

# THE KVARKEN FERRY LINK

and its importance in cross-border  
cooperation and integration

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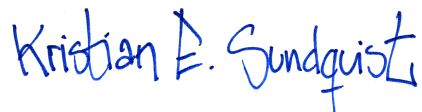
# Preface

As part of the Nordic Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017–2020, three Nordic thematic groups have been established in the following areas:

1. Sustainable rural development
2. Innovative and resilient regions
3. Sustainable cities and urban development

The groups have been set up by the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R), under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Sustainable Growth, and the members are representatives of relevant ministries, national authorities, regional authorities and cross-border co-operation committees. One purpose of the thematic groups is to implement the co-operation programme by contributing to the exchange of knowledge and experience between regional policy stakeholders, by promoting Nordic perspectives and by highlighting the importance of regional policy issues for sustainable development and growth.

This report is part of the Transport for Regional Integration in Border Regions (TRIBORDER) project. The purpose of TRIBORDER is to analyse the potential challenges in planning and developing transport connections across national borders in the Nordic region. The project consists of three parts, each of which will contribute to the work of the Nordic Thematic Group for Sustainable cities and urban development 2017–2020. The first part focuses on how small and medium-sized cities may benefit from the introduction of a high-speed train connection between Oslo and Stockholm. The present report addresses the second part of the project, focusing on the Kvarken region and the effects of the ferry connection between Umeå and Vaasa on their surrounding regions. The third part concentrates on connectivity and urban planning in small and medium-sized cities in relation to the train accessibility within the cross-border region of Greater Copenhagen. The authors wish to thank all of the interviewees, Mathias Lindström at the Kvarken Council and everyone who read draft versions of the report and provided valuable support along the way.



*Kristian Elleby Sundquist  
Chair of the Nordic thematic group  
Sustainable Cities and Urban Development*



# Summary

Focusing on the ferry connection between the Swedish city Umeå and the Finnish city Vaasa, this report examines how cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region has evolved and investigates cross-border integration using the ferry connection as the basis of analysis. The study examines the past and current states of cross-border cooperation and integration in the Kvarken region, and explores the potential for stronger cross-border integration in the future.

This report shows that a reliable transport link has been central to maintaining and developing cross-border relations in the Kvarken region. Sea traffic has been the lifeline enabling cross-border interactions and exchanges throughout the centuries, and cross-border cooperation has remained largely dependent on the ferry connection until this day. Over the decades, the depth and breadth of cooperation between the Finnish and Swedish sides of Kvarken have followed changes in the ferry connection. From the 1970s onwards, passenger traffic over the Kvarken Strait increased significantly, and cross-border cooperation became more established and varied. However, the abolishment of tax-free sales on the Kvarken ferry in 1999 was, in many ways, a turning point that led to a significant decline in traffic and had a severe, negative effect on cross-border relations. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been described as a low point in cross-border cooperation across Kvarken, because the unstable and limited ferry connection between Vaasa and Umeå made it difficult to maintain and develop the economic, social, and cultural ties that had been established during previous decades.

Following this period of decline, joint actions were taken by actors on the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Kvarken region to reinstate a new, stable ferry connection in 2012, highlighting the importance of this traffic link to both parties. The arguments for reinstating the ferry link focused not only on improving connectivity, but on providing a new basis for re-strengthening cross-border relations and developing stronger synergies across the region, which were considered to depend on a reliable traffic link allowing frequent travel. The reinstated ferry connection has had numerous direct and indirect effects on both sides of the Kvarken Strait, such as cooperation within research, education, healthcare, and tourism, as well as new forms of cooperation between businesses, all of which suggest that cross-border cooperation has strengthened and expanded during the most recent decade. Based on this study, central actors involved in cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region generally feel that newly emerged cooperation initiatives have also led to a stronger belief in the potential benefits and synergies that can be achieved by working together, which has, in turn, led to additional spin-offs and opportunities. While there are remaining challenges and barriers to further integrating the Kvarken region, in a long-term perspective, cross-border cooperation in many areas appear to be on a more solid foundation than in the past.

# Sammanfattning

I denna rapport används färjeförbindelsen mellan Umeå och Vasa som utgångspunkt för att studera hur det gränsöverskridande samarbetet i Kvarkenregionen har utvecklats över tid. Rapporten granskar hur samarbetet har sett ut förut, hur det ser ut idag samt diskuterar potentialen för starkare gränsöverskridande integration i regionen i framtiden. Studien visar att en pålitlig transportlänk har varit central för att upprätthålla och utveckla relationerna mellan de finska och svenska delarna av Kvarkenregionen. Sjöfarten har historiskt sett varit livsviktig för att möjliggöra samarbete och utbyte och färjeförbindelsens betydelse är fortfarande central.

Under de senaste årtiondena har vidden och djupet av samarbetet fluktuerat beroende på förändringar som har påverkat färjeförbindelsen. Från 1970-talet framåt ökade passagerartrafiken över Kvarken avsevärt och det gränsöverskridande samarbetet blev mer etablerat och mångsidigt. 1999 avskaffades taxfree-försäljningen på Kvarkenfärjan. Det ledde till en kraftig minskning av passagerartrafiken och negativa konsekvenser för de gränsöverskridande relationerna. Under det första årtiondet av 2000-talet var färjeförbindelsen mellan Umeå och Vasa bristfällig vilket gjorde det svårt att upprätthålla och utveckla de ekonomiska, sociala och kulturella band som hade knutits under föregående årtionden. Efter denna nedgång beslutade aktörer på den finska respektive svenska sidan av Kvarken att återinföra en ny och stabil färjeförbindelse år 2012, något som underströk betydelsen av förbindelsen för båda parter. Samtidigt var motivet inte endast att skapa en tillförlitlig transportlänk för passagerare och gods utan även att förbättra förutsättningarna för att skapa starkare synergier mellan såväl privata som offentliga aktörer och innovatörer i Kvarkenregionen.

Den återinförda färjeförbindelsen har haft många direkta och indirekta effekter på båda sidorna av Kvarken. Exempelvis har nya former för samarbete utvecklats inom forskning, utbildning, sjukvård, turism och andra industrisektorer under det senaste årtiondet. Enligt denna studie upplever centrala aktörer inom Kvarkensamarbetet att dessa nya partnerskap har bidragit till en starkare tro på de potentiella fördelarna och synergier som kan uppnås genom att arbeta tillsammans, vilket i sin tur har lett till fler nya samarbetsinitiativ och möjligheter. Trots att det fortfarande finns utmaningar och hinder för att skapa en ännu mer integrerad Kvarkenregion visar studien att samarbetet nu vilar på en starkare grund än tidigare.

# 1. Introduction

Cooperation between bordering regions has long been an important element among the Nordic countries. This element is based on the notion that these regions are often peripheral within their respective countries and, therefore, have much to gain by collaborating across national borders. However, the borders themselves can restrict free movement for businesses and workers. Many solutions for providing services, commuting, business development, and increasing freedom of movement across border regions have been developed within the context of Nordic cooperation, such as through Nordic cross-border cooperation committees and with support from various programmes. As stated in the Nordic Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017–2020, successful collaboration can create an integrated and cohesive border region that promotes development, innovation, and growth (Nordic Council of Ministers 2017).

The present study focuses on cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region, around the Gulf of Bothnia, which separates Finland and Sweden. Cross-border interaction has occurred across the Kvarken Strait for centuries, with well-established cooperation throughout Kvarken dating to the early 1970s. As the Kvarken region is separated by a body of water, the Kvarken Strait, sea traffic has played a pivotal role throughout the history of this exchange.

Focusing on the ferry connection between the Swedish city Umeå and the Finnish city Vaasa, this report examines how cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region has evolved and investigates how the ferry connection increases cross-border integration. The purpose is to examine the past and current states of cross-border cooperation and integration in the Kvarken region, and to explore the potential for stronger cross-border integration in the future. The study addresses three main questions:

1. What role does the ferry link between Umeå and Vaasa play for cross-border cooperation and integration in the Kvarken region?
2. What effects has the re-establishment of the ferry connection in 2012 had on the region?
3. What potential is there for stronger cross-border cooperation and integration in the future?

This report is based on interviews and desk research. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with various local and regional actors from Finland and Sweden, all of whom work with cross-border issues in Kvarken (see references for list of interviewees). The research material also consists of research and policy reports, media articles, and statistics.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 defines and positions the Kvarken region in a wider Nordic context. Chapter 3 discusses the rise and the demise of the Kvarken traffic in a long-term perspective until the end of the 1990s. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the re-establishment of the ferry connection in 2012 and discusses what effects this has had on cross-border cooperation during the past decade. Finally, chapter 6 concludes with a discussion of the main research findings and about the future potential for deeper cooperation.



## 2. Positioning the Kvarken region in a Nordic context

The close ties that have long existed between the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Kvarken region are related to the two countries' shared history and geographic proximity. Finland was part of Sweden for around 700 years, from the mid-1100s to the early-1800s and, as crossing the Kvarken Strait is the shortest passage over the Gulf of Bothnia, it has long played a pivotal role in linking the two countries, particularly the regions of Västerbotten on the Swedish side and Ostrobothnia on the Finnish side. The distance from coast to coast is approximately 80 km, while roughly 25 km separate the outermost Finnish and Swedish islands. Because these distances are so small, the northern parts of the Swedish kingdom were ruled from Ostrobothnia between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and frequent transport of people and goods over the Strait has occurred for centuries (Kvarken Council n.d.). These factors have provided the foundation for established cross-border relations and cooperation between the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Kvarken Strait.

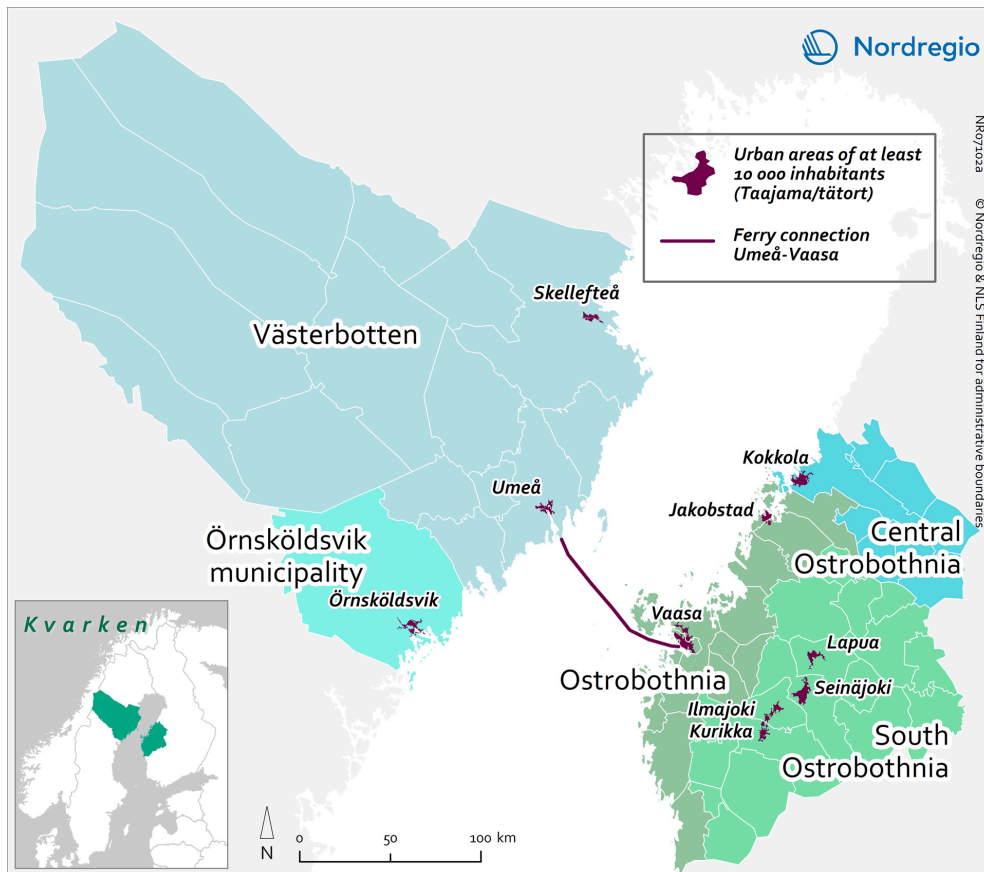


Figure 1. The Kvarken region.

Map by Oskar Penje.

## Defining and delimiting Kvarken

The exact boundaries of the Kvarken region have shifted over time. The current definition of the Kvarken region is based on established cross-border cooperation overseen by the Kvarken Council. The Kvarken Council is a cross-border cooperation association uniting the Finnish regional councils of Ostrobothnia, South Ostrobothnia, and Central Ostrobothnia, including the cities Vaasa, Kokkola, Seinäjoki, and Jakobstad, and the Swedish Regional Council of Västerbotten and municipality of Örnsköldsvik (see figure 1). However, as will be discussed further below, the Kvarken cooperation is not strictly confined to those regions and municipalities. This is the case especially recently, as cooperation has expanded, both geographically and thematically, to include more actors and stakeholders beyond the immediate Kvarken region.

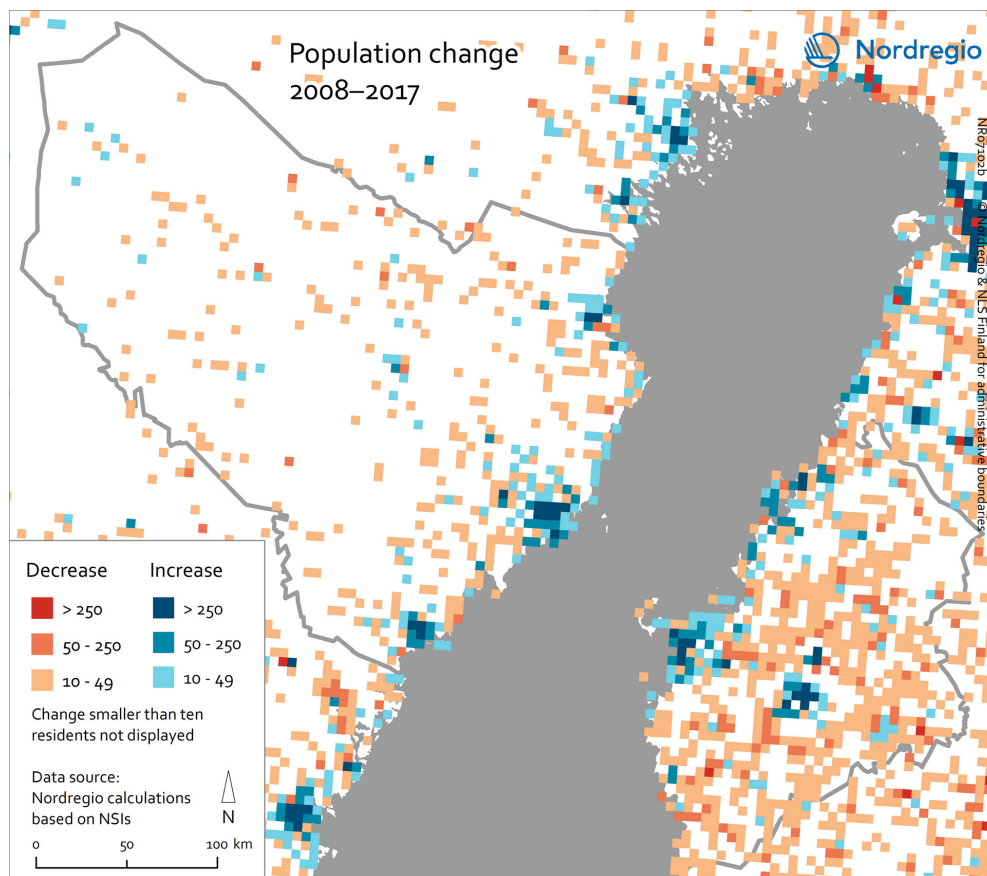
## Demographic characteristics and development

The total population of the Kvarken region, as defined by the regions and municipalities that are members of the Kvarken Council, was around 765,000 in 2018, of whom around 440,000 live on the Finnish side and 325,000 on the Swedish side. More than half of the Kvarken population resides in the six most populated municipalities: Umeå (125,080), Skellefteå (72,723), Vaasa (67,392), Seinäjoki (62,676), Örnsköldsvik (56,139), and Kokkola (44,168) (table 1). In contrast, 40 of the region's 56 municipalities are sparsely populated, with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants each in 2018.

As shown in table 1 and figure 2, the Kvarken region has undergone highly unbalanced population development. While the region's total population increased from around 750,000 to 765,000 between 1990 and 2018, only 10 of the 56 Kvarken municipalities saw a population increase during this period. The most significant population increase occurred in Umeå (35,076), while notable population growth also occurred in Seinäjoki (15,961) and Vaasa (9,120). Furthermore, 46 of the 56 Kvarken municipalities have experienced a population decrease during the last two decades. Population projections through 2030 suggest that the urban regions of Umeå, Seinäjoki, and Vaasa will continue to grow, while a population decrease will continue in other areas, particularly Västerbotten (Sánchez Gassen 2018).

The Kvarken region is also heterogeneous in terms of the age distribution of its population. This is particularly evident in Västerbotten, in which most municipalities have among the highest populations of older adults in Sweden, while Umeå has one of the youngest populations in the country (Stjernberg 2020). The relatively young population in Umeå is related to the fact that there are over 34,000 students at Umeå University (Umeå University 2019). The Finnish side of Kvarken generally has a younger population compared with the Swedish side, especially in Ostrobothnia, where the city Vaasa is inhabited by more than 17,000 students (Vaasa 2020).

Regarding cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region, the role of the Swedish language has been a central component throughout history. Due to their shared history, Swedish is an official language in Finland and around 5% of the Finnish population speaks Swedish as their first language. This proportion is higher in the Finnish part of the Kvarken region, where around one fifth of the population, or 96,000 inhabitants speak Swedish as their first language. While more people on the Finnish side speak Swedish as a second language, the share of Swedish speakers varies significantly between the three Finnish regions in Kvarken. While 49.4% of the population in Ostrobothnia had Swedish as their first language in 2019, the corresponding shares were 9% in Central Ostrobothnia and only 0.1% in South Ostrobothnia. This difference is even starker when comparing municipalities, as there are six in Ostrobothnia where over 80% of the population have Swedish as their first language, while this share is under 1% in half of all Finnish municipalities in the Kvarken region (Statistics Finland 2020a).



**Figure 2. Population change in the Kvarken region at the grid level (5,000 × 5,000 m).**

Map by Oskar Penje.



Ostrobothnia (Österbotten)			
	1990	2018	Change
Vaasa	58,272	67,392	9,120
Korsholm	15,971	19,384	3,413
Jakobstad	19,887	19,379	-508
Pedersöre	9,768	11,084	1,316
Närpes	10,535	9,507	-1,028
Laihia	7,548	8,051	503
Nykarleby	7,756	7,521	-235
Kristinestad	8,920	6,638	-2,282
Vörå	7,541	6,616	-925
Kronoby	7,085	6,531	-554
Malax	5,861	5,477	-384
Larsmo	3,587	5,264	1,677
Isokyrö	5,297	4,673	-624
Korsnäs	2,306	2,154	-152
Kaskinen	1,784	1,274	-510
Total	172,118	180,945	8,827

South Ostrobothnia			
	1990	2018	Change
Seinäjoki	46,715	62,676	15,961
Kurikka	26,730	21,203	-5,527
Kauhava	20,222	16,278	-3,944
Lapua	14,533	14,494	-39
Kauhajoki	15,573	13,610	-1,963
Ilmajoki	12,040	12,205	165
Alavus	13,758	11,713	-2,045
Alajärvi	11,860	9,831	-2,029
Ähtäri	7,809	5,906	-1,903
Teuva	7,422	5,269	-2,153
Kuortane	4,888	3,637	-1,251
Lappajärvi	4,554	3,140	-1,414
Vimpeli	3,814	2,974	-840
Evijärvi	3,372	2,499	-873
Soini	2,990	2,114	-876
Isojoki	2,903	2,032	-871
Karjajoki	1,974	1,329	-645
Total	201,157	190,910	-10,247

Central Ostrobothnia			
	1990	2018	Change
Kokkola	43,130	47,723	4,593
Kannus	6,073	5,520	-553
Kaustinen	4,440	4,309	-131
Veteli	4,098	3,216	-882
Toholampi	4,092	3,192	-900
Perho	3,417	2,860	-557
Halsua	1,673	1,171	-502
Lestijärvi	1,090	789	-301
Total	68,013	68,780	767

Västerbotten			
	1990	2018	Change
Umeå	90,004	125,080	35,076
Skellefteå	74,720	72,723	-1,997
Lycksele	14,186	12,257	-1,929
Vännäs	8,325	8,776	451
Nordmaling	8,107	7,103	-1,004
Vilhelmina	8,532	6,787	-1,745
Robertsfors	7,833	6,784	-1,049
Storuman	7,847	5,902	-1,945
Vindeln	6,632	5,412	-1,220
Norsjö	5,349	4,086	-1,263
Malå	4,142	3,133	-1,009
Åsele	4,139	2,809	-1,330
Dorotea	3,757	2,646	-1,111
Sorsele	3,570	2,516	-1,054
Bjurholm	2,991	2,451	-540
Total	250,134	268,465	18,331

Västernorrland			
	1990	2018	Change
Örnsköldsvik	59,255	56,139	-3,116
Total	59,255	56,139	-3,116

**Table 1. Population development in the municipalities of the Kvarken region, 1990–2018**

(Statistics Finland 2020, Statistics Sweden 2020).

## Socio-economic characteristics

Employment rates are generally higher in Sweden than in Finland, but this is less evident when comparing the Finnish and Swedish sides of Kvarken. In the Finnish context, Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia, and South Ostrobothnia have comparatively higher employment rates than most regions in Finland (Grunfelder et al. 2020: 65). Although Västerbotten has a slightly higher employment rate compared with the Finnish regions in Kvarken, this difference is less stark than when comparing average Finnish and Swedish regions. In terms of education levels, the proportion of the population that has attained a tertiary education is somewhat higher on the Finnish side compared with the Swedish side of Kvarken. However, Umeå stands out from its neighbouring municipalities in Västerbotten due to its population's significantly higher education level, which can be attributed to the city's large university. Similarly, Vaasa stands out from most other municipalities due to its population's markedly higher education level compared with most other parts of Ostrobothnia (Randall & Karlsdóttir 2018).

According to Nordregio's Regional Potential Index, which ranks Nordic regions according to their demographic, labour market, and economic potentials, Ostrobothnia and Västerbotten have almost identical scores and rank 29 and 30, respectively, among the 66 total regions (Grunfelder 2020). In Finland, Ostrobothnia is the second highest ranked region, after Helsinki-Uusimaa, while Västerbotten is above average compared with other Swedish regions. Meanwhile, Central Ostrobothnia and South Ostrobothnia have relatively low rankings on this index (53 and 60, respectively).

### 3. The rise and demise of Kvarken traffic title

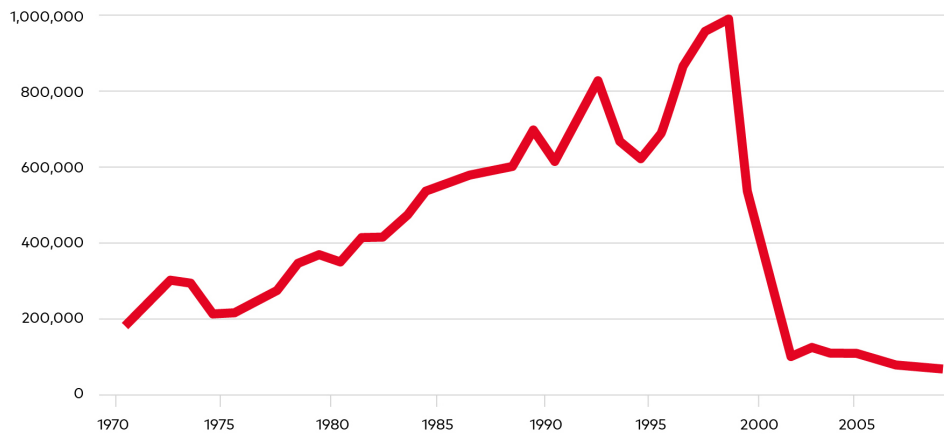
#### Rapid growth in traffic and stronger cross-border relations in Kvarken

Throughout the centuries, sea traffic over the Kvarken Strait has been of central importance for cross-border interaction and exchange. Those living on the islands of Björkö on the Finnish side and Holmön on the Swedish side have long played important roles in operating traffic over the Kvarken Strait, by transporting mail and passengers by boat (Kvarken Council n.d.). In the 1830s, the first steamship began operating between Umeå and Vaasa and, following the First World War, more frequent transport connections were established over the Kvarken Strait during the summer months (NSB CoRe 2018). A turning point came after the Second World War, when connections became more regular, and the first car ferry was introduced in 1958. Year-round traffic between Umeå and Vaasa began in 1972, leading to a significant increase in car traffic and passenger numbers, and eventually to a need for larger ferries. Although the route between Umeå and Vaasa was the most important and had the most traffic, there were other traffic connections across the Kvarken Strait during the 1960s and 1970s, including between Vaasa and Örnköldsvik, Vaasa and Härnösand, and Pori and Sundsvall. However, these alternate connections were relatively short-lived and discontinued soon after their introductions. Only the connection between Umeå and Vaasa has remained over the decades.

In parallel with developing traffic connections, cross-border exchange and cooperation also became more established and formalised in the 1970s. This necessitated initiatives to strengthen cooperation between the Finnish and Swedish sides of Kvarken in sectors such as business, tourism, education, and healthcare (Kvarkenrådets Strategiplan 2018). The founding of the Kvarken Council in 1972, an initiative based on Nordic friendship and cooperation among the associations Pohjola-Norden in Finland and Föreningen Norden in Sweden, deepened exchanges across the Kvarken Strait. During its initial years, the organisation focused on establishing cooperation between municipalities, public authorities, and other organisations. While cross-border exchange had existed in areas such as culture, sport, and education, the Kvarken Council provided the basis for solidifying these ties. In 1979, the Kvarken Council became part of the official Nordic border region cooperation, which meant it gained financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

During the decades following the Second World War, traffic over the Kvarken Strait increased substantially. Between 1960 and 1965, passenger numbers grew from around 30,000 to 80,000 per year (Kvarken Council n.d.). As shown in figure 3, passenger numbers doubled from around 200,000 to 400,000 from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, and continued to increase significantly during the 1980s and particularly during the 1990s, reaching a peak of around one million annual passengers in 1998. The sharp increases in passenger numbers during the 1980s and 1990s has largely been attributed to tax-free sales aboard the ferry (Kvarken Shortcut 2012).





**Figure 3. Development of passenger traffic over the Kvarken Strait (passengers per year) (adapted from Kvarken Shortcut 2012).**

## Decline in traffic following the abolishment of tax-free sales

As shown in figure 3, passenger numbers dropped suddenly, and drastically, at the end of the 1990s. This was largely due to the abolishment of tax-free shopping on the Kvarken route in 1999, due to the 1995 entry of Finland and Sweden into the European Union (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). Meanwhile, the other ferry connections between Finland and Sweden via the Sea of Åland were exempt from the ban on tax-free products, meaning that the Kvarken Strait route became the only ferry connection between Finland and Sweden without tax-free sales aboard, making it less competitive and profitable (INAB 2017).

While the number of passengers crossing the Kvarken Strait dropped significantly, passenger traffic over the Sea of Åland, in contrast, remained stable and even increased during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). Before the abolishment of tax-free sales on the Kvarken route, around one million passengers travelled on the Kvarken ferry in 1998, compared with under 900,000 on the ferries over the Sea of Åland. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this shifted significantly, as passenger numbers on the Kvarken ferry dropped to under 100,000 and increased on the Åland ferry to more than one million (Kvarken Shortcut 2012).

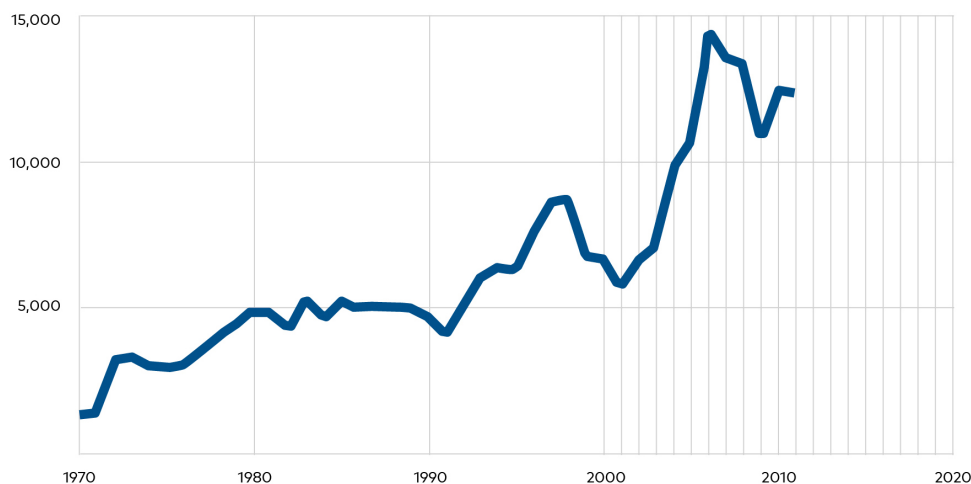
While ticket prices on the Kvarken route had been similar to those on the Åland routes, the abolishment of tax-free sales eventually led to a substantial increase in ticket prices between Umeå and Vaasa, to make up for the revenue loss due to the drop in passenger numbers. The price for a one-way trip on the Kvarken ferry had been around 10–15 euros in the 1990s, which increased to over 60 euros during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). This subsequently made the Kvarken connection less attractive to potential passengers, and the route, which had been one of the most profitable during the 1990s, also became unattractive to operators.

Silja Line, which had operated the ferry since the 1990s, declared in 2000 that it was cancelling the route due to its unprofitability (Kvarken Council n.d.). Passenger traffic between Umeå and Vaasa was reinstated in May 2001 by RG Line, a Vaasa-based company that operated the ferry from 2001–2011. Another company, Botnia Link, also operated on the route briefly (for around a year and a half from 2001–2002) (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). Meanwhile, none of the large companies were interested in operating the ferry, as the route was considered unattractive.

According to Westin and Westin (2016) the drop in passengers was also related to the ferry being primarily freight-oriented, having poor quality passenger services, and being generally considered unreliable. Based on passenger surveys and interviews conducted aboard the ferry in March 2012, its main problems were high ticket prices, low quality of onboard services and facilities, poor accessibility of the ferry terminals in both Umeå and Vaasa, unreliability of the ferry service, and its inconvenient timetable, which was based on the needs of freight traffic (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). These combined factors also reduced the number of passengers and, as will be discussed next, led to severely hindered cross-border cooperation and exchange.

In contrast to passenger numbers plummeting significantly during the first decade of the

21<sup>st</sup> century, freight traffic showed a notable increase from 2002–2005, reaching higher annual volumes than during previous decades (see figure 4). Nevertheless, although the ferry was freight-oriented, its reputation as unreliable meant that it also gradually became less attractive to transport companies. Even though the Kvarken Strait connection was much shorter (80 km), these companies increasingly shifted to the land route around Kvarken via Tornio and Haparanda (840 km) to retain their markets (Westin & Westin 2016). This explains the slight drop in cargo transport after 2005 (see figure 4).



**Figure 4. Development of freight traffic over the Kvarken Strait (number of trucks per year) (adapted from Kvarken Shortcut 2012).**

A 1998 evaluation of the consequences of abolishing tax-free sales stated that it was unrealistic to operate traffic over the Kvarken Strait on a market-basis, and that doing so would require public support (Bäckström 1998, as quoted in INAB 2017). It was further argued that the Kvarken traffic link should be seen as a general interest service and that Sweden and Finland would need to jointly ensure that year-round traffic over the Strait would be possible (ibid.). To compensate for passenger loss following the abolishment of tax-free sales, financial support for operating the Kvarken ferry was provided by the Finnish government, the region of Västerbotten, and the Swedish municipality Umeå; no funding was provided by the Swedish state. This support amounted to around 500,000 euros annually, considerably less than the public funding used to operate other ferry lines (Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012). For instance, public financial support for ferries crossing the Sea of Åland was approximately six times higher per passenger than for the Kvarken ferry in 2012 (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). Following the steep decline in traffic, RG Line, which had operated the Kvarken ferry from 2001–2011, announced in 2011 that operations were unprofitable, filed for bankruptcy, and discontinued operations (Kvarken Council n.d.).

## A low point in cross-border relations

The period from 2000–2011 has been characterised as a low point in cross-border Kvarken cooperation; during this time it became increasingly difficult to maintain and develop the economic, social, and cultural ties that had been established over the previous 40 years (INAB 2017). Over the decades, the ferry had played an important role in connecting the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Kvarken; diminished traffic over the Strait during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was considered to cause many severe, negative impacts on interactions and cohesion in the region (Kvarken Shortcut 2012).

For residents of the Kvarken region, one negative effect of the weaker ferry service was that commuting for workers and students became more difficult. Although daily commuting had

never been possible, due to the relatively long travel time of more than four hours each way, weekly commuting, which was still possible in the 1990s due to low prices and several daily departures, was common (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). Umeå University was also attended by many students from Finland prior to 2000, and the university provided an important source of jobs for many Finns (Sikström, interview, 2019). Active cultural exchange for children and young people, organised through schools and sport clubs, was also disrupted (Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012).

There was also a decline in tourism across Kvarken during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although Västerbotten was an emerging tourist destination in Sweden, the unstable ferry connection made it difficult to establish synergies in tourism between the Finnish and Swedish sides of Kvarken. One indication of this is that in 2010, only 8,100 Finns stayed overnight in Umeå, compared with 39,000 Norwegians who did so (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). Several mountain resorts on the Swedish side of Kvarken, in the western parts of Västerbotten, were severely affected by the weakened ferry connection. Some resorts lost almost 40% of their customers and have stated that their Finnish market nearly disappeared during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (INAB 2017). In the whole of Västerbotten, Finnish travellers constituted only 1.2% of those staying overnight during 2010 (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). On the Finnish side, many tourism companies, which had based their activities on a reliable ferry connection (e.g. Wasalandia amusement park and Tropiclandia water park) saw a significant drop in visitors after 1999, when tax-free sales were abolished (Verkkouutiset 2000).

A well-functioning ferry service is also considered a precondition for trade and industry cooperation. Thus, the unreliable ferry connection was problematic for businesses on both sides of Kvarken. For instance, although Västerbotten businesses consider the Finnish market to be their most important sources of both imports and exports (INAB 2017), and despite its geographic proximity, trade decreased in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century largely because the ferry was perceived as unreliable (Kvarken Shortcut 2012).

It has been argued that EU membership, contrary to its objective, significantly diminished integration between the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Kvarken region in the early 2000s (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). Overall, the significant decline in cross-border relations following the abolishment of tax-free sales on the Kvarken ferry was profound. According to the sources interviewed for this study, the severity of these negative effects on the region were also generally unexpected. This highlights the importance of the ferry, which goes far beyond traffic volumes. Several interviewees involved in cross-border Kvarken cooperation described a sense of uncertainty in the region during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to the unstable and unreliable ferry link.



## 4. Re-establishment of the ferry connection

### Joint efforts to reinstate a novel ferry service

Following the instability of the ferry connection during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in 2012 the Ministry of Transport and Communications in Finland appointed a working group tasked with drafting a proposal for the measures needed to secure year-round passenger and freight traffic over the Kvarken Strait (Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012). The working group consisted of stakeholders from both Finland and Sweden, including representatives from the Finnish Ministry of Finance; the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy; the South Ostrobothnia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment; the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia; the Country Council of Västerbotten; the Kvarken Council; and the municipalities and ports of Vaasa and Umeå. In its final report, the working group stated that ferry traffic between Vaasa and Umeå should be considered part of a broader territorial context, connected to the surrounding transport infrastructure (Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012) (see also figure 10). Specifically, the ferry route was described as a strategic link along the E12 route from Helsinki to Mo i Rana, Norway. The working group argued that the ferry not only serves the immediate regions, but offers the potential to enhance exchange and trade with Norway, Russia, and the Baltic states, essentially being a "strong intermodal gateway between the EU and the Russian markets" (Kvarken Shortcut 2012: 23). The working group recommended both short- and long-term actions for reinstating a reliable, modern ferry connection. Among their recommendations were that such transport infrastructure should consist of an environmentally friendly, ice-going vessel adapted to its customers' needs. A longer-term recommendation was to purchase a ferry specifically constructed for Kvarken traffic. Regarding funding, the working group encouraged the municipalities Vaasa and Umeå, and other actors in the Kvarken region, to apply for EU funding; it also urged the Finnish and Swedish governments to support the project and contribute to national funding (Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012).

In its final report, published in 2012 (English summary of Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012), the working group stated that ferry traffic between Vaasa, Finland and Umeå, Sweden is a strategic requirement for developing trade and industry, cultural exchange, efficient transport, and mobility for labour and education. As described above, cross-border relations severely withered during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, following the decline in traffic over the Kvarken Strait. The working group stressed the importance of transport across the Strait for Vaasa and Umeå, and their surrounding regions, and that without a regular ferry service connecting Kvarken year-round, cooperation across the region would diminish and social cohesion would suffer (English summary of Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012).

Concrete, joint actions were taken by the two municipalities to reinstate a reliable ferry connection between Vaasa and Umeå. In 2012, Vaasa and Umeå founded a co-owned shipping company, NLC Ferry AB, with the marketing name Wasaline (Umeå kommunföretag n.d.). An older vessel, constructed in 1981, was purchased and renovated to operate the route, and has been in service since 2013 under the name M/S Wasa Express (see figure 5). However, this vessel was intended as an interim solution, with the long-term objective of purchasing a new ferry specifically designed and built for the needs of the Kvarken route, corresponding to the working group's recommendations. To secure funding for a new ferry, and to develop the connection into a multimodal transport link, the companies Kvarken Link AB and Kvarken Link Oy were founded by Vaasa and Umeå in 2015 and in 2019, respectively (Kvarken Link n.d.). Another joint effort towards securing and improving the transport link between Vaasa and Umeå was undertaken in 2015, when the two municipalities established a joint port company to run the Vaasa and Umeå ports, with the intention of developing the market positions of both ports in the Baltic Sea trade (Kvarken Ports n.d.).

Developing the ferry connection and the adjoining transport infrastructure was supported by several projects and studies, with cooperation between various public and private regional stakeholders. These included the Nordic Logistic Corridor (NLC) project (2011–2014), which

aimed to develop the transport corridor from the Atlantic coast via Helgeland, Norway to Västerbotten, Sweden, over the Kvarken Strait and across Finland, following the E12 road, consistent with the EU's priority for the European transport network since 2013 (NSB CoRE 2018). This project also aimed to enhance cooperation between stakeholders in the different countries and resulted in improved port infrastructures in Umeå and Vaasa, and in the establishment of the shipping company NLC Ferry in 2012 and the company Kvarken Ports in 2015. The purpose of the EU-funded Midway Alignment of the Bothnia Corridor project (2012–2018) was to design and build a new, environmentally friendly ferry for Kvarken and to improve the port and logistics system among Finland, Sweden, and Norway, with a focus on different modes of transport (NSB CoRe 2018). Similarly, the MABA I and II projects (2015–2016 and 2015–2018, respectively) focused on improving the Kvarken transport link, planning a new ferry, and developing ports and logistics throughout the region to ensure year-round passenger and freight traffic (NSB CoRe 2018). These projects highlighted a shift towards a more comprehensive approach, in which development of the Kvarken ferry link was more strongly related to strategic infrastructure planning.

Following these joint initiatives, a contract to purchase a new ferry was signed in 2018 with the shipbuilding company RMC in Rauma, Finland. The new ferry, which will be named Aurora Botnia, is currently under construction and is scheduled to begin operating in 2021 (see figure 6). The estimated price of the new ferry is approximately 120 million euros. The municipalities of Vaasa and Umeå have both committed to funding the purchase by contributing 25 million euros each, and the Finnish state will contribute a corresponding sum; no state funding is being contributed by Sweden, due to a Swedish state principle of not funding cross-border ferry traffic (Lillkvist 2016; Leiwo 2018). In addition, Kvarken Link Oy has signed a loan contract for 70 million euros with the European Investment Bank to acquire the ferry (EIB 2019).



**Figure 5. The current Kvarken ferry, operating between Vaasa and Umeå since 2013.**

(Source: Visit Vaasa)

## A new beginning for traffic and exchange across the Kvarken Strait

Since 2013, when Wasaline began operating between Umeå and Vaasa, passenger numbers have increased markedly (see figure 7). From around 46,000 passengers in 2011, the year when RG Line filed for bankruptcy, passenger numbers have grown gradually, to around 212,000 in 2019. Passenger numbers have risen more than anticipated, as estimates from 2012 predicted that the number of annual passengers would increase to around 150,000–175,000 during the 2010s (Kvarken Shortcut 2012). A parallel increase in freight traffic has also occurred, with volumes increasing from around 220,000 to 313,000 cargo tons from 2012 to 2017<sup>1</sup>. Following a period of unprofitability after the abolishment of tax-free sales, this growth in traffic volumes meant that the ferry became profitable again, and Wasaline's financial profile has improved annually in recent years (NLC Ferry 2020).

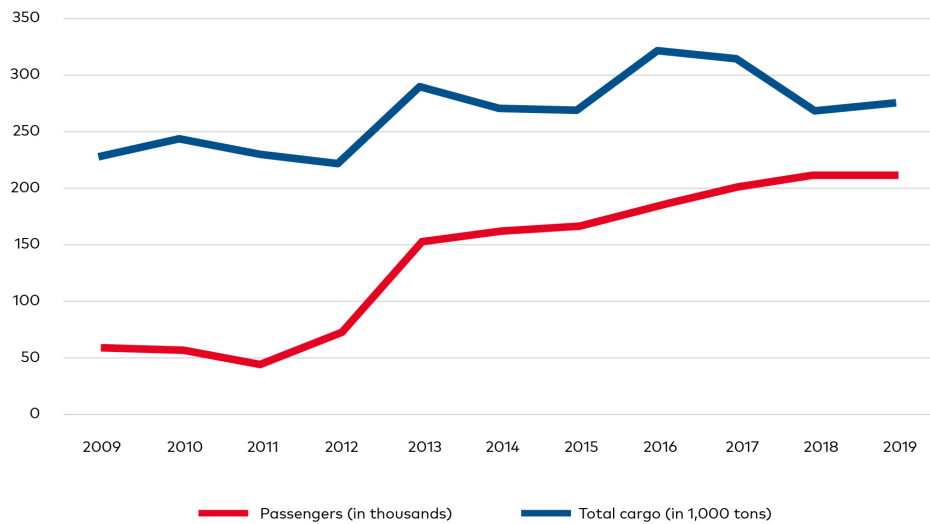


**Figure 6. The new Kvarken ferry, scheduled to begin operating in 2021.**

(Source: Kvarken Link)

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1. Three weeks of ferry maintenance and strikes impacted traffic numbers in 2019 (NLC Ferry 2020).



**Figure 7. Development of passenger and freight traffic over the Kvarken Strait from 2009–2019**  
(Transport Analysis 2020)

Compared with their low point a few years earlier, these traffic values suggest that the newly reinstated ferry traffic between Umeå and Vaasa in 2013 was more attractive to both passengers and freight transport. While the current ferry is an interim solution pending the arrival of the new ferry, which is expected to begin operating in 2021, the growth in traffic volumes indicate that the market for both passenger and freight traffic has reacted positively to the changes over the past decade. As discussed above, passenger traffic was highly dependent on tax-free sales during the 1990s. The increase in passenger numbers during the past decade shows that there is a new demand type. The operating conditions for the Kvarken ferry differ from those of the other ferry lines between Sweden and Finland. Specifically, all other routes between the countries have tax-free shopping aboard, enabling lower ticket prices. Nevertheless, Peter Ståhlberg, Wasaline CEO, stated in 2018 that although they no longer have tax-free sales, he is satisfied that the ferry is founded on a healthier basis (Sveriges Radio 2018). Westin and Westin (2016) argue that while the current ferry is not a long-term solution due to its age, high operational costs, and negative environmental impacts, its main function has been to rebuild confidence in the transport link, at a reasonable price, after a decade of inadequate transport solutions.

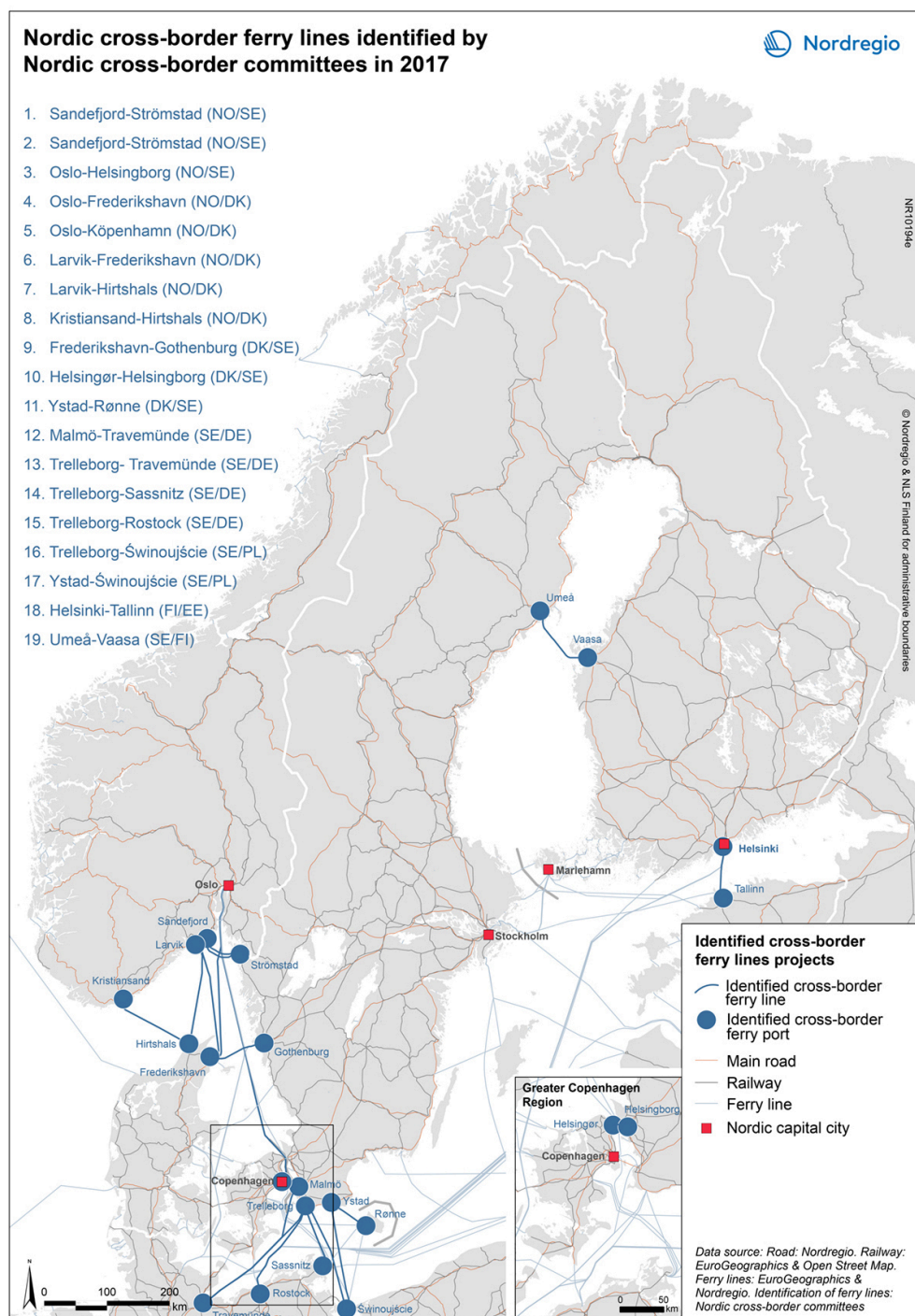
Many people who live in the Kvarken region see the ferry as a floating bridge (Knutar & Lindholm interview 2019). Most passengers come from Finland, and the ferry is especially important to Finns who work and study in Umeå, and to those who visit the Swedish side for tourism and shopping. There are also now more conferences and meetings held aboard the ferry, the facilities for which will also be improved on the new ferry (Björkqvist 2018). Passenger traffic over the Kvarken Strait is highly seasonal, with almost half of all passengers travelling during the summer months (i.e., June–August). In contrast, freight transport is more evenly distributed over the year, and more dependent on economic fluctuations (MABA Financial Engineering Pre-study 2015).

In terms of freight transport, in recent years, the ferry has generally operated at maximum capacity year-round. While most passengers come from the Finnish side, there is slightly more export of freight from Umeå to Vaasa, largely due to Umeå's significant paper industry. Paper, wood, metal, chemicals, and general cargo are the most important freight types transported over the Kvarken Strait. Although the Kvarken connection competes for freight transport with the ferries crossing the Sea of Åland, Wasaline's main competitor is the road route north of the Bothnian Bay, via Haparanda and Tornio (Knutar & Lindholm interview 2019). Since Wasaline only offers one daily departure, to which many transport companies cannot adapt their schedules, some companies prefer the longer road route alternative. Another reason why some transport companies may choose the longer road route is the transport subsidies paid by the Swedish state for traveling more than 401 km in Sweden (Tillväxtverket 2020). These subsidies



have been noted as potentially attractive to some companies, leading them to choose the road alternative instead of the Kvarken ferry (Knutar & Lindholm interview 2019).

From a long-term perspective, passenger numbers are considerably lower than they were during the 1980s and 1990s, while freight transport has increased markedly over the decades. The development of passenger numbers and freight volumes over time illustrates that the relative importance of passenger and freight transport have varied. In the interviews conducted for this study, it was stressed that both passenger and freight transport are currently viewed as equally important, and it was emphasised that they will both remain equally prioritised in the future, following the arrival of the new ferry in 2021.



**Figure 8. Nordic cross-border ferry lines (Nordregio 2017).**

Map by Linus Rispling.



## 5. Re-established ferry connection enables stronger cross-border cooperation

Following the decline in cross-border relations during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, several developments during the most recent decade suggest that cross-border exchange and cooperation has both strengthened and taken new forms. As previously described, re-establishment and development of the ferry connection between Umeå and Vaasa since 2012 has largely resulted from cross-border cooperation and joint actions by actors from both the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Kvarken region. But, as will be discussed next, re-establishment of the transport link has itself enabled stronger cross-border cooperation, resulting in several regional effects and spin-offs in a variety of arenas.

### Education and research

As detailed above, in 2012, the working group tasked with drafting a proposal for reinstating a reliable ferry connection over the Kvarken Strait argued that the ferry is critical to citizens on both sides of the Strait, enabling them to live, work, study, and travel across a considerably larger region than their own countries (English summary of Arbetsgruppens Slutrapport 2012). The decline in passenger traffic and cross-border exchange during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the ferry connection was less stable, shows that a connection allowing frequent travel, or weekly commuting, is a precondition for being able to work or study on the other side of the Kvarken Strait.

Education and research are areas in which the improved ferry connection has enabled stronger exchange over the Kvarken Strait during the past decade. For Umeå University, Finnish students were the most important foreign student group until the end of the 1990s. Consequent to increased ticket prices and a weakened ferry connection during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, this figure plummeted (INAB 2017). Since the new ferry began operating, student numbers have again increased from around 250 to 450 between 2011 and 2016 (INAB 2017). In 2017, Umeå University had the highest number of students from Finland among all Swedish universities (Hoppu 2017), and in recent years has actively marketed itself to potential students attending high schools in Ostrobothnia (Kepsu & Henriksson 2019). Between 10% and 15% of all first-year students from Finland who are attending Swedish universities study at Umeå University (Beste 2020).

According to Hans Adolfsson, vice-chancellor of Umeå University, the improved connection has also generally opened new potential for collaboration with, and recruitment of, researchers, while new cooperative agreements have been made between Umeå University and universities on the Finnish side of Kvarken (INAB 2017). For instance, a joint course was organised in 2020 by Umeå University and the Hanken School of Economics in Vaasa, addressing cross-border regional development and planning in the Kvarken region (Grönholm 2020). While a well-functioning ferry connection is widely considered to be strategically important for academic collaboration, there are, nevertheless, various structural barriers that hinder cooperation between Finnish and Swedish universities. These include differences in national educational policies and funding models that do not support organising joint courses (Grönholm 2020; Björk Interview 2019). However, collaboration on research projects seems less problematic, and during the past decade universities from either side of the Kvarken have collaborated with each other, and with other public and private stakeholders, on numerous projects. These include projects such as '@geing Online' (2017–2021), which promotes social participation of older adults via digital tools (@geing Online n.d.), and 'Destination Kvarken' (2018–2021), aimed at promoting tourism in the region (Destination Kvarken 2018).

## Extended labour market

From the perspective of a cross-border labour market, the upgraded ferry connection has opened new opportunities for companies and employees on both sides of the Kvarken. For instance, in 2017, the municipalities Umeå and Lycksele organised a joint recruitment event in Vaasa, which they stated would not have been possible without the ferry (INAB 2017). This example highlights both the increased interest in, and the prerequisites for, looking across national borders for a workforce. The event was a new approach for competence matching in Västerbotten and an attempt to interest people from Finland in seeking employment on the other side of the Kvarken. The event was arranged based on Umeå's stated intention to hire around 1,000 new employees per year during the coming decade to ensure wellbeing and services (INAB 2017; Umeå 2017). In particular, they needed to hire teachers, social workers, engineers, and nurses.

The historical pattern of it being more common for people from the Finnish side of Kvarken to work and study in Sweden has continued. For instance, from 2015–2016, the number of people who moved from Ostrobothnia to Sweden increased from around 300 to 400 per year, half of whom were aged 15–24 years (Kepsu & Henriksson 2019). While labour market exchange remains primarily from the Finnish side to the Swedish side of Kvarken, this is a challenge for Vaasa and the regions in Finland. Tomas Häyry, Mayor of Vaasa, expressed that to counteract this loss, Vaasa and the neighbouring municipalities need to increase the attractiveness of their local labour markets and become more competitive (Häyry interview 2019).

## Healthcare

Healthcare is another sector in which cooperation and exchange across national borders has increased. A reliable ferry link is considered crucial to this cooperation, and when the ferry connection was less stable in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, this exchange was severely hindered. Healthcare professionals from Ostrobothnia have long been an important source of labour for the healthcare sector on the Swedish side in Västerbotten. This is due to geographic proximity, but also the fact that many on the Finnish side of Kvarken speak Swedish as their first language. A prerequisite for Finnish healthcare professionals' ability to work on the Swedish side of Kvarken is that they can keep a flat in Finland and commute on a weekly basis, which, again, has now become more feasible with an improved traffic connection.

From the perspective of ensuring a large enough population and patient base, a cross-border perspective opens new possibilities. For instance, in Sweden, maintaining high quality specialised healthcare, research, and education in medicine requires a population of around one million inhabitants in its four northernmost counties (INAB 2017). Since population development shows a decrease in northern Sweden, it has been argued that new collaborations are needed to ensure that this criterion is met, emphasising the importance of cross-border collaboration within the Kvarken region. According to interviewees, it is likely that the University Hospital of Umeå would not be able to offer open-heart surgery without a potential patient base from the Finnish side of Kvarken. At the same time, Vaasa Central Hospital has not had an open-heart surgery unit after it was discontinued in 2016 (Enkvist 2016). This underlines a mutual need for collaboration on both sides. In 2015, the regional council of Västerbotten and the Vaasa healthcare district both wrote letters of intent concerning stronger cooperation within the Kvarken region in healthcare, especially focusing on specialised healthcare between the University Hospital of Umeå and Vaasa Central Hospital.

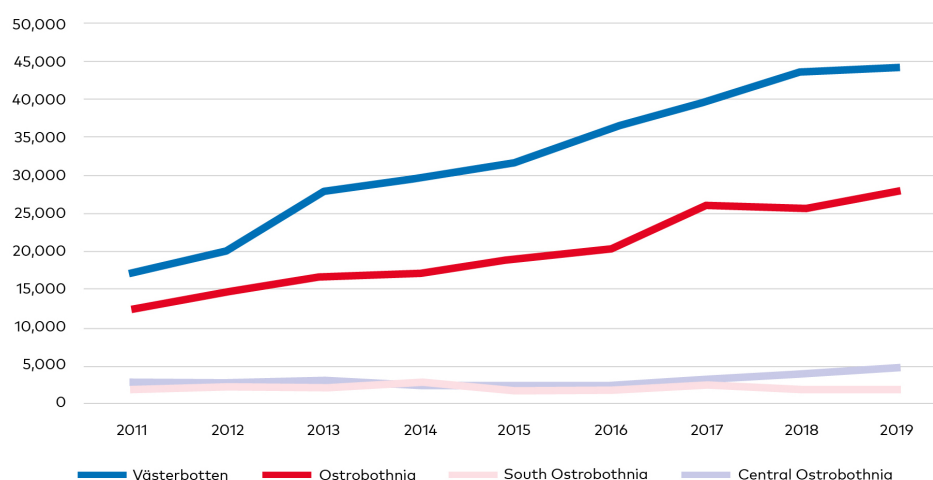
In May 2019, a collaboration was formally agreed upon between the University Hospital of Umeå and Vaasa Central Hospital for the transport of stroke patients from the Finnish side to Umeå. It is estimated that this will involve around 10–20 patients annually (Engström 2019). In urgent stroke cases, time is a critical factor; the travel time between Vaasa and Umeå has proven under three hours, a faster alternative to transporting stroke patients from Vaasa to the nearest university hospitals in Finland (in Tampere or Turku, 250 and 340 km away, respectively) (Mattfolk 2018). Furthermore, the costs for care and transport of patients from the Finnish side of Kvarken to Umeå is comparable to the alternatives on the Finnish side (INAB 2017). The University Hospital of Umeå also benefits from receiving patients from Finland, since a large number of patients is needed to maintain a special neurologic ward, to provide in-house

specialists with sufficient training, and to educate new specialists (Engström 2019). There are also two ambulance planes and a helicopter in Lycksele which can be used to transport stroke patients (Lagerwall 2019).

Another form of collaboration to which the University Hospital of Umeå and Vaasa Central Hospital have recently agreed upon concerns the possibility of Swedish medical students completing their period of general practice (*allmäntjänstgöring*) in Vaasa (Ström 2019). This arrangement is seen as advantageous for both parties, as there is often a long wait time for medical students to obtain a position of practice in Sweden, while it can be challenging to recruit doctors to Ostrobothnia, especially those who speak Swedish, which is important in this part of Finland (Teir 2019). Prior to this agreement, doctors from Sweden had worked in Vaasa during the summer (Teir 2019). Overall, while the direction of student and labour market exchanges in Kvarken are predominantly from Finland to Sweden, this agreement is an example of exchange in the opposite direction. Overall, both parties have stressed that the ferry is essential to this cooperation, and as the new Kvarken ferry will have designed space for transporting patients, this will also open new possibilities (Frantz interview 2019).

## Tourism

The ferry plays an important tourism role on both sides of the Kvarken, not only for passenger traffic but for establishing potential synergies. While domestic visitors are the most significant tourist groups, both in Västerbotten and Ostrobothnia, increases in tourism over the past decade are due largely to the ferry connection. Following the abolishment of tax-free sales in 1999 and the decline in the ferry service that followed, tourism over the Kvarken Strait plummeted at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, since re-establishing the new ferry connection, the number of Finns who stayed overnight in Västerbotten, and the number of Swedes who stayed overnight on the Finnish side of the Kvarken has again increased (see figure 9). In Västerbotten, the number of Finnish tourists grew from around 17,000 to over 44,000 from 2011–2019. In Ostrobothnia, the number of Swedes who stayed overnight more than doubled from around 13,000 to 28,000 during the same period, while overnight stays in the other Finnish regions of Kvarken, Central Ostrobothnia and South Ostrobothnia, have remained relatively constant.



**Figure 9. Overnight stays per year by Swedes on the Finnish side of Kvarken and by Finns on the Swedish side.**

(Statistics Finland 2020a; Statistics Sweden 2020a).

While passenger numbers were at a record-high during the tax-free period in the 1990s, a large proportion of passengers only travelled back and forth to take advantage of duty-free shopping (Back interview 2019; Jansson interview 2019). As indicated by the increased number of overnight stays in Västerbotten and Ostrobothnia from the opposite sides of the Strait, reasons for crossing the Strait seem to have changed. Historically, more people have travelled from Finland to Sweden than vice versa, and although this trend is still evident, more people are now also travelling over the Strait to Finland from the Swedish side. One of the emerging attractions on the Finnish side is PowerPark in Kauhava (80 km from Vaasa), the largest amusement park in Kvarken. PowerPark increasingly seeks to attract customers from the Swedish side through cooperation with Visit Vaasa and Wasaline; they even introduced the use of Swedish Krona as a currency in the amusement park (Back interview 2019; Jansson interview 2019). In Vaasa, the water park Tropiclandia has been another important attraction, though the opening of a water amusement park in Örnköldsvik has reduced attendance (Back interview 2019). Overall, Vaasa appears to have become a more popular destination for Swedish tourists in recent years, especially during the summer season (Bergfors 2016). Vaasa and its surrounding regions also attract a considerable number of business travellers due to a strong business sector and large technology and energy companies, such as Wärtsilä, ABB, and Danfors (Jansson interview 2019).

In Västerbotten, roughly half of all tourists who stay overnight stay in Umeå, 30% travel to the mountain areas, and 20% travel to other parts of the region. Tourism has also become less concentrated during the summer months (Forsgren interview 2019). The main attractions on the Swedish side include shopping and cultural attractions in Umeå. Umeå benefits from being the largest city in the region and experienced a boost when it was selected as a European Capital of Culture in 2014. As in Västerbotten overall, visitors from Norway are clearly the largest group after domestic travellers, but among all nationalities, the most significant increase has been the number of Finnish tourists who stay in Umeå (Visit Umeå 2018). A revival of visits has also been seen in Hemavan-Tärnaby, one of the Swedish mountain resorts that lost a substantial share of their customers during the early 2000s and which is beginning to focus again on the Finnish market (INAB 2017). Another important destination is the High Coast (*Höga Kusten*), one of the fastest growing destinations in Sweden (Höga Kusten 2018). This is a particularly important location from the perspective of cross-border cooperation, because in 2006 the High Coast on the Swedish side and the Kvarken Archipelago on the Finnish side formed a cross-border UNESCO World Heritage Site.

There have been joint initiatives to develop the High Coast–Kvarken Archipelago World Heritage Site and to enhance the site's accessibility and attractiveness to inhabitants, entrepreneurs, and tourists. This has been the specific focus of two separate projects within the Botnia-Atlantica programme, which have been funded by the European Regional Development Fund: World Heritage Sites in partnership with the 63° North-World Heritage Ambassadors (2012–2014) and Lystra (2018–2020) (NSB CoRe 2018). Another project funded by the same programme is Destination Kvarken (2018–2021), which aims to increase tourism in the region as a whole (Destination Kvarken 2018). The intention is to deepen cooperation and form stronger synergies in marketing Kvarken as a destination and, through close collaboration with various small and medium-sized tourism companies, to reach new and larger markets (Visit Umeå 2019). This marketing involves selling two destinations, in two countries, with two cultures, as one; the marketing focus has thus far targeted central Europe.

## Business

For several reasons, the ferry connection has been important for businesses on both sides of Kvarken. As described above, improved traffic connection over the past decade has provided better conditions for passenger traffic, allowing greater potential for a larger labour market. It has also enabled stronger cooperation between businesses and may provide the premise for increased synergies between companies. The potential synergies between businesses that have been envisioned and discussed recently include establishing closer collaborations between the chemical industry in the Kokkola region, the energy sector in Vaasa, the cluster for biotechnology in Örnköldsvik, and the battery industry in Skellefteå (Wallendahl 2020). The energy cluster in Vaasa includes more than 140 companies with more than 10,000 employees. Kokkola is home to the largest inorganic chemistry cluster in northern Europe, with over 2,300 employees in 70 companies, while investments in a large battery factory in Skellefteå are expected to bring 3,000

new jobs to the city (SVT 2020; Wallendahl 2020). There are also visions for a Nordic battery belt, which could be based on raw materials from Finland, technology from Sweden, and renewable energy from Norway (Andersson 2019). To facilitate collaboration and the emergence of potential synergies, the regional stakeholders interviewed for this study highlighted the importance of social networks and face-to-face interactions. While digital solutions are considered a valuable component of cooperation and exchange, every interviewee emphasised that digital tools cannot replace in-person contact. They highlighted that the ferry is vital to enabling and maintaining social contacts. The interviewees consider the increased cooperation between companies during recent years to be connected to the re-established ferry connection.

While most cases of cooperation between businesses have not occurred through formal channels, numerous projects have aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of companies on both sides of Kvarken through closer cross-border collaboration. For instance, the Cleantech Kvarken project (2015–2018) aimed to promote collaboration between Finnish and Swedish companies in the energy and environmental technology sectors (Cleantech Kvarken 2018). The successive Future Cleantech Solutions project (2019–2021) seeks to promote cleantech companies' opportunities for cooperation and new markets (Future Cleantech Solutions 2019). Another example is the Circular Economy project (2018–2020), which focuses on the wood building industry and aims to boost the competitiveness of companies by introducing new circular economy solutions and strengthen synergies between businesses (Circular Economy 2018). Infra-Botnia (2018–2020) is another example, which aims to strengthen cross-border business cooperation in Kvarken by creating a new platform for exchange among companies in the infrastructure and building industries, concerning international cooperation and digitalisation (Infra-Botnia 2020).

Västerbotten and Ostrobothnia are among the regions in their respective countries that have seen the sharpest increases in exports during recent years (Tillväxtverket 2019; Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö 2019). Freight transportation via the ferry connection is important to many companies on both sides of the Kvarken, as illustrated by the marked increases in freight transport volumes. In a 2017 report by Infrastruktur i Umeå AB (INAB 2017), several businesses described the importance of the ferry link, citing company managers who rely on this route over the Kvarken Strait. Västerbotten is home to over 30,000 businesses, most of which are small or medium-sized, and the Finnish market is their most important source of both imports and exports. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the ferry connection was unstable, these companies had considerably lower exports to Finland than they do now, emphasising the importance of a reliable ferry link. In 2009, a spokesperson for businesses in Västerbotten stated that they have considerably less trade with Finland than with Norway, even though Vaasa is the closest city to Umeå (Andersson 2009). SCA, a large Swedish manufacturer of timber, pulp, and paper, which exports goods on a nearly daily basis, has emphasised that without a ferry with a reliable schedule and sufficient capacity, their only other option is transporting goods around the Gulf of Bothnia. Similarly, Olofsfors AB, which produces parts for forestry and construction machines in Västerbotten, has stated that they export 30% of their production over the Strait to Finland, and are highly reliant on this transport route. Besides the Finnish market, Russia and the Baltic states are increasingly important to product sales among many companies on the Swedish side of Kvarken (INAB 2017).

## Kvarken in a wider territorial context

A general trend over the past decade has been the increasingly common view of the Kvarken transport route as connecting the surrounding and adjoining transport infrastructures. As early as 2012, the working group tasked with drafting a proposal to reinstate the Kvarken ferry emphasised that the ferry not only serves its immediate regions, it also facilitates new potential trade between European and Russian markets. This also means that the Kvarken region is now viewed, by more actors on both the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Strait, as lying within a broader territorial context. It is also seen as such by those in northern Norway, who foresee potential that extends far beyond the immediate regions. For example, the regional councils of Ostrobothnia, Västerbotten, and Nordland Fylke in Norway have all argued that the Kvarken ferry connection is not only important for Nordic integration, but for broader European integration (INAB 2017).

A transport and traffic infrastructure perspective has been prominent in numerous Kvarken regional projects over the past decade, focusing on the ferry connection in a wider territorial context, as part of a larger European transport network that also connects to Russian, and even Chinese, markets. Several of these projects have been carried out within the framework of the Bothnia-Atlantica programme (2014–2020), in which transport is one of four priority areas and which covers a programme area representing an extended Kvarken region: Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia, and South Ostrobothnia in Finland; Västerbotten and Västernorrland counties and the municipality of Nordanstig in Sweden; and Nordland county in Norway. Northern Norway's inclusion in this programme illustrates that a Norwegian perspective has become more clearly incorporated into the Kvarken cooperation during recent years (Kvarken Council 2018).

In several projects, development of the Kvarken region has been seen in relation to the E12 road route, of which the Kvarken ferry is linked. For instance, the NLC project (2011–2014) concentrated on developing the E12 transport route from the Norwegian Atlantic coast over the Kvarken Strait and through Finland to Russia and the Baltic States. Similarly, the E12 Atlantica Transport project (2016–2018) aimed to strengthen development of the E12 from Finland to Sweden and Norway, and to develop strategies and guidelines for cross-border route development and transport planning. The E12 Atlantica BA3NET project (2016–2019) also focused on strengthening the E12 route by developing methods, evaluation tools, and knowhow for common strategic planning of the border area transport sector. (NSB CoRe 2018)

Overall, the Kvarken transport connection is increasingly positioned in a broader European context. This notion was central in the EU-funded project Midway Alignment of the Bothnian Corridor (2012–2018), which focused on creating stable transport over the Strait to better connect Northern EU countries, Norway, and other EU countries. The project focused on multiple forms of transport, in which the Kvarken ferry was linked to four strategically important European roads, namely the E12, E10, E4, and E8, and to the Botniabanan railway line in Sweden (Midway Alignment n.d.). Additionally, in the NSB CoRe project (2016–2019), the Kvarken ferry link was seen in connection to the wider Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) through the transport corridor along the eastern Baltic Sea region (NSB CoRe 2019). Regarding future potentials, two projects currently in their planning stages would provide new opportunities to link Kvarken transport to a wider geographic area. The first is a 100 km tunnel between Helsinki and Tallinn, which would provide a railway connection between Finland and the Baltic states (Kentish 2019). The second is the Rail Baltica project aimed at integrating the Baltic States into the European rail network (Rail Baltica n.d.). A future gateway to Mo i Rana, Norway also has the potential to open up a greater geographic area. A new international airport in Helgeland, near Mo i Rana, has been approved and is included in the Norwegian transport plan for 2018–2029 (Kvarken Council 2017). Mo i Rana is on the Northern Sea Route to China, which also allows potential for a new shipping route.

It is widely acknowledged that considerable improvements to the surrounding infrastructure are needed to boost the importance of the Kvarken transport link. The NSB CoRe report (2018) highlights that although both cargo and passenger volumes are increasing, the whole corridor needs better land infrastructure. Otherwise, without real investments, there is a risk that shipping may become a bottleneck. Large investments are currently being made to upgrade and develop the ports of Umeå and Vaasa, including improving connectivity between the ports and railway networks on both sides of Kvarken (Öhlund 2018; Sten 2019). Improving the railway infrastructures adjacent to these ports is considered particularly important, as railway transport is central to improving connections between the Kvarken link and the Russian and Chinese markets to the east. On the Finnish side, the railway link between Seinäjoki and Tampere needs upgrading, which is problematic as this is part of the route between Vaasa and Helsinki (NSB CoRe 2018). Concerning access to China, the railway connection between Kouvola in eastern Finland and Xian in China is central. As part of developing a "modern silk route between Finland and Asia" (SVT 2017), a new intermodal rail and road terminal is currently being built in Kouvola, with an ambition to develop a competitive rail corridor for container transport between Europe and Asia (Kouvola 2020). The railway link to China is of increasing interest to companies in Sweden and Norway, such as for the export of Norwegian seafood to China (Nielsen 2019). While there have been freight trains operating from Kouvola to China since 2017, transport via this connection has thus far remained small-scale, and an increase in traffic is only expected upon the 2022 completion of the railway terminal in Kouvola (Tillaeus 2019).



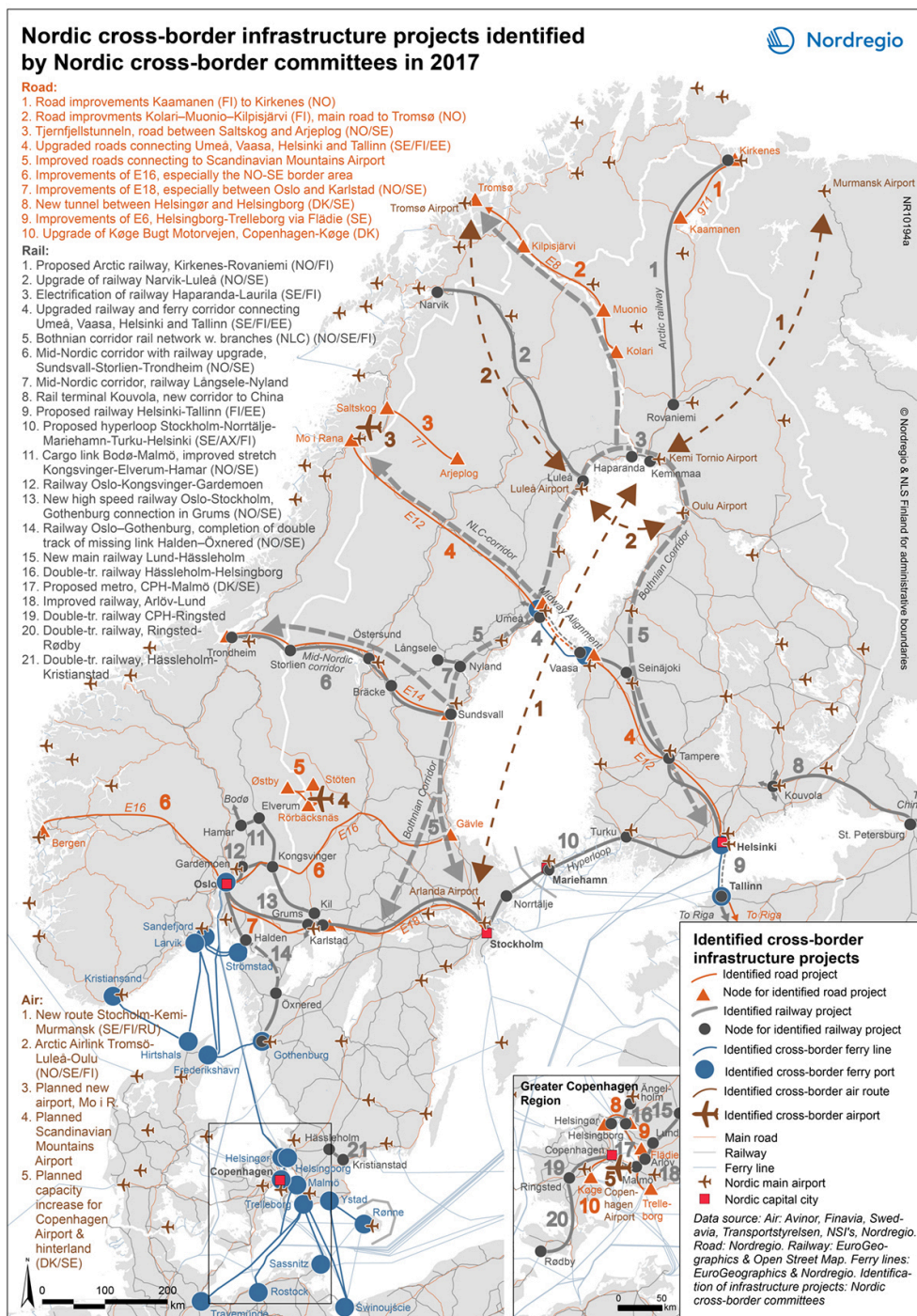


Figure 10. Nordic cross-border infrastructure projects (Nordregio 2017a).

Map by Linus Rispling.



## 6. Discussion

This report has examined how cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region has evolved over time. Using the ferry connection between the Swedish city Umeå and the Finnish city Vaasa as the basis for analysis, the purpose has been to better understand the past and current states of cross-border cooperation in the region, and the future potentials for strengthening cross-border cooperation and integration. The main topics, i.e., the role of the ferry link, the effects of its re-establishment, and the future potential for deeper cooperation, are discussed in this section.

### The ferry connection as a precondition for cross-border exchange

This report shows that a reliable transport link has been central to maintaining and developing cross-border relations in the Kvarken region. From a long-term perspective, sea traffic has been the lifeline enabling cross-border interactions and exchanges throughout the centuries. More recently, cross-border cooperation has remained largely dependent on the ferry connection, and the depth and breadth of cooperation between the Finnish and Swedish sides of Kvarken have tracked changes in the ferry connection.

Beginning from the 1970s, passenger traffic over the Kvarken Strait increased significantly, while cross-border cooperation became more established and varied. There was a growth of initiatives to strengthen exchange in sectors such as tourism and healthcare, as well as youth exchanges through schools and sport clubs. There was also increased mobility over the Strait because many Finns relocated to the Swedish side of Kvarken to work and study. However, the abolishment of tax-free sales on the Kvarken ferry in 1999 was, in many ways, a turning point that led to a significant decline in traffic and had a severe, negative effect on cross-border relations.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been described as a low point in cross-border cooperation across Kvarken, because the unstable and limited ferry connection between Vaasa and Umeå made it difficult to maintain and develop the economic, social, and cultural ties that had been established during previous decades. Following this period of decline, joint actions were taken by actors on the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Kvarken region to reinstate a new, stable ferry connection in 2012, highlighting the importance of this traffic link to both parties. However, both also believed that interruptions to the ferry schedule, would cause unforeseen damage to their cross-border relations. The arguments for reinstating the ferry link focused not only on improving connectivity, but on providing a new basis for re-strengthening cross-border relations and developing stronger synergies across the region, which were considered to depend on a reliable traffic link allowing frequent travel.

The current ferry link is the result of cross-border cooperation and joint efforts, but the ferry connection has also resulted in numerous direct and indirect effects on both sides of the Kvarken Strait. The examples discussed herein have concerned initiatives to strengthen cooperation in sectors such as research, education, healthcare, and tourism, as well as new forms of cooperation between businesses, all of which suggest that cross-border cooperation has strengthened and expanded during the most recent decade. In the study interviews, local and regional actors unanimously stated that most joint activities and initiatives emerging over the past decade would not have existed without the ferry. It is generally felt that newly emerged cooperation initiatives have also led to a stronger belief in the potential benefits and synergies that can be achieved by working together, which has, in turn, led to additional spin-offs and opportunities.

## Future potential for deeper cross-border integration

When envisioning future potentials for deeper cross-border cooperation and integration in the Kvarken region, a central starting point is understanding the basis for past and current exchange and cooperation. These have been closely related to the combination of a shared history, dating to the centuries when the Finnish and Swedish sides of Kvarken were the same country, and to geographic proximity, in which traffic over the Kvarken Strait has served as the link to connect people. According to the study interviews, these close historical ties have resulted in a common culture and shared values; this, and the fact that Swedish is widely spoken on the Finnish side of Kvarken, have provided the foundation for cross-border relations. Cross-border cooperation in the Nordic region has generally been based on the notion that border regions are often peripheral within their respective countries, and that these regions have plenty to gain from working with those across national borders. As stated in the interviews, a central reason for cooperating is that, in many cases, there are closer ties between the regions of Ostrobothnia and Västerbotten than between these regions and their respective capital cities (Häyry interview 2019; Strand interview 2019). Furthermore, it is felt that Vaasa, Umeå, and their surrounding regions are not prioritised in the national political agendas of Finland and Sweden, which is why the cities and their wider regions have been keen to establish close cooperation within various sectors and domains.

A precondition for integrating the Kvarken region is its actors' mutual interest and willingness to strengthen cross-border relations. According to most interviewees, interest in cross-border exchange has traditionally been somewhat stronger on the Finnish side. Some interviewees believe that this is likely connected to the history of people on the Finnish side having greater interest in looking westward to the Swedish side. For example, it was mentioned that people from Ostrobothnia have long followed Swedish television, news, and current affairs, and that people from Finland more commonly move across the Kvarken Strait to work or study. This pattern can still be seen, with many highly educated and skilled workers from Finland, particularly those who speak Swedish, moving to Sweden. This is a challenge from the Finnish perspective, so that enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the labour market on the Finnish side of Kvarken is considered important (Häyry interview 2019). Visions and actions to develop stronger synergies between Finnish and Swedish companies, for instance within bioeconomy and cleantech, might be a step in this direction and would enable a more balanced labour market exchange that would benefit both sides more equally.

A positive signal that cross-border relations are being enhanced is the apparent, and increasing, interest in cooperation from the Swedish side. Several interviewees mentioned a growing interest among Swedish businesses in strengthening cooperation with the Finnish as one of the clearest changes. Meanwhile, an increase in tourism and overnight stays in Ostrobothnia from Sweden could be an indication of growing interest among the Swedish people more generally. Interviewees mentioned that while the interest in Nordic cooperation decreased after Finland and Sweden joined the EU, this has now shifted and there seems to be stronger mutual interest in re-establishing cross-border contacts and cooperation (Strand interview 2019). Strong interest was expressed in Umeå cooperating with the Finnish side of Kvarken, because the city differs from the surrounding Västerbotten region in many ways (Forsgren interview 2019). Whereas most of Västerbotten is sparsely populated with a shrinking, ageing citizenry, Umeå is a growing city with a younger population. From the municipality's perspective, cross-border exchange within healthcare, research, and education is important for maintaining and strengthening its skilled, competent labour force. Overall, increased interest in cross-border cooperation among both Swedish and Norwegian stakeholders appears to be linked to a greater transport focus and the potential for stronger connections between the Kvarken region and the European, Russian, and Chinese markets.

According to interviewees, coastal areas have always been the most active and centrally involved in Kvarken cooperation, and the two largest cities, Umeå and Vaasa, have played especially central roles. Meanwhile, on the Finnish side, South Ostrobothnia and Central Ostrobothnia have played relatively smaller roles in such cooperation (Peltola interview 2019; Kouvo interview 2019). One reason for lower involvement by South Ostrobothnia appears to be that the region does not have a coast and has traditionally not been strongly international. Instead, its many small businesses and agricultural sector have been connected primarily to the domestic market (Peltola interview 2019). Another reason for the more limited involvement by South Ostrobothnia could be that the region is vastly Finnish speaking (Peltola interview 2019). Since the Swedish

language has always played a central role in cooperation over the Kvarken Strait, this may explain why the Swedish-speaking population in Finland has been more centrally involved in such exchange than those who are not fluent in Swedish. Nevertheless, several interviewees noted that language is now less important, and generally felt that Kvarken's Finnish-speaking population now has more interest in, and sees more potential in, cooperation. Overall, while the Swedish language provides a logical basis for exchange in Kvarken, it was simultaneously emphasised that the Finnish do not consider cross-border cooperation to be exclusively intended for the Swedish-speaking population, but rather for the benefit of the whole region and the whole Kvarken population (Strand interview 2019; Peltola interview 2019).

From a long-term perspective, the territorial scope of cross-border cooperation has expanded, with more involved actors and stakeholder groups. Shifting from being centred around a core, specifically Umeå and Vaasa, the region is now seen as connected to a wider geographic area. Nevertheless, many primary actors have remained at the centre of this exchange throughout the decades. The Kvarken Council has been at the core of this exchange since it was established in the 1970s and will most likely remain at the forefront of cross-border cooperation for years to come. In 2020, the Kvarken Council was transformed from a registered association to a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), i.e., a European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation. Kvarken Council members generally believe that this can open new possibilities for EU funding and give the region a stronger voice and position in Europe (Jern interview 2019). There is optimism that this organisational change will help strengthen Kvarken as a common regional labour market. Although synergies between companies on either side of the Strait have improved, it is widely acknowledged that plenty needs to be done to integrate the labour market more fully (Strand interview 2019). Being an EGTC is viewed as providing an improved foundation for maintaining cross-border infrastructure, including cooperation between hospitals and universities, implementing cross-border development projects, and generally maintaining everyday cross-border cooperation (Lindström n.d.).

The new ferry, which will begin operations in 2021, will play a central role in future opportunities. The relative importance of passenger and freight transport has varied over time. Until 1999, when the abolishment of tax-free sales led to a significant drop in passenger numbers, passenger traffic was clearly the focus. This shifted during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when passenger numbers decreased significantly and the relative importance of freight traffic increased. Since the ferry connection was re-established in 2012, both passenger and freight transport have been highly prioritised and are currently seen as mutually important for year-round traffic (Knutar & Lindholm interview 2019). The new ferry will be the first specifically designed and built for Kvarken traffic and has it been described as the first Kvarken ferry that will allow proper focus on both passenger and freight traffic (Knutar & Lindholm interview 2019). While passenger traffic will undoubtedly remain vital to future cross-border cooperation and exchange, in terms of traffic volumes, there is more growth potential in freight transport. Whereas passenger capacity will remain consistent, the new ferry will allow around a 50% increase in freight capacity (Strandén 2018). On the new ferry, freight traffic will increase because there will be more space available, and because there will be more crossings that follow a more convenient timetable, which will improve conditions for trade both across the Strait and with other markets. However, to increase freight transport, adjoining traffic infrastructure will also be crucial. As described above, transport and traffic infrastructure has probably been the most prominent issue in cross-border cooperation projects during the past decade. Hence, the potential for boosting contributions by Kvarken transport to the Russian, Chinese, and other European markets will depend not only on the ferry itself, but to a large degree on surrounding and connecting port, rail, and road infrastructure, all of which currently require substantial improvements.

Although the Kvarken region is increasingly viewed in a broader territorial context, in which many actors see potential extending beyond the immediate region, the most important aspect of cross-border cooperation has always been the potential for exchanges between people. Perhaps the most important effect of re-establishing the ferry connection in 2012 has been improving the conditions for exchange between those on the Finnish and Swedish sides, following the low point in cross-border relations during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The new ferry will have a central role in further increasing regional integration. Based on the long-term history of Kvarken, it is clear that a precondition for achieving flourishing cross-border cooperation is a connection that allows frequent travel and enables people to live, work, study, travel, and maintain social contacts

across the Kvarken Strait. Passenger capacity on the new ferry will remain fairly similar to the current ferry, but with a shorter travel time (3 hours, compared with the current 4.5 hours), more departure times, and, since the new ferry will have more space for cars, this will provide increased opportunity for business and leisure travel.

One of the most recent initiatives in the Kvarken region concerns electric aviation. In the autumn of 2019, the Kvarken Council carried out a feasibility study to assess the regional development impacts of electric-powered air traffic (Kvarken Council 2020). Consequently, several public and private partners from the Finnish and Swedish sides of the Strait submitted an application for funding to support a two-year project on electric flights in Kvarken. Local stakeholders argue that the region is well suited to electric aviation because current flight connections are inadequate, and because the distances are well suited to the range capacities of electric planes. There are several airports in the Kvarken region within a 100–200 km radius (e.g., Kokkola-Jakobstad, Lycksele, Seinäjoki, Skellefteå, Umeå, Vaasa, and Örnsköldsvik), but there are currently no direct flight connections between these airports. Compared with the ferry link, electric flights would reduce travel times significantly, and while the ferry links the two largest cities, electric flights would also increase direct connectivity among the region's other cities and towns. Electric flights could, thus, complement the ferry connection and increase engagement among actors from Kvarken areas traditionally less involved in cross-border cooperation.

## Concluding remarks

While cross-border cooperation in many areas seems to be on a more solid foundation, challenges and barriers to further integrating the region remain. One central question is whether national-level decision making enables or hinders cross-border cooperation at the regional level. Several interviewees expressed that the joint efforts to re-establish and develop the ferry connection since 2012 have not always gained strong national support in Finland and Sweden. For example, the decision to establish a joint port company was not initially supported at the national levels (Strand interview 2019). There have also been challenges to purchasing the new ferry. While the Finnish government has committed to funding a portion of the purchase, Sweden's state principle disallows funding cross-border ferry traffic (Lillkvist 2016). Given these circumstances, many central Kvarken actors involved in cross-border cooperation consider it vital that local and regional actors play an active role in shaping the region. However, a general sentiment expressed in the interviews was that the situation has improved over the past few years, and that being active and achieving visible results has given the Kvarken region more visibility and leverage at the national and EU levels. For instance, the new ferry has received widespread attention by the Finnish media. Becoming more visible to the European Union is important, as this has given Kvarken more leverage with politicians and policymakers in the capital cities of Helsinki and Stockholm (Häyry interview 2019). This would not have occurred without the individuals who have nurtured cross-border exchange and collaboration. Continued efforts will be needed to maintain and gain additional progress, or risk losing these achievements over time.

Cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region has many advocates, who consider it important for a variety of reasons. However, based on this study, it is difficult to assess with any certainty how the public sees the region, how they feel about the importance of cross-border cooperation, or how they believe it defines their region. Although many new collaborative initiatives have recently emerged, there seems to be less social exchange than in the past, such as fewer sports competitions, school trips, and education exchanges. It is worth considering whether this may indicate that a sense of belonging to the Kvarken region is not necessarily as strong as the regional cooperation advocates might hope for. Therefore, it could be valuable to study how the public on both sides of the Kvarken Strait view regional cooperation and whether it confers mutual benefits. Thus, understanding residents' perspectives on Kvarken cooperation through a resident survey might be useful during a future partnership stage. The general understanding of the Kvarken region, and what it means, could be useful in a campaign to raise awareness about the benefits of collaboration, and might promote a more inclusive and unified region. In this way, employees, teachers, and members of social organisations, sport clubs, and other community activities might be more likely to think of the region as a cooperative whole when they plan and organise activities. Strengthening a regional identity among the Kvarken population through such initiatives could be a step towards better integration.

The present study was largely conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, at the time of finalising this report, the pandemic in 2020 severely hindered cross-border exchange in the Kvarken region as well as in other Nordic bordering regions. While the Kvarken ferry connection has previously been vulnerable to acute external shocks, such as the abolishment of tax-free, the current situation where exchange and mobility over the border has almost ceased entirely is in many ways unprecedented. While the long-term effects of the crisis remain to be seen, there may be stronger potential for recovery than before based on the various cross-border initiatives that have emerged during the past decade.

Looking further ahead, it seems important to keep our sights on the historical foundation for Kvarken's cross-border cooperation. Besides geographic proximity, the close historical ties that have resulted in a common culture and shared values provide the basis for strengthening future cross-border relations. With the emergence of a transport-focused perspective, the Kvarken region is increasingly seen as connected to a wider territorial context. In the near future, most forms of exchange and collaboration will remain centred primarily around the immediate region. Thus, while new perspectives and layers of cross-border cooperation are added, it seems important to ensure that they expand upon a solid foundation of long-established strengths.

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## List of interviewees

Mathias Lindström, Director, Kvarken Council – (21.08.2019)

Hans Frantz, Chairman of the board of the Vaasa Hospital District – (17.09.2019)

Tomas Häyry, Mayor, City of Vaasa – (17.09.2019)

Peter Björk, Professor, Hanken School of Economics – (17.09.2019)

Olav Jern, Chief Executive at Regional Council of Ostrobothnia – (18.09.2019)

Tomas Sikström, Infrastructure Manager at INAB, (Infrastruktur i Umeå) – (18.09.2019)

Isabella Forsgren, Infrastructure Strategist, INAB (Infrastruktur i Umeå) and Former Development Manager at Umeå municipality – (18.09.2019)

Björn Knutar, Cargo Manager and Matthias Lindholm, Freight Coordinator – (19.09.2019)

Joakim Strand, Member of the Finish Parliament – (19.09.2019)

Asko Peltola, Regional Mayor, Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (19.09.2019)

Kajsa Kouvo, Municipal Council in Kokkola (19.09.2019)

Per Nylén, Chairman of the Municipal Council in Örnsköldsvik, (19.09.2019)

Max Jansson, Managing Director, Visit Vasa (11.11.2019)

Erja Back, Project Manager, Visit Umeå (11.11.2019)

# About this publication

## **The Kvarken ferry link and its importance in cross-border cooperation and integration**

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