. The pilot will last for a year and will be evaluated afterwards by the government. It was designed for 30 people, and all the available places were filled almost immediately. Instruction will be in both English and Swedish, with the assistance of an interpreter. In 2018, a delegation from the school visited other schools in Bosnia and Croatia in order to build networks with the places where many of the immigrants who are now in Närpes were originally born. An initial idea has been to develop an EU project enabling Bosnians and Croatians to work in teaching, as well as additional courses being taught by native speakers of these languages. Various departments are also working on particular projects. International student exchange programmes are also an option.

According to head teacher Kjell Langels, the number of people in adult education is growing and the future therefore looks bright. However, there is a continuing trend of lower demand and lower applications from younger students. *“While five years ago we had around 100 applications, now there are around 60. The low birth rate is one explanation,”* says the head teacher. But the reality is that most students find a job after the school.

Among the things that need improving is a good highway connection and better rail links to and from Närpes in order to connect with the ports in Vaasa and Turku.

What about the future? According to Kjell Langels, the greenhouse business will probably grow. The other two larger companies, NTM and Närko, have found their own niches, producing high-tech garbage trucks and trailers respectively. While the two metal companies are focused on (and depend on) exports, greenhouse businesses mainly concentrate on domestic markets at the moment.

Immigration policy –the Närpes model

What researchers describe as ‘Model Närpes’ (e.g. Ivars, 2012) refers back to a long history of immigration and the institutionalisation of integration activities. This includes the conscious integration of children in daycare facilities and schools, as well as bringing their parents into the cultural life of their new home municipality. Närpes was the first

municipality outside the largest city regions to receive immigrants after the late 1980s, and it has continued to do so ever since.

Immigration Timeline:

- 1988–1992, Vietnamese refugees.
- 1992–2002, Bosnian refugees.
- 2002–Serbo-Croats.
- During the 2000s, labour immigration (greenhouses – see below)
- 2014–2015, Sudanese refugees.
- 2015–Asylum seekers from Syria and the Middle East.

The way the first refugees were received some 30 years ago has laid the foundations of today’s situation, with over 14% of Närpes’ residents having a background overseas. The structures for the integration of incomers have been developed since the 1980s and 1990s.

In the early 2000s, employers began to consider the need for labour immigration. Närpes is a small place. This is good for cross-sectoral cooperation between the local authorities, employers and the third (voluntary) sector. The integration structure and model consists of several different elements: work, housing, language training and the provision of a social infrastructure.

Children from an immigrant background are integrated into the normal daycare activities of the area. People with different cultural and national backgrounds support the children. There is continuous staff training to manage daycare on a multicultural basis.

For older children, language classes are offered during their first year of arriving at school. After that, students participate in regular classes, but support teaching and assistance with interpretation offered when needed. Åbo Akademi University’s pedagogical faculty in Vaasa is responsible for the continuing education programme for teachers, including a module entitled ‘Our Multicultural School’. There is also provision for immigrants at Ostrobothnia’s folk high school, SÖFF, which is for young adults.

In addition, Närpes opened a new ‘Welcome Office’ in 2012. This is an advisory and guidance centre for immigrants and others who might need a variety of information, including:

- Information during the initial stages/step-by-step guide to a new country
- Providing information on which authorities are responsible for what
- Language courses, vocational training and further education
- Additional information provided to employers.

The municipality can now look back at more than two decades of immigration policy, implemented (and recently further institutionalised) through a specially dedicated immigration unit and the Welcome Office. The municipality helps with an integration course, which is organised during the winter months, while most activities are in winter hibernation. Courses offer Swedish language training and lectures about Finnish society, rules and norms. Day care centres and local schools are welcoming to the children of greenhouse workers.

Researchers have spoken of the 'Närpes Model' in this regard (e.g. Mattila and Björklund, 2013). This model builds on the reliable availability of jobs, the infrastructure of a small community, and the positive attitude of the local population. Throughout its immigration history, most of Närpes' residents have been welcoming towards immigrants. Another recent study (Ekberg and Östman 2017) concluded that integration in line with the Närpes model generally works pretty well, but the situation is more complex than the official image, and mutual acceptance was lacking in some of the interviews conducted for this study.

Consequently, and for this case study, we interviewed an immigrant family from Bosnia to discover what their perspective and experience has been.

What makes the place attractive – insights from an immigrant family

In the family we interviewed, the husband's sister had informed him about jobs in the greenhouse business in Närpes. He started working there in 2012, commuting in three-month intervals between Närpes and Bosnia. The husband's job has not changed much since coming to Finland. He still works in the largest greenhouse. Work there, according to him, is *"not so hard, but sometimes the place is too warm. Also, women are working there."* The reason he gave for immigration to Finland was working in the greenhouse business. Immigrants are required to work for five years there, as their visa is specifically connected to greenhouse work-

ing. This man would be interested in switching to another sector, but he considers his language skills insufficient at present.

His wife's story is quite different. She worked as a teacher in Bosnia, where the families' oldest son was also born. She came to Närpes in 2014 and worked in a greenhouse for a year. The work was hard for her. Until the birth of their youngest child and her maternity leave, she attended language school for around six months. Later, she also attended a course for foreigners at the vocational school, learning about Finland and its society. Two months after finishing this course, and through the support of one of her teachers, she found a job as an after-school teacher. Later, she was able to work for the city of Närpes as a religion teacher focussing on Muslim studies, commuting between five different schools. She has between two and 15 pupils.

The wife says: *"It may seem nothing special, but the most important thing is financial security, to ensure that our kids are fine and able to learn fast. Our oldest is the best pupil in the whole third class."* Her hopes for the future are that she can continue to work in the school system and that her language skills will improve further. Her husband hopes to learn Swedish and eventually to be able to switch jobs. Overall, they see their future in Närpes. *"We like smaller places. It also feels safe for our kids. They can go to the shops on their own and traffic is not a problem."*

Both refer to the welcoming environment they experienced when they came to Närpes. Right from the start, people were helpful. *"Finnish people are kind,"* they say. Their oldest boy likes to go to school. He enjoys drawing, which is his favourite subject. He takes a taxi to school (8 km from their home). The youngest son (who is six) started in a special language group for five weeks, after which he will attend pre-school. He has friends who speak Swedish as their mother tongue.

Critique and things to improve

The father in this family has worked in the same greenhouse for five years and only receives the minimum salary. There has only been one wage increase in the past five years. This is due to the fact that the greenhouse pays the minimum wage. This family would like to see a higher proportion of the successful company's profits put back into its workers' paylips. This is particularly important

due to inflation, higher rents, living costs, and so on. *"We have less income because of the minimum wage,"* the father says. However, changes in the Aliens Act, which came into force on 1 June 2019 will make it easier for foreigner workers, including those in the greenhouse sector, to move on to the metal sector.⁵⁰ In the case of Närpes, this is a positive step forward in response to local needs.

An attractive place for developing and maintaining businesses – green smart specialisation

The case of Jonathan Nordberg and the närpes vegetable cooperative

Looking at the structure of business in Närpes for 2018, 56% of all jobs are in the service sector combined, 20.3% are in manufacturing and construction, and 22.2% are in agriculture and forestry (Source: City of Närpes – see also Figure V.11.3., for individual sectors). Agriculture stands out as a particularly significant sector. We will, therefore, focus in on greenhouse cultivation before shedding further light on the culture of entrepreneurship in Närpes.

Närpes Vegetable Cooperative was founded in 1957 to market the region's greenhouses. The cooperative is owned by 37 growers, with many farmers continuing a long family tradition and many farms being family run.

Farmers are able to learn from each other and do not have to compete. Profits are shared between the members of the cooperative. Närpes Vegetable Cooperative is the country's leading supplier of domestic tomatoes. Its produce includes different varieties of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and chillies. Between 80 to 90 % of tomatoes and 60 to 70% of cucumbers produced in Finland are from Närpes. More than 95% of vegetables grown by the cooperative are produced using renewable, local thermal energy. The company also cultivates indigenous vegetables. The average distance from each farmer to the packing centre is 13 km.

Jonathan Nordberg, who was interviewed for this case study, is part of the third generation in greenhouse crop cultivation.

On 14,500 m², he cultivates steak tomatoes and bead tomatoes. Jonathan currently has seven em-

ployees, but in busier periods he hires more people. Since his parents own a greenhouse, it was fairly easy for him to go into the business himself, although he started his career differently. After 11 years in the business and a good deal of learning Jonathan has witnessed many transformations, with just four growers starting business and 250 growers closing down. Twenty years you needed to go to the greenhouse for everything, but Nordberg explains: *"Now you more or less take the house with you and receive feedback via your smartphone. In fact, there are many things measured in relation to the plants which can now be reported to you in real time."*

Among the enablers for, and transformation of, the greenhouse business in Närpes are:

- Marketing and selling through the cooperative
- Smarter greenhouses.
- Advanced packing technology
- Automation
- Cooperation, alongside healthy competition
- More specialisation on specific products.

Branding proved to be a crucial step in the development of the cooperative. Prior to the beginning of active branding about five years ago, a consumer survey was conducted. This showed that fewer than 10% of Finns knew about Närpes. Now this figure is over 50%. Branding, improved production quality and shelf-life and new distribution channels – these all had a huge impact on the quantity of sales. While five years ago about 200,000 units were sold, the cooperative went on to sell more than 10 million units in 2018. One person is now employed full-time for marketing purposes and *"to show that our products are better than others"*. One challenge in the development strategy is to convince those who are sceptical about producing in the far North to understand the advantages.

Sustainability Challenges and Opportunities

While Jonathan Nordberg believes that the future of agriculture looks bright, and that more people will be eating more vegetables (reinforcing the need for additional greenhouses), there are a number of challenges to solve.

Location is both a challenge and an advantage at same time. On the one hand, the location *"is great because it has lots of opportunities and possibilities"*. According to Nordberg, the carbon emission is lower compared to other parts of Europe,

⁵⁰ For instance, "if a foreign employee who has worked in Finland with a residence permit as an employee for at least one year wishes to change occupation, the Employment and Economic Development Office will no longer carry out labour market testing". See Finnish Immigration Service information (2019).



A greenhouse in Närpes. Photo: Tomas Salinka

for example. Shortage of water is not a problem in Finland, either. As with other farmers, Nordberg uses biological (organic) substances for disinfection and for pest management. There is no great need for pesticides, and most of those used are organic. From a sustainability point of view, the use of plastics for packaging needs to be looked at further. According to Nordberg, there is good plastic and bad plastic. He also reminds us that the use of plastic keeps products fresh for longer a longer period and increases shelf-life.

Logistics are something of a challenge too, and better access to rail services and main roads is needed, especially to facilitate better access to the larger cities. "National politics does not take care of that".⁵¹ In spite of this, Nordberg says that Närpes remains several steps ahead of the domestic competition – for instance in terms of direct delivery to a large German-owned supermarket chain, with no long storage requirement. "We sell directly. They are very flexible. We can call on Friday and get our products onto their shelves during the following week", Nordberg explains. Flexibility is highly valued, as there is no way of reliably predicting the harvest. A quick response on the part of the retailer is therefore required.

From an economic and environmental sustainability perspective, production patterns have changed over the years. According to Nordberg, subsidies to support production are not necessary. Instead, farmers need support for making investments, especially in greener technology. Most

greenhouses in the cooperative are heated with biowaste and renewables. The goal here is to have 100% renewable heating. Fuels include wood, bio-energy and peat.

The workforce is mainly recruited from outside Finland, including from countries outside the EU. A labour law exemption makes this possible. In the late 1980s, it was refugees coming in with their families who were finding work in the greenhouses. According to Jonathan Nordberg, integration was more difficult then compared to now, especially because of the language barrier.

In addition to foreigners, greenhouses also attract a few Finnish workers, not least from neighbouring municipalities. But overall, because wages are not high, interest among Finns is rather limited. Nordberg compares the situation of workers



Jonathan Nordberg (left) introduces Nordregio researcher M. Kull to his business, and to tomato growing. Photo: A-S. Backgren

⁵¹ A reference to the Sipilä government, which was in power until 2019.

here to the attitude of employers in other parts of Europe and argues that Finns are now ready to pay more. According to him, there is *"pride and understanding that we are bringing jobs to Finland."* He continues: *"The Dutch are very good at cutting costs. But I don't want to follow that model. I'm happy with things as they are, knowing that workers have better conditions here."* In fact, Jonathan Nordberg sees his workers as long-term investments. *"I want people to like to work here. I want to have a good reputation, as this attracts new staff."* Currently, 19 out of 24 of his employees are from Vietnam.

Food for thought for political decision-makers

Much depends on who sits in government in Helsinki and Brussels. Politicians at this level, when asked to help with solving local problems, often choose "the path of least resistance," according to Nordberg. *"We are in the front line and we are detached. Local politicians are more accessible. Others seem to lack responsibility for people here (...) and have their own agendas. Populism is not the solution,"* he says. With regard to the EU, Nordberg feels that you should be able to "decide locally what is good for us." He does not want to see a similar development to the Netherlands, where there are huge greenhouses. Instead, he is proud to see the cooperative work with much smaller units. He also criticises what he sees as "the strong Spanish lobby in Brussels and the EU institutions" and being able to conduct "bogus marketing and labelling" for organic products.

Håkan Westermark thinks that agriculture will remain an important part of Närpes' economy. In the future there may well need to be other types of farms, he says. Potentially, new types of products will be produced in the fields. Production costs are higher in Finland when compared to the Netherlands, for instance. While a lot of manual work is required in the greenhouses at the moment, the nature of the work in the future remains a big question, especially due to increasing automation.

A culture of collaboration and entrepreneurialism

"Here in Närpes we work together and find ways to suitable for our needs. It is a lively city and always 'on the go'," Cisse Grönholm from the Hotel Red and Green explains. As in other case studies, one ingredient for a thriving and attractive place to live and work is a particularly entrepreneurial culture. "We do things ourselves and we collabo-

rate", Grönholm adds. The hotel is part of a new multi-purpose building with many different types of services and amenities "under one roof". With the support of an EU LEADER project, the city built the building to satisfy a variety of needs. It provides a good hotel, venues for cultural events and films, medical and dental services, office and meeting space in the heart of the city, as well as a venue for art exhibitions. Of course, there was also some opposition to the building.

For the hotel, the city looked for a genuine entrepreneur to run the business. Cisse Grönholm, interviewed for this study, was engaged for that purpose in 2012 and was able to open the hotel and restaurant in 2014. She was able to influence the design, and the city's openness to her own ideas "was a fantastic experience". She invested about €1 million in the project and employs around 15 people. The hotel has 30 rooms. Most of the guests are business people. The hotel has filled a niche, because Närpes previously lacked new hotels that were easily accessible and had meeting rooms.

Grönholm also refers to some of the challenges involved, such as the degree of acceptance of outsiders. So, as an entrepreneur from outside Närpes, she decided *"to win and convince one person from Närpes every day. It took time, about a year, but then I was accepted."* One idea was to offer special lunch deals for elderly people. This improved her image and word spread.

Another challenge is to find the right people to work in services, especially people able to communicate in three languages (Swedish, English and Finnish). Grönholm has high hopes that the latest reforms in education will help. These allow vocational schools to customise teaching to suit the needs of both entrepreneurs and pupils. A minimum of five people is needed for this purpose, and the teaching can be adapted to the schedules and needs of both groups, integrating education and teaching into the enterprise itself to a greater extent. Since it is particularly challenging to attract young people, *"You need to teach them; which is why people have high expectations of these reforms."*

Overall, Grönholm believes that the city can look to the future with an optimistic attitude. *"We are in Närpes and people realise that we exist, that we do good things, and that maybe we are different to what you would get in the larger cities. But people are always positively surprised."*

Other than the challenges above, she had no real criticism. *"I want to be here, as you can have a*



Photo: Tomas Salinka

positive impact. There is no 'det går inte' (this does not work). We look for solutions together. After all, it is a small place and we have to work with each other."

An attractive place for living – culture, sport and healthy social spaces, plus youth perspectives on the future

To understand the current situation of young people, students from Närpes Upper Secondary School were interviewed in October 2018. What makes the place attractive for them, what are their plans for the future and what are the challenges of the place from their viewpoint? In addition to the students, Mikael Snickars, the headmaster of Närpes Upper Secondary School, was also interviewed.

Around 140 students are studying at the school, including young people from Kristinestad and Kaskinen. The students interviewed all live close to the school, but they pointed to the fact that the municipality operates a school bus for students who need to commute. Most of the older students have driving licenses. "Everyone owns a car, but we should change that thinking. Rather than using cars, we need to change our attitude. But the reality is that since everyone owns a car, nobody is using the bus anymore."

All the students said that they had very good opportunities for after school activities. The orchestra, which has been playing for more than 60 years, was especially praised. In their spare time,

students like to play football, ice hockey, or take/run dancing courses in their school.

"It is a small place, and it is modern", one student stressed. An important element in the quality of life of the place is what students and Westermarck called 'social spaces'. This includes cultural amenities like theatres, sports provision, and other facilities people need, such as gyms (Table V.11.1. next page).

The city of Vaasa is also fairly close by, offering additional cultural and other amenities. Asked about how they see the integration of immigrants, students said that they thought the municipality treats them well. The greenhouses provide many jobs, including for refugees. The students think it is mainly immigrants who work in them. They meet immigrant children in school, but also during leisure activities and because of shared hobbies. "Immigrant children have good opportunities here. They take part in leisure activities, but they also have their own groups. The cultural café in the city square is one meeting point but we also meet privately," the students explained.

Asked about their future, all of the students interviewed wanted to move to other parts of Finland to study. The Swedish speaking Åbo Akademi was referred to frequently. One of the students said that it is "very common to go there; you are not alone there."

The problem for some is coming back and finding jobs after higher education. It has proved dif-

Table V.11.1. Culture and Sports in Närpes

Cultural Activities	Sports Activities and Facilities
Närpes Art Club	Swimming and sports halls
Photo Club Focus	Mosedals sports field
Närpes School music classes	Ice rink
Närpes Theatre	Bowling
Active youth associations	Tennis
Local folklore	Gym
Museums	Vargbergets fritidscentrum
Focus Photo Club	Twenty sports clubs

difficult for people with higher levels of education to find jobs in Närpes. Some choose to live in Närpes and commute to Vaasa. Another interviewee saw the 'brain drain' Närpes is facing as a challenge but said that if she wants to find a job here, she will be able to return. But first she wants to travel, see the world and study. Then she will be return at some point after that.

Another student stressed that a lot depends on the type of job you find. As an "economist it might be harder, and I may be better off staying in a larger company and not returning." Another student wants to be an interior designer and does not see many opportunities for her profession. But she would consider moving back when starting a family. Students do see their parents as a model in this regard – people who went abroad to study and work, and then returned enriched by the experience.

In a situation like this, when students are undecided, strategies to attract them back are important. A member of the Nordic Thematic Group for Sustainable Rural Development, Ann-Sofi Backgren, emphasises that many municipalities in the region of Ostrobothnia have discussed ways of attracting young people to return. "The culture and spirit of entrepreneurialism are among the qualities that might convince students to come back to the place", she explains.

Asked about what he sees as the most attractive resources in Närpes, Snickars adds that one advantage of living in here is the family connec-

tions and bonds. It is a safe place to live and the cultural amenities, including the theatre and the orchestra, are good. There is a lively sports scene and the integration of foreigners seems to work well. "We are growing, we enjoy a range of possibilities, and the world has become smaller through infrastructure development, job hopping and so on," Snickars adds. Overall, he believes that Närpes has invested well in its future.

Conclusion

This study has combined quantitative analyses of net migration patterns and local employment patterns with qualitative interviews featuring business representatives, the public sector, headmasters, students and families. Through this mixed method, we have been able to identify the different reasons underlying various positive trends and the overall attractiveness of Närpes, as well as a number of the challenges that lie ahead.

We found that there is a good education system and close collaboration between businesses, with the vocational school providing customised education to suit the needs of the local economy. The public sector – both at municipal and regional level – is able to support this. To integrate people from various cultures, a distinctive immigration policy, known to some as the "Närpes Model" has been developed over the past few decades. Healthcare is provided in collaboration with neighbouring municipalities. Interviewees stressed that the place is an attractive one for quality-of-life due to a good menu of cultural and sporting activities.

The availability of jobs for more highly educated people is a particular problem, and many of them travel to nearby Vaasa. Another challenge was switching jobs from the greenhouses to other sectors. However, amendments to the Aliens Act that came into force on 1 June 2019, make it easier for foreigner workers, notably in the greenhouse sector, to move to the metal sector. Many interviewees also felt that there was a need to maintain and improve road and rail links to other parts of Finland, particularly for the purposes of exporting local products. There was also a feeling that the previous government had overlooked Närpes because it is a Swedish-speaking rural area.

Table V.11.2. summarises good practices and the main reasons underlying the attractiveness of Närpes, as well as the obstacles and challenges it faces. These enable us to see drivers for both demand- and supply-driven migration.

Table V.11.2. Attractiveness in Närpes and obstacles/challenges to overcome

Good practices and reasons underlying attractiveness	Obstacles and challenges
<p>Access to public services Availability of different public services, including schools. Health care provided in cooperation with neighbouring municipalities.</p> <p>Culture, sport, recreation An attractive place for living – good cultural and sporting amenities.</p> <p>Education Good education system/vocational school – answering the needs of businesses and integrating immigrants.</p> <p>Employment and jobs An attractive place for developing and maintaining businesses, especially the greenhouse sector. Recent changes in the Aliens Act, making it easier for foreigner workers to move to other sectors.</p> <p>Entrepreneurial culture A collaborative and entrepreneurial culture.</p> <p>Housing Immigrant families buying houses from elderly people in the villages/elderly people moving to the centre. Immigration A well-functioning immigration policy – the 'Närpes Model'.</p> <p>Quality-of-life and local community An attractive place to live due to 'healthy social spaces' and the perception of it being a safe place.</p> <p>Young people – living, staying/returning Young people's perception of the place as an attractive one, inclusive of immigrants.</p>	<p>Employment & jobs Lack of availability of jobs for more highly educated people. Switching jobs from greenhouses to other sectors perceived as not easy by some interviewees, but support mechanisms (schooling, legislation change) are in place. The latter includes changes in the Aliens Act as of the beginning of June 2019.</p> <p>Infrastructure and transport Road and rail connections to access other parts of Finland and beyond.</p> <p>Location Feeling of being 'overlooked' by decision-makers in Helsinki and Brussels.</p> <p>Young people, staying/returning Lack of availability of jobs for more highly educated people.</p>

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