



KVARKENRÅDET
MERENKURKUN
NEUVOSTO

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

TOGETHER WE CREATE THE WORLD'S MOST
MEANINGFUL HANDPRINT





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FOR A VIVID REGION

The Kvarken Council is a neutral cooperation platform and an enabler for all types of cross-border cooperation in the Kvarken region.

The Kvarken Council is a Nordic cross-border cooperation platform for the counties of Ostrobothnia, Southern Ostrobothnia, and Central Ostrobothnia in Finland as well as the regions of Västerbotten and Västernorrland in Sweden. Together they form the Kvarken Council's operating area, the Kvarken region. The Kvarken Council is one of the official cross-border cooperation bodies co-funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Kvarken Council EGTC strives to promote and develop a strong and viable region by:

- promoting integration within the region
- providing a platform for cooperation for all the region's actors
- reducing and eliminating border barriers
- increasing the region's visibility at national and European levels
- working actively in several European networks
- utilizing the region's strengths and supporting its development.

Mainly within the following areas: business, education, tourism, research and development, health care, culture, environmental issues, sports, children, and young people as well as communications and transport infrastructure.



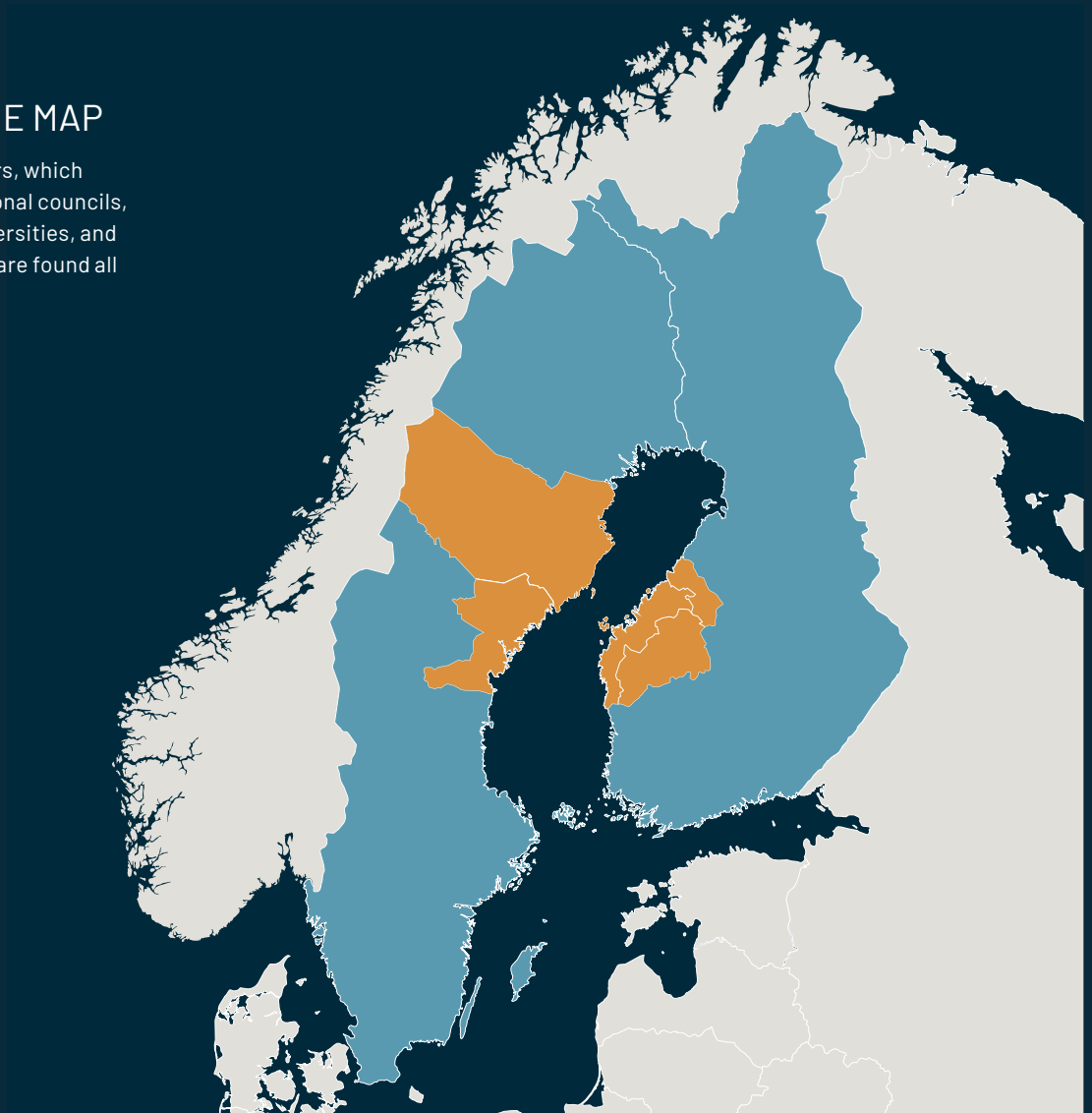
Nordic
Co-operation

THE KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC AS AN ORGANISATION

The Kvarken Council was founded in 1972 during the first Kvarken Conference in Vaasa, Finland. The first years were dedicated to the organization's formation and the cooperation's anchoring in the municipalities, authorities, and organizations. In 1979, the Kvarken Council became a part of the official Nordic border-regional cooperation, with financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers and its Nordic Senior Official's Committee for Regional Policy (NÄRP). The Kvarken Council's operations was administered by a non-profit association as of 2008. At the turn of the year 2020-2021, the Kvarken Council changed from a registered association to a stable legal entity when the Kvarken Council EGTC began its operations.

OUR REGION ON THE MAP

The Kvarken Council's members, which consist of municipalities, regional councils, development companies, universities, and higher education institutions, are found all over the region.



KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC'S BOARD 26.5.2023–

FINLAND

Ordinary member

Joakim Strand, City of Vaasa, Deputy Chairman (*Tomas Häyry**)
Mats Brandt, The Regional Council of Ostrobothnia (*Steven Frost-
dahl**)

Mikko Savola, The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (*Heli
Seppelvirta**)

Stina Mattila, City of Kokkola (*Jonne Sandberg**)

Hannemari Niemi, City of Seinäjoki (*Erkki Välimäki**)

Jyrki Kaiponen, The Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia (*Margi-
ta Lukkarinen**)

Anna-Kaisa Pusa, City of Kurikka, Deputy Chairman (*Olavi Kandolin**)

Christoffer Ingo, Korsholm Municipality (*Rurik Ahlberg**)

Peter Boström, City of Jakobstad (*Milla Kallioinen**)

SWEDEN

Ordinary member

Rickard Carstedt, Region Västerbotten, Chairman (*Anna Frej**)

Lilly Bäcklund, Region Västerbotten (*Mikael Abrahamsson**)

Bore Sköld, Region Västerbotten

Åsa Ågren Wikström, Region Västerbotten, Deputy Chairman (*Per
Boström**)

Mattias Larsson, Region Västerbotten (*Meta Tunell**)

Anna-Britta Åkerlind, Örnsköldsvik Municipality (*Carolina Sondell**)

Hans Lindberg, Umeå Municipality (*Elmer Eriksson**)

Tomas Mörtzell, Storuman Municipality (*Karin Malmfjord**)

Roland Sjögren, Lycksele Municipality (*Lars Olsson**)

Evelina Fahlesson, Skellefteå Municipality (*Andreas Löwenhök**)

Jonny Lundin, Region Västernorrland (*Sara Nylund**)

Mattias Rösberg, Region Västernorrland (*Dan Rasmusson**)

*Suppleants

The Kvarken Council EGTC's board has gathered for physical meetings four times and had one Teams meeting during 2023. Physical board meetings were arranged on 23.2.2023 in Härnösand, 12.4.2023 in Korsholm, and 12.12.2023 in Umeå. The Kvarken Council's annual meeting was held 26.5.2023 in Umeå. In addition, the constitutive board meeting was arranged via Teams on 23.8.2023.

KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC'S BOARD 20.5.2022–26.5.2023

FINLAND

Ordinary member

Joakim Strand, City of Vaasa, Chairman (*Tomas Häyry**)
Mats Brandt, The Regional Council of Ostrobothnia (*Steven
Frostdahl**)

Mikko Savola, The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (*Heli
Seppelvirta**)

Stina Mattila, City of Kokkola (*Jonne Sandberg**)

Hannemari Niemi, City of Seinäjoki (*Erkki Välimäki**)

Jyrki Kaiponen, The Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia
(*Margita Lukkarinen**)

Anna-Kaisa Pusa, City of Kurikka, Deputy Chairman (*Olavi Kandolin**)

Christoffer Ingo, Korsholm Municipality (*Rurik Ahlberg**)

Peter Boström, City of Jakobstad (*Milla Kallioinen**)

SWEDEN

Ordinary member

Lennart Holmlund, Region Västerbotten, Deputy Chairman (*Tomas
Marklund**)

Lilly Bäcklund, Region Västerbotten (*Kristina Fredriksson**)

Mathias Sehlstedt, Region Västerbotten (*Mikael Jakobsson**)

Åsa Ågren Wikström, Region Västerbotten, Deputy Chairman
(*Veronica Kerr**)

Mattias Larsson, Region Västerbotten (*Robin Thörnberg**)

Per Nylén, Örnsköldsvik Municipality (*Anna-Britta Åkerlind**)

Hans Lindberg, Umeå Municipality (*Anders Ågren**)

Tomas Mörtzell, Storuman Municipality (*Karin Malmfjord**)

Christer Rönnlund, Lycksele Municipality (*Lars Olsson**)

Evelina Fahlesson, Skellefteå Municipality (*Andreas Löwenhök**)

Hans Backlund, Region Västernorrland (*Arne Engholm**)

Annica Engström, Region Västernorrland (*Lars-Gunnar Hultin**)

*Suppleants

MEMBERS OF THE KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC 31.12.2023

Founding members of the Kvarken Council EGTC

Region Västerbotten
Umeå Municipality
Örnsköldsvik Municipality
The Regional Council of Ostrobothnia
The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia
The Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia
City of Vaasa
City of Kokkola
City of Seinäjoki
City of Jakobstad

New main members (with voting rights)

City of Kurikka
Korsholm Municipality
Storuman Municipality
Lycksele Municipality
Skellefteå Municipality
Region Västernorrland

Other municipality members

Vindeln Municipality
City of Nykarleby
City of Närpes
Nordmaling Municipality
Vännäs Municipality
Larsmo Municipality
Kronoby Municipality
Sundsvall Municipality

Organisation members

Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK
VAMK University of Applied Sciences
University of Vaasa
Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia
Into Seinäjoki
Kristinestads näringslivscentral
Hanken School of Economics
Umeå University
Mid Sweden University

THE KVARKEN COUNCIL'S STAFF 2023

The Kvarken Council is a small but highly operational and efficient organization. The Development Manager and one of the Senior Advisors are situated in Umeå. The Kvarken Council opened an office in December 2023 at Storgatan 65 in Umeå. Other staff members are situated on the Finnish side at the office in Vaasa, Gerbyntie 18.

Webpage: www.kvarken.org

The Kvarken Council's staff:

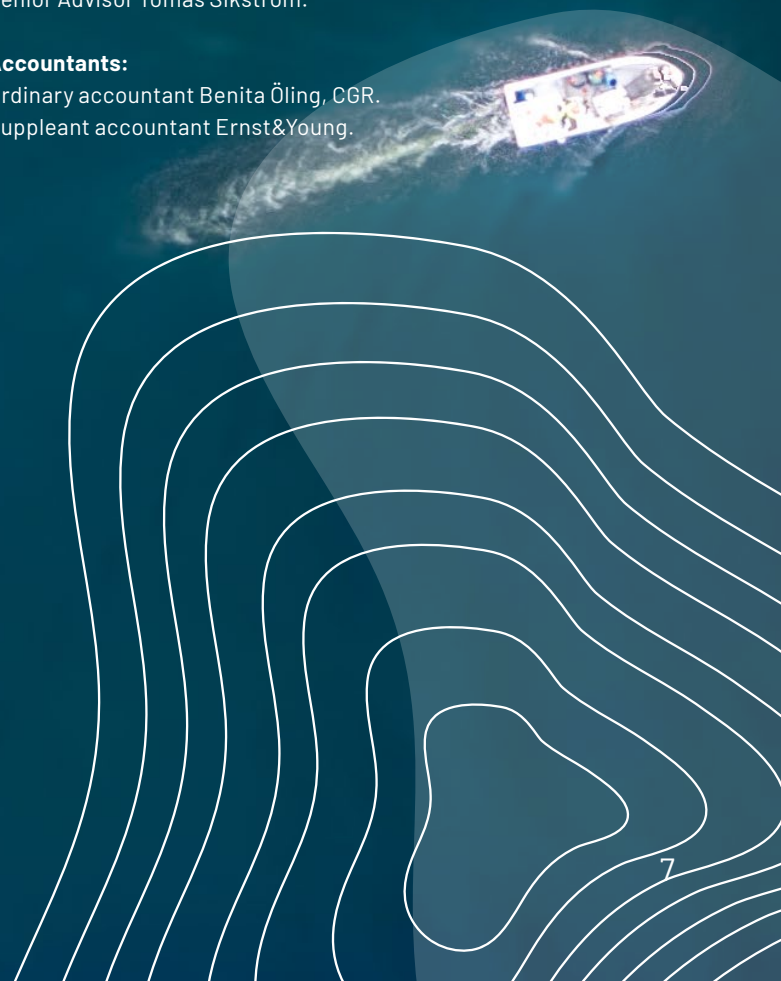
Director Mathias Lindström
Development Manager Veronica Berg
Growth Manager Sarah Väre (was hired in December 2023)
Financial Manager Maria Snickars
Communications Manager Johanna Häggman
Communications Assistant Ida-Maria Huuhka

Project staff:

Project Manager Marianne Sjöström
Event Coordinator Fredrik Furu
Senior Advisor Olav Jern (resigned in May 2023)
Senior Advisor Tomas Sikström.

Accountants:

Ordinary accountant Benita Öling, CGR.
Suppleant accountant Ernst&Young.



CHAIRMAN'S GREETING

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE FUTURE FOR THE KVARKEN REGION



As the Chair of the Kvarken Council EGTC, it is with great satisfaction that I reflect on the past year – a year that has marked significant progress and development for our region. 2023 has been a year where our collective work and commitment have clearly manifested in several important advancements.

One of the most noteworthy advancements has been the expansion of the Kvarken Council EGTC with new members. This expansion is not just a quantitative increase but, above all, a qualitative enhancement of our ability to act and influence at both regional and international levels. This underscores our joint commitment to the prosperity of the region and is a clear sign of the attractiveness and trust the Kvarken Council enjoys.

As our world changes, security issues have become increasingly prominent. Our efforts to strengthen east-west connections have been crucial in increasing the security and stability of the region. This initiative goes hand in hand with the Finnish investiga-

tion mentioned in the Finnish Government Programme adopted in 2023, which forms a cornerstone of our continued work towards a stronger and more interconnected region, from east to west, from Norway to the Finnish hinterland.

It is also worth emphasizing the good work that the staff of cooperation organizations has done over the year. Without your commitment and professionalism, we would not have been able to achieve the successes we see today. Your efforts are the core of our success and deserve our deepest appreciation and recognition.

Let us continue to build on the solid foundation that has been laid, with a continued focus on sustainable development, innovation, and cross-border cooperation. I look forward to the challenges and opportunities that 2024 brings, convinced that together we will continue to strengthen the Kvarken region's position as a leading force for positive change in the Nordic region and beyond.

Together we create a brighter future for the Kvarken region.

Rickard Carstedt

Chairman, Kvarken Council EGTC

DIRECTOR'S GREETING

OUR COLLABORATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN THE NORDICS



During 2023, the Kvarken Council EGTC has continued its ambitious work in promoting cross-border collaborations and sustainable development in the Kvarken region. The year has been characterized by discussions about a Fixed Link over the Kvarken, now called the Nordic Connector, which is not only a project of great strategic importance but also strongly rooted in the Finnish Government Programme. This connection is seen as a key to strengthening the region's competitiveness, accessibility, and preparedness, especially considering the current geopolitical situation and its impact on the region. This includes our continued focus on developing a stronger and more coherent transport infrastructure that can connect the Nordics, Europe, and NATO. Connections for growth are not only about our region, since they also bring positive effects on a larger scale to our countries' inland portions, capitals, and the entire Nordics.

In addition to infrastructure projects, the Kvarken Council has devoted itself to promoting sustainable development through projects such as Bothnia Green Energy and Bothnian Coastal Route. These projects stimulate cross-border cooperation, promote investments in sustainable energy solutions, and strengthen the region's attractiveness as a sustainable tourist destination.

The Kvarken Council, in collaboration with the region's airports, has continued the work on implementing electric and sustainable aviation also during 2023. The projects FAIR 2 and New North both aim to accelerate the implementation of sustainable flights in the northern Nordics, which can then be realized in other parts of the Nordics and Europe. These projects are clear examples of how the Kvarken Council works to promote a green transition, strengthen the region's position as a leader in sustainable development, improve the conditions for business, and work to enrich the residents' leisure time.

Organizational growth in terms of an increased number of members has been complemented by a strategy work that includes all members and stakeholders. The strategy work aiming for 2030 resulted in a jointly adopted strategy with future directions, priorities, and actions (see here). This vision and our commitments also aim to contribute to the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision of making the Nordics the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030. In addition, the Kvarken Council has also strengthened its organization with two new recruitments to support the members and the realization of the vision.

I would like to welcome our new resources and express my deepest gratitude to everyone working within or for the Kvarken Council and contributing to these successes; the Kvarken Council's board, members, the region's politicians and officials, and our financiers from the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Interreg programs. Your efforts are invaluable.

Together, we have laid the foundation for a future where the Kvarken region not only strengthens its position, but also continues to lead the way towards an integrated and sustainable future for the Nordics.

Forwards – together!

Mathias Lindström

Director, Kvarken Council EGTC



WORK TO REDUCE BORDER OBSTACLES

The Kvarken Council is working actively in a number of European networks to promote a more open Europe and to reduce border barriers.

The Nordic Council of Ministers defines a border obstacle as “any type of problem that prevents, restricts, or renders more difficult the potential of people to operate freely across national borders”. The Kvarken Council is working actively in a number of European networks to promote a more open Europe and to reduce border barriers.

The Kvarken Council runs its own projects, propel various cross-border projects as well as initiate collaboration projects between different parties. All this to contribute to a positive development of the society in the Kvarken region, the Nordic region, and Europe.

THE KVARKEN COUNCIL HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN THE FOLLOWING NETWORKS IN 2023:

EGTC PLATFORM

The EGTC Platform was established on 27th January 2011 by the European Committee of the Regions. The Kvarken Council EGTC will be included in the EGTC Platform upon its establishment, which strengthens the Council's opportunities to practice interest representation in Europe. The EGTC Platform is an organization that represents the interests of cross-border regions at EU level and simultaneously functions as a platform for the exchange of experiences. In addition to promoting the EGTC as a tool for territorial cohesion and giving visibility to EGTC projects, it also supports the European Committee of the Regions and fulfills a consultative purpose regarding cross-border issues.

EUROPEAN STRAITS INITIATIVE ESI

The Kvarken Council is a member of the European Straits Initiative ESI network, which is a partnership consisting of European regions bordered by a strait. The network's goal is to promote the visibility of European straits and their specificities and represent their interests at EU level. The ESI partnership also aims to develop the launch of various cooperation projects and promote cooperation between the straits in terms of economic development, environmental protection, traffic and logistics, cultural collaboration, and tourism.

SCANDRIA ALLIANCE

Scandria Corridor is a geographic corridor which extends from the north of Scandinavia via Oslo, Helsinki, Stockholm, Berlin, and Wien to the northern part of the Adriatic Sea in Italy. Scandria Alliance is a cooperative platform for e.g. cities and regions along the corridor to cooperate on climate-smart multimodal transport solutions to achieve sustainable regional development. The Kvarken Council EGTC was granted a membership in the alliance in 2021. The membership in Scandria Alliance results in better opportunities to interest monitor the needs and interests of the region on EU-level and offers also a natural partnership platform for new projects, for example within CEF or the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. The vice-chairman Åsa Ågren-Wikström is the board's representative in the steering group for Scandria Alliance.

KVARKEN COUNCIL'S FIRST STRATEGY AS A EUROPEAN GROUPING OF TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

Members of the Kvarken Council EGTC approved a new and thoroughly revised strategy for Kvarken cooperation for 2030 in the grouping's annual general meeting on May 26th, 2023.

The Kvarken Council's membership, extending over three Ostrobothnian counties in Finland and the regions of Västerbotten and Västernorrland in Sweden, have together with their collaboration partners actively participated in the creation of the new Cross-Border Development Strategy 2030.

STRATEGY'S FOCUS AREAS

The strategy maps out the way for cross-border cooperation that is both prioritized in the Kvarken region and that affects Nordic cooperation in the region.

The purpose of the jointly approved vision is to create the most meaningful handprint through Nordic cooperation. Handprint is used to refer to the positive impact and change that cooperation leaves behind for future generations.

In the same way that a hand has five fingers, the imprint is described in the form of five priority areas:

- Demographics and Attractiveness
- Accessibility
- Green Transition

- Competence and Learning
- Interaction Between Residents

– These priority areas have been identified as the most current common denominators in the Kvarken region, and they are now included in the documents that steer the Kvarken Council's activities.

All priority areas include ongoing actions or actions that will be launched according to signals from the region and by the board's decision. The entirety is a living document due to actions that are constantly updated, and the purpose of all this is to develop our region into a successful region to live, reside, and work in – both for the individual person as well as for companies and industries, explains **Mr Mathias Lindström**, Director of the Kvarken Council.

A JOINT DEMONSTRATION OF RESOLVE

The new organizational structure, the EGTC, reinforces the engagement of members and collaboration partners in the activities. Discussion sessions, joint working meetings, and statement rounds have been organized for members and collaboration partners so that they can express their wishes and influence the creation of this first strategy based on completely new conditions.

– Our activities and actions have already previously been guided by our members' needs, but this organizational form allows new op-

portunities and methods of application, tells **Mr Joakim Strand**, Finnish MP and outgoing Chairman of the Kvarken Council's Board.

– Compared to many other Nordic cross-border committees, the Kvarken Council EGTC and its members have a unique opportunity to jointly discuss, prioritize, and coordinate development work that requires so-called multi-level governance in order to be implemented efficiently, **Mr Strand** continues.

DEMOCRATICALLY ANCHORED ORGANIZATION

Up until 2021, the Kvarken Council was a non-profit organization that functioned as a Nordic, cross-border cooperation committee co-funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. It was reorganized into an EGTC in order to create a clearer and more democratically anchored organization that takes on a more substantive and explicit financial responsibility for cross-border cooperation. The EGTC is the European Commission's own legal body.

The Kvarken Council EGTC has a strong democratic legitimacy through its clear membership composition and Board representation, preparations, and the annual general meeting of its members, alongside the method of operation that was created through reorganization. The organization's chairmanship alternates regularly between the countries of Finland and Sweden.

EGTC ORGANIZATIONAL FORM IMPROVES KVARKEN COUNCIL'S OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN THE REGION

The Kvarken Council became the first fully Nordic EGTC area on December 31st, 2020. Over the three years that the EGTC organizational form has been in use, the prerequisites for Kvarken Council to strengthen the region have improved and the handling of cross-border projects has been facilitated, among other things.

EGTC stands for European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation and it is the EU's own legal instrument specifically tailored for cross-border cooperation in Europe. The Kvarken Council is the first fully Nordic EGTC area in Europe. The EGTC organizational form brings new opportunities for the Kvarken Council to develop and strengthen the region through cross-border cooperation projects.

– There are many advantages to being an EGTC area instead of an association. EGTC has given us a stronger body to address issues that are important for the region at national and EU levels. The new organizational form entails stronger commitment from the partnership and facilitates action at EU level, says **Mr Mathias Lindström**, Director of the Kvarken Council.

WORKING COMMITTEES FOSTER CONTINUOUS CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Working committees are a new working method implemented after the Kvarken

Council became an EGTC area. The Kvarken Council's board or annual meeting can establish these committees within the framework of the council's operations. This can be done on its own initiative or at the request of a member, partner, or project. The strengths of this working method are that it brings strong commitment from the board and the collaborating organizations in everyday work and that it is possible to invite private actors and non-members to participate in the committees' work.

The first committee established is the Working Committee for Traffic and Infrastructure. This group has worked to explore the implementation of a fixed connection – the Nordic Connector – across the Kvarken, even though there is currently no ongoing project regarding the connection.

– At the Kvarken Council, we aim for continuous cross-border activities year-round, regardless of whether there are ongoing projects or not. The committees serve as a working method that contributes to this, maintaining operations even when there is no project funding, **Mr Lindström** says.

Several corresponding working committees will be established in the future. The Bothnia Green Energy project aims to establish a working committee for energy issues within the Kvarken Council.





Photo: City of Vaasa / Christoffer Björklund.

NEW ORGANIZATIONAL FORM FACILITATES PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The new organizational form can function as a sole beneficiary in its EGTC role. This means that members of the Kvarken Council, as well as other collaborative partners, can work across borders on projects, while the projects' administration, information dissemination, and financial management will be entirely handled by the Kvarken Council. Partners can simply focus on goals and activities, whereas the Kvarken Council takes care of the "boring" tasks.

The first project where the Kvarken Council acts as the sole beneficiary is FAIR 2, focusing on sustainable aviation. The project aims to deepen understanding of the need for sustainable regional flight connections.

Several member organizations are part of the partnership, along with Luleå.

– We've gained many new members since the EGTC organizational form was implemented. Membership is of interest because the Kvarken Council EGTC enables smoother administration of international projects. The latest development is that some universities have applied for membership, and our long-standing partners in Norway have also shown interest in joining the Kvarken Council, says **Mr Lindström**.

The Kvarken Council's goal is to promote all types of cross-border collaboration with the ambition of developing the region into the best place globally to live and work. The Kvarken Council EGTC, for instance, works through tourism and transportation projects to strengthen economic and social cross-border cohesion and to develop

the region. The council's work is based on collaboration on behalf of its members and other collaborative organizations in the region.

EVENTS

The Kvarken Council and its projects have arranged several events during 2023.

STRATEGY MEETING

One part of the work to create the 2030 strategy for the Kvarken Council was to arrange a workshop February 2nd, 2023, onboard on Aurora Botnia, where both Finnish and Swedish partners could participate. The strategy meeting was preceded by Teams meetings in which the strategy took shape.

NORDIC BATTERY BELT WORKSHOP

Within the Nordic Battery Belt feasibility study, a workshop was arranged in Umeå 20-21.4.2023. The aim of the workshop was to identify the interest for a new cross-border project in the Nordic Battery Belt region, and which issues should be most prioritised to handle in such a project..

BOTHNIAN COASTAL ROUTE WEBINAR

About 60 people gathered behind their computers to watch the Sustainable Coastal Tourism webinar, arranged by the Interreg Aurora project Bothnian Coastal Route, on October 31st, 2023. The first part of the webinar consisted of a panel discussion where different aspects of sustainability were addressed. The other parts of the webinar consisted of presentations about the unique selling points of the Bothnian Bay coastal area and how sustainability should be communicated.

WASA FUTURE FESTIVAL

The Kvarken Council was responsible for some of the program 10-11.8.2023 during Wasa Future Festival. During the program the impact and role of investments for continued development in the Kvarken region, security supply, security policy issues, co-



Photo: Niklas Eklund at Wasa Future Festival on August 10th, 2023.

ordination around energy cooperation, and sustainable solutions were presented and discussed. The event was divided into two days and arranged at the Wasa Innovation Center in Vaasa.

The key speaker at the Kvarken Council's event on August 10th was Niklas Eklund, Professor of Politics and Public Administration at the Department of Political Science at Umeå University. He spoke about security policy issues and about how problematic it is that the Nordic countries do not know what Russia is doing in the Arctic. Eklund criticised Finland and Sweden for thinking about the future only one period of parliament at a time, and stated that we need more long-term perspective thinking.

Security policy issues, for instance, NATO and security supply were also discussed in a closed meeting for invited guests on the morning of August 11th. Among others, representatives of the Finnish and Swedish defense forces were present at the meeting.

KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC'S ANNUAL MEETING

The Kvarken Council's annual meeting was arranged May 26th, 2023, in Umeå. A dinner for the board and the annual meeting delegates was also arranged the evening before the meeting.



Åsa Ågren Wikström, Rickard Carstedt, Anna-Kaisa Pusa, Kvarken Council EGTC's annual meeting 26.5.2023

OUR PROJECTS

WHEN VISION BECOMES REALITY

Over 130 cross-border projects in over 50 years! The Kvarken Council runs its own projects, and initiate collaboration projects between different parties. All the following projects have been granted funding from Interreg Aurora.

ALL OF OUR ONGOING AND COMPLETED PROJECTS IN 2023

BOTHNIAN COASTAL ROUTE

Coastal experiences all year round, with sustainability in focus.

Bothnian Coastal Route (BCR) is a tourism development project that is geographically characterized by a natural circular tour over the Kvarken and along the Finnish and Swedish coasts of the Bothnian Bay. Fourteen coastal destinations are included, and together they form a chain of attractive destinations, businesses, and products.

Based on travel motivations and unique selling points, i.e. what makes our area appealing to visitors, the project managed to carry out an inventory of the entire area in 2023 to identify tourism businesses that have chosen to focus on or are committed to sustainability in their offerings. The entire route and offerings are presented on a website that the project filled with content during the autumn for launching in the new year 2024, when the real marketing activities began. The site bothniancoastalroute.com serves as a product portfolio for the area and is aimed at foreign tour operators.

The project will also support companies through competence-enhancing efforts, with a strong focus on sustainability. The first webinar was held in October, and the keynote speaker and main attraction was Professor Xavier Font from Surrey University in England, who spoke about how to market and communicate sustainability practices to tourism companies. A couple of his tips were to communicate sustainability as something one does, rather than a thing one just talks about, and as something that the customer benefits from to make it feel meaningful. Furthermore, three European market-leading tour operators participated in the panel discussion



Photo: Lola Akinmade Akerstrom

on sustainable travel. A Swiss travel journalist, who toured the area on behalf of the project, shared their views on the great potential for BCR.

Budget: 2 712 677 euro.

Project partners: Kvarken Council EGTC (lead part and coordinating beneficiary), City of Kalajoki, Luleå Business Region AB, City of Oulu/ Business Oulu, Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK, Visit Skellefteå AB and Visit Umeå AB.

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland, Region Västerbotten, Kvarken Council EGTC, Umeå Municipality, Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK, City of Kalajoki, Luleå Business Region AB, City of Oulu/ BusinessOulu, Visit Skellefteå AB, City of Vaasa, Kokkola Tourism Ltd, Haparanda municipality for Haparanda/ Tornio, Bothnian Arc ry, City of Pietarsaari, Piteå municipality, Kemi Tourism Ltd, NLC Ferry Ab Oy.

Project time: 1.1.2023–31.12.2025.

BOTHNIA GREEN ENERGY

Supports the development of sustainable energy solutions.



Bothnia Green Energy will stimulate cross-border collaboration and investments in sustainable energy solutions in the geographical area around the Kvarken. Something completely new is that the project collaborates to build innovative networks and ecosystems around the region's energy companies.

During the first half of 2023, the project underwent a startup phase with planning, organizing, and a kickoff. Thereafter, in the second half of 2023, the project was carried out with very good progress with three ongoing pilot projects in the areas of talent pool, DC networks, and the use of excess heat. Additionally, the project team started planning hydrogen work, conducted two workshops on energy solutions within construction and real estate, presented the project at Kokkola Material Week, and developed proposals for a preparatory group for energy issues at the Kvarken Council EGTC.

Budget: 1918 400 euro.

Project partners: Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia, Kokkola Region Development Company KOSEK, The Kvarken Council EGTC (lead part and coordinating beneficiary), Technology Centre Merinova, Skellefteå Science City, Umeå Municipality, Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK, Övik Energi.

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia, Herrfors, Kokkolan Energia, City of Kokkola, Kvarken Council EGTC, Regional Council of Lapland, Technology Centre Merinova, Region Västerbotten, Region Västernorrland, Skellefteå Municipality, Skellefteå Kraft, Umeå Energi, Umeå Municipality, Vaasan Sähkö, City of Vaasa, Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK, Örnsköldsvik Municipality, Övik Energi.

Project time: 1.1.2023–31.12.2025.

NORDIC BATTERY BELT FEASIBILITY STUDY

Gathering the region's battery technology actors to investigate needs and the content of a larger implementation project.

The Nordic Battery Belt feasibility study has gathered the region's stakeholders in battery technology to investigate the needs and content of a larger implementation project. The feasibility study has focused on the emerging green industry in the Northern Nordics and has included a mapping of challenges and opportunities within various themes (skills supply, energy supply, housing supply, transport, research and development, and regional marketing). Relevant projects and initiatives have been mapped, and key players from different parts of the region have been interviewed.

Based on this, a workshop with about 30 participants from across the region was organized. The workshop's outcome indicated that population growth is both the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity, and that cross-border regional marketing is an area with potential for further development. An application for a larger project – Nordic Green Belt – aimed at addressing these issues was prepared and submitted to Interreg Aurora at the beginning of 2024.

Budget: 40 000 euro.

Project partners: Kvarken Council EGTC (lead part and coordinating beneficiary), and MidtSkandia.

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, Region Västerbotten, Kvarken Council EGTC, and MidtSkandia.

Project time: 1.11.2022–31.7.2023.

FAIR 2

Increasing knowledge of the demand for sustainable regional aviation from a cross-border perspective.

The FAIR 2 project aims to enhance our understanding of the demand for sustainable regional aviation from a cross-border perspective. This understanding and knowledge are vital for well-informed, long-term decision-making in order to create a sustainable regional aviation system in the Northern Nordics. The study area in FAIR 2 is geographically limited to the Kvarken Council EGTC's member areas in Sweden and Finland and to the municipality of Luleå in Sweden.

The project was launched during the autumn of 2023, and a reference group was formed with participants from several key regional

stakeholders. A comprehensive demand study was commissioned in late autumn. The study is based on three parts: an analysis of mobile phone data to understand existing travel patterns in the region, an interview study with businesses and public organizations to explore their travel needs and views on the possibilities of new aviation technology, and a larger survey with the region's inhabitants to find out their current demand for regional travel and how it could change with new transportation options. Insights from the demand study will be crucial for the next steps in preparing the region for new aviation technology.



Photo: Eviation

Budget: 450 430 euro.

Lead partner EU: Kvarken Council EGTC (sole beneficiary, EGTC).

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland, Kvarken Council EGTC, FAB Kronoby Flyghangar, Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK, Umeå Municipality, Skellefteå Airport, Skellefteå Kraft, Luleå Business Region, Sundsvall Municipality, Into Seinäjoki, Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, Örnsköldsvik Municipality, Lycksele Municipality, Region Västerbotten, MidtSkandia.

Project time: 1.6.2023–30.11.2024.

NEW NORTH

Aims to analyze transport systems in the northern parts of the Nordic countries in light of the changed geopolitical situation.

The goal of the New North project is to develop a sustainable transport system in the northern region that takes into account the future transport possibilities. The main partner is the Regional Council of Lapland. One of the project's work packages focuses on sustainable aviation and is led by the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten County in cooperation with the Kvarken Council. This project takes the previous electric aviation project FAIR's knowledge base one step forward.

Budget: 1980 592 euro.

Project partners: Regional Council of Lapland (main partner), Regional Council of Kainuu, Kvarken Council EGTC, Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, Regional Council of North Karelia, Council of Oulu Region, Finnmark fylkeskommune, Nordland fylkeskommune, and Troms fylkeskommune.

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland, Regional Council of Kainuu, Kvarken Council EGTC, Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, Länsstyrelsen Västerbotten, Regional Council of North Karelia, Council of Oulu Region, Finnmark fylkeskommune, Nordland fylkeskommune, and Troms fylkeskommune.


Project time: 31.8.2023–30.8.2026.

Interreg

Aurora



Co-funded by
the European Union

An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. The left side shows a calm, light-colored body of water, while the right side is a dark, rocky shore with many small, jagged rocks. A large, dark blue circle is superimposed on the water side, containing white text.

IN 2023, THE WEBPAGE
KVARKEN.ORG WAS VISITED BY
21 338 USERS. ON AVERAGE,
USERS SPENT 2 MIN 4 SEC ON THE
WEBPAGE, WHICH IS AN INCREASE
OF 54,6 % COMPARED TO 2022.

IN TOTAL, THERE WERE 69 800
PAGE VIEWS IN 2023. ON AVERAGE,
USERS VISITED 5,15 PAGES
PER SESSION.

THE OFFICE'S SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF THE ECONOMY IN 2023

Liquidity has been challenging throughout the year due to the completion of several projects in 2023 and the fact that disbursements of EU support always occur with some delay. EU support for projects initiated and started in 2023 could not be requisitioned during the same operating year. Thus, a large cash flow deficit has been generated during the year. We hope that the final payment applications for projects completed during the year can be sought in 2024 and that we can also apply for payment for costs incurred within new projects.

Additionally, the Kvarken Council has significantly increased its number of members during the year, which leads to increased costs but also positively affects cooperation in the region. To meet the increased need and interest in Nordic cross-border cooperation in the region, the Kvarken Council has hired more staff during the year and opened a new office in Umeå, Sweden, with the aim of serving our members more proactively.

