



KVARKENRÅDET
MERENKURKUN
NEUVOSTO

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER
KVARKEN REGION



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ANNUAL REPORT 2024

TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER
KVARKEN REGION



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.

The Kvarken Council is mainly active 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.



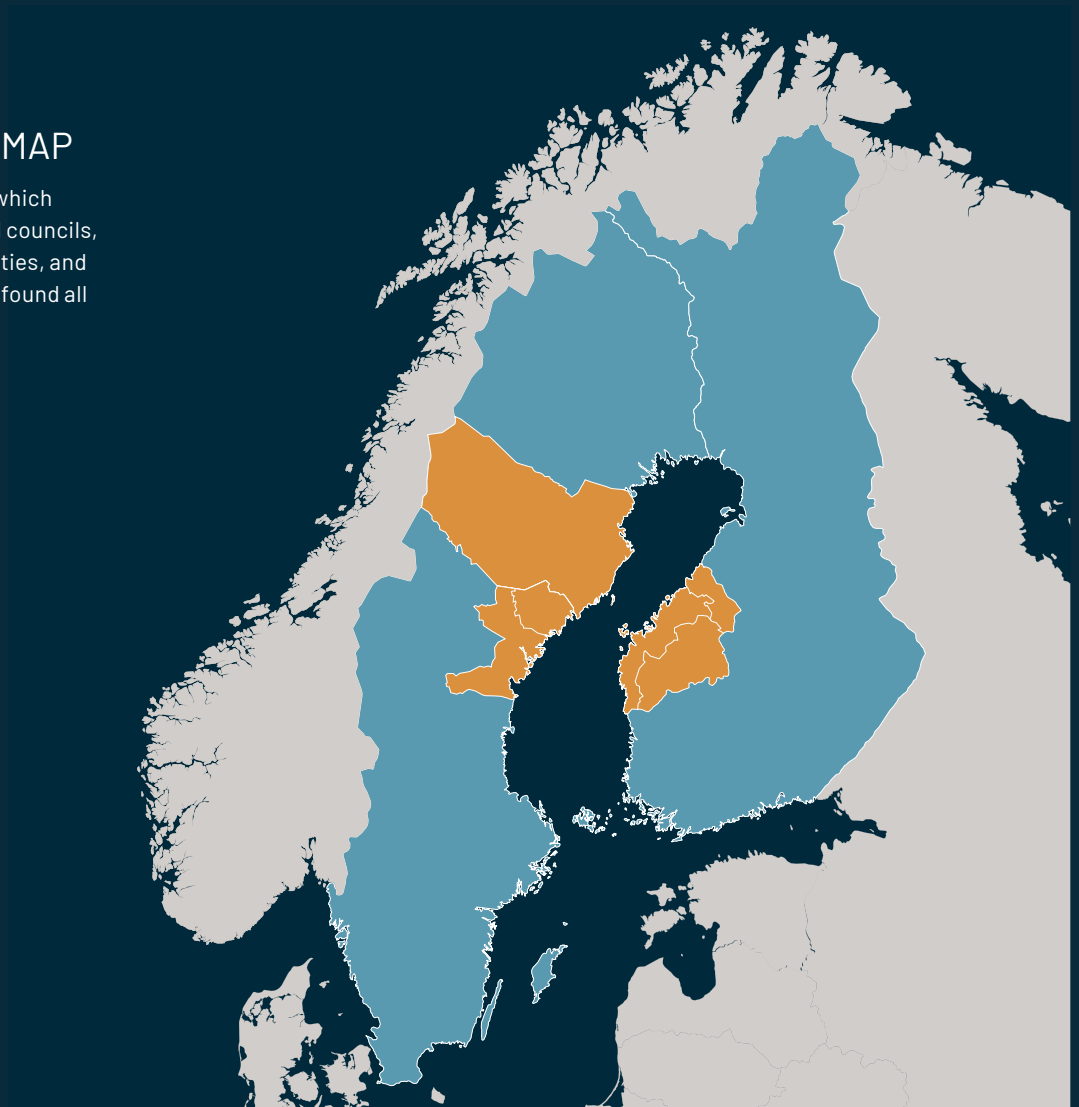
**Nordic
Co-operation**

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 24.5.2024–

FINLAND

Ordinary members

Joakim Strand, City of Vaasa (until 5.7.2024) (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 (Jaakko Kiiskilä*)
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 members

Rickard Carstedt, Region Västerbotten, Chairman (Anna Frej*)
Lilly Bäcklund, Region Västerbotten (Mikael Abrahamsson*)
Bore Sköld, Region Västerbotten (Ylva Hedlund-Hedqvist*)
Åsa Ågren Wikström, Region Västerbotten, Deputy Chairman (Per Boström*)
Mattias Larsson, Region Västerbotten (Meta Tunell*)
Anna-Britta Åkerlind, Örnköldsvik Municipality (Carolina Sondell*)
Hans Lindberg, Umeå Municipality (Elmer Eriksson*)
Tomas Mörtzell, Storuman Municipality (Karin Malmfjord*)
Roland Sjögren, Lycksele Municipality (Lars Olsson*)
Evelina Fahleson, Skellefteå Municipality (Andreas Löwenhöök*)
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 2024. The physical board meetings were arranged 21.2.2024 in Pietarsaari, 18.9.2024 in Skellefteå, and 3.12.2024 in Seinäjoki. The Kvarken Council's annual meeting was organised 24.5.2024 in Kokkola. One board meeting was arranged digitally via Teams 3.5.2024.

KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC'S BOARD 26.5.2023–24.5.2024

FINLAND

Ordinary members

Joakim Strand, City of Vaasa, Deputy 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*)
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Evelina Fahleson, Skellefteå Municipality (Andreas Löwenhöök*)
Jonny Lundin, Region Västernorrland (Sara Nylund*)
Mattias Rösberg, Region Västernorrland (Dan Rasmusson*)

*Suppleants

MEMBERS OF THE KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC

Kvarken Council EGTC's main members with a board seat

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
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
Novia University of Applied Sciences
Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences
Åbo Akademi University

KVARKEN COUNCIL'S STAFF 2024

The Kvarken Council is a small but highly operational and efficient organization. The Development Manager, the Project and Financial Assistant, and the Senior Advisor are situated in Umeå. The Kvarken Council's office in Umeå is situated at Storgatan 65. Other staff members are situated at the Kvarken Council's office in Vaasa at Gerbyntie 18.

Webpage: www.kvarken.org

The Kvarken Council's staff:

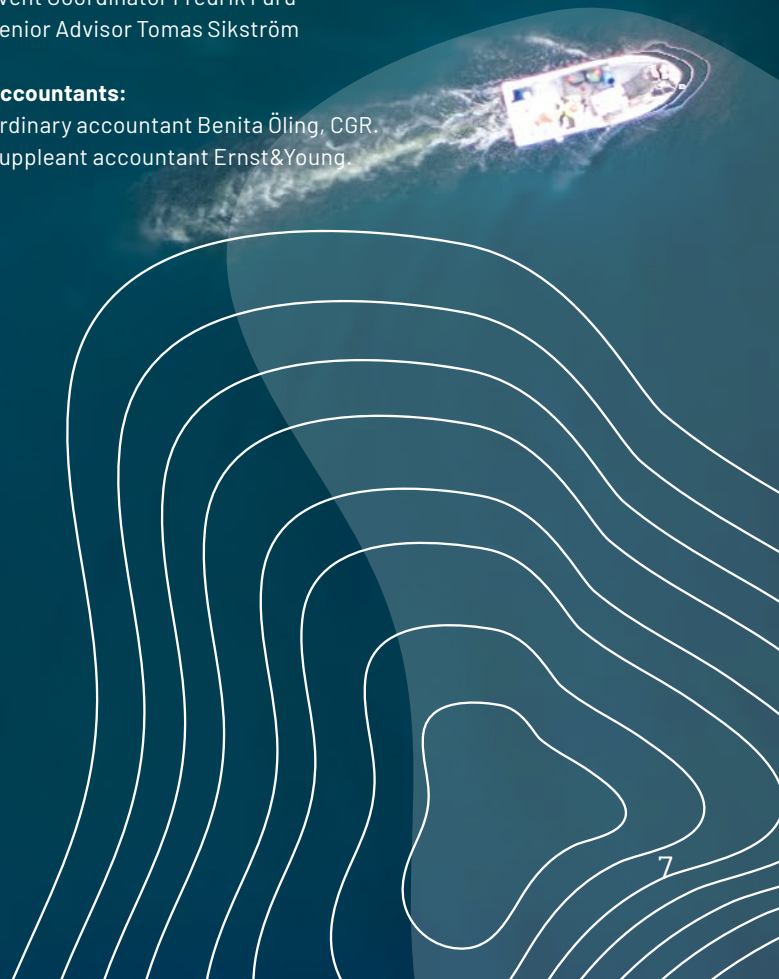
Director Mathias Lindström
Development Manager Veronica Berg
Growth Manager Sarah Väre
Financial Manager Maria Snickars
Project and Financial Assistant Ella Back (was hired 8.1.2024)
Communications Manager Johanna Häggman
Communications Assistant Ida-Maria Huuhka

Project staff:

Project Manager Marianne Sjöström
Event Coordinator Fredrik Furu
Senior Advisor Tomas Sikström

Accountants:

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



CHAIRMAN'S GREETING

TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER KVARKEN REGION



The past year has been marked by decisive progress in the east-west connections in the Northern Nordics. The importance of further strengthening infrastructure from a regional, Nordic, and European perspective was emphasised during the Västerbotten at Grand Hôtel event in January 2024. The Nordic Connector initiative, which aims to develop a fixed connection across the Kvarken to further connect and strengthen the Nordic region, gained historic momentum at that time. Interest in this important future issue has remained significant throughout the year.

In addition to infrastructure matters, the Board has decided to expand our collaboration platform by placing special focus on energy and culture. Therefore, we established two strategic working committees in 2024 within energy and culture & education, complementing the existing working com-

mittee on traffic and infrastructure. These thematic working groups include both members and external stakeholders, creating a unique arena where the public sector meets businesses and other interested parties. The working committees ensure that initiatives are anchored in real regional needs and serve as active recipients of project results. This system effectively captures requests and ideas from the field, ensuring that collaborative initiatives have a clear regional foundation and contribute to regional development.

The Board has also worked strategically to develop the organisation's structure and working methods. The Kvarken Council's rapid growth, with several new members in recent years, places high demands on clear governance and efficient processes. This work ensures that we can meet future challenges with a strong and well-functioning organisation.

The Kvarken region remains strong despite challenges in the green transition. We are well-positioned to lead future development thanks to our unique potential in renewable energy, technological innovations, and cross-border cooperation. Together, we are

creating the conditions for a sustainable future that benefits both the environment and regional growth.

I would like to thank everyone who contributes to our successful cooperation – the Kvarken Council's dedicated staff, the Board, our members, financiers, as well as the region's politicians and officials. Together, we continue to strengthen and develop the Kvarken region.

Rickard Carstedt

Chairman, Kvarken Council EGTC

DIRECTOR'S GREETING

KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC – A MODEL FOR NORDIC COOPERATION



The Kvarken Council EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) is a unique and groundbreaking organization that plays a crucial role in promoting Nordic cooperation and cross-border regional development. Through its innovative Board composition and by delivering tangible projects, the Kvarken Council EGTC has become a model for how regions can collaborate across national borders to foster sustainable development and strengthen regional ties.

Unique Board Composition

One of the many aspects that make the Kvarken Council EGTC particularly unique is its Board composition; the Board consists of representatives from both Finland and Sweden, ensuring that decisions and strategies reflect the interests and needs of both sides of the Kvarken. The Kvarken Council's members have decided to prioritize cooperation, and the Board is a distinguished assembly of 21 members, including active politicians and officials from both sides of the Kvarken – all with significant influence within their respective organizations. This cross-border representation is not merely symbolic but also practical, enabling a more integrated and coordinated development of the region and ensuring an efficient process from idea to concrete cooperative measures.

Tangible Cooperation Projects and Initiatives

The Kvarken Council EGTC is engaged in a range of concrete projects that are of great importance

for the region's development. One of the most prominent and visible projects is, of course, the development of a new ferry line between Vaasa in Finland and Umeå in Sweden. This ferry, jointly owned and operated by the two cities in two different countries, is an example of how long-term and well-structured Nordic cooperation can lead to practical solutions that benefit both countries, regions, and local businesses.

Another significant initiative is the regional electric aviation project, which aims to develop sustainable and environmentally friendly transportation solutions. By promoting innovation and sustainability, the Kvarken Council EGTC helps reduce the region's carbon footprint and contributes to creating a greener future.

Next in line is, of course, the Nordic Connector project, which seeks to develop a fixed connection across the Kvarken. Nordic Connector is an incredibly important strategic project rooted in solid political cooperation, evidenced by its inclusion in the Finnish Government Programme, which led to the launch of the ongoing feasibility study.

However, it is essential to remember that the goal is not merely to create projects – the projects are tools in this process, albeit vital ones.

Nordic Cooperation and Cross-Border Regional Development

The Kvarken Council EGTC plays a central role in strengthening Nordic cooperation and actively contributes to realizing the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030, which envisions the Nordics as the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. The Kvarken Council helps to build bridges and foster understanding between Finland and Sweden by serving as a platform for dialogue and collaboration between the two countries. This is particularly important at a time when cross-border cooperation is increasingly necessary to address shared challenges, such

as geopolitical tensions, the green transition, climate change, and economic development.

The Kvarken Council EGTC holds a significant role in cross-border regional development. The organization contributes to strengthening the region's competitiveness and attractiveness by driving projects that enhance infrastructure, promote innovation, and create new opportunities for businesses, such as in the tourism sector through the Bothnian Coastal Route project. This, in turn, leads to increased growth and prosperity for the region's inhabitants.

World's Most Democratic Organization?

The Kvarken Council EGTC is a shining example of how cross-border cooperation can lead to tangible results and positive change. Through its unique Board composition and innovative projects, the organization sets a path for how regions can work together to create a sustainable and successful future. It is a model that other regions in Europe and beyond can learn from and be inspired by. Remarkably, this has been achieved without top-down direction; there are no laws or regulations mandating regions, municipalities, and organizations to coordinate at the Nordic level across national borders. This collaboration has been created single-handedly and voluntarily by the region's inhabitants, because it is important. The foundation of this cooperation is trust, and its structure fosters even more trust. For this reason, I often refer to this collaboration as the world's most democratic organization. In today's turbulent world, where nations are divided and wars rage in various corners of the globe, this achievement is something we can and should be immensely proud of. Trust is the greatest treasure of the North.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to everyone contributing to the Kvarken Council's success – our dedicated staff, Board, members, regional politicians and officials, and our funders from the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Interreg Aurora program. Your efforts are invaluable and deeply appreciated.

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 makes it more difficult for 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 2024:

EGTC PLATFORM

The EGTC Platform was established on January 27th 2011 by the European Committee of the Regions. The Kvarken Council EGTC was 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 (CoR) and fulfills a consultative purpose regarding cross-border issues.

ECB PLATFORM

To underline the needs of the border regions and their citizens, CoR launched the European Cross-Border Platform (ECB Platform), the successor of the EGTC Platform. The Platform, established in 2024, aims to create a new place for cross-border stakeholders to meet and discuss border communities' unique circumstances and needs, allowing them to engage with the EU

institutions through the CoR. The platform will advocate for new approaches and policy solutions for cross-border regions, contributing to their social and economic growth while building a common European cross-border future for border regions.

EUROPEAN STRAITS INITIATIVE

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.



The working committee for culture and education was established in 2024. The committee's Chairman is Jonny Lundin from Region Västernorrland, and the Vice Chairman is Anna-Kaisa Pusa from City of Kurikka.

WORKING COMMITTEES

The Kvarken Council's board can appoint necessary committees within the framework of the Kvarken Council's activities. The working committees must, within their respective work areas, be responsible for the preparatory work that the Kvarken Council's board needs. The chairman and vice-chairman of the committees are appointed by the board and must, together with the Kvarken Council's Director or Development Manager, continuously inform the board about the committees' work.

The working committees carry out concrete activities and initiatives that contribute to regional development. Their work ensures that collaboration continues even when there are no active projects bringing the stakeholders together. Establishing working committees is a concrete example of how we implement our organization form, the EGTC.

The strengths of these working methods are a strong commitment from the Board in the everyday work, as well as the fact that you

can invite private actors and non-members to participate in the working committees, in cases where it serves the purpose of the group. The idea is to effectively listen to needs and ideas from the field and ensure that cooperation initiatives have a regional or local order and recipient. This leads to a stronger regional establishment over a wider field in central issues.

WORKING COMMITTEE FOR TRAFFIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The first committee appointed was the working committee for traffic and infrastructure. The Kvarken Council's board considered that a working committee for traffic and infrastructure issues is necessary because there are many important issues related to traffic and infrastructure in the region, and because these issues are central to the region's development. Over the years, the Kvarken Council has conducted and will continue to conduct relevant projects in this sector.

WORKING COMMITTEE FOR ENERGY

A working committee for energy was estab-

lished in connection to the Kvarken Council EGTC's Annual Meeting in Kokkola, Finland, on May 24th, 2024. The proposal to set up a working committee for energy within the Kvarken Council EGTC came from energy companies participating in the Bothnia Green Energy project. The rationale is to strengthen cooperation across the entire Kvarken region in the energy sector and create a platform for dialogue between politics, academia, and energy companies.

WORKING COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Region Västernorrland took the initiative to establish a working committee for education and culture within the Kvarken Council EGTC. The motivation for establishing a working committee for culture and education is the green transition and new industrialization currently taking place on both sides of the Kvarken. Culture has increasingly become an important factor in the effort to secure competence and improve the region's attractiveness. Cooperation in the Kvarken region can open doors for new investments and projects that can benefit the ongoing transition work. The working committee's aim is to strengthen cooperation among the Kvarken Council's members on cultural and educational issues.

CROSS-BORDER DANCE EXCHANGE MADE POSSIBLE WITH THE KVARKEN COUNCIL'S SUPPORT

One of the grants awarded by the Kvarken Council in 2024 made it possible for young dance enthusiasts from Sweden and Finland in the Kvarken region to get to know each other and dance together.

The Kvarken Council can provide small grants for activities, events, and projects that strengthen connections between Finland and Sweden in the Kvarken region. In 2024, the Kvarken Council awarded grants that e.g. enabled the exchange between Midgårdsskolan's dance-oriented aesthetic programme, Skellefteå Dans & Ballet association, Kuula-Institute in Vaasa, and TaiKon, which offers basic art education in Vaasa.

The first part of the exchange took place in May in Umeå and focused largely on getting to know each other. Young dancers from Umeå, Skellefteå, and Vaasa participated in various collaborative exercises and shared dance lessons. The dancers were introduced to new teachers, teaching styles, and dance techniques.

The second part of the exchange was held in October in Vaasa. During this part, students participated in various dance workshops, collaborative exercises, and discussions, which helped create new connections with other young dance enthusiasts.

The exchange has increased inspiration and motivation among the young dancers. It has enhanced their dance and language skills as well as their social competence and ability to collaborate. The exchange strengthens ties between organizations and creates

opportunities to share experiences.

"I would like to thank the Kvarken Council for their financial support. The students shared experiences and created valuable memories for life. The exchange will continue in Skellefteå in October 2025. Both students and leaders are eager to deepen their connections further," says Sari Åkerdal, a dance teacher at Midgårdsskolan.

The Kvarken Council provides information on its website, kvarken.org, about grants available for cross-border activities. The Kvarken Council prioritizes applications related to children and youth activities. The grant is a one-time contribution and cannot be applied for ongoing activities. The grants will be revised during the spring 2025, and the application period is expected to open in the fall 2025.





EVENTS

The Kvarken Council and its projects have arranged several events during 2024.

BGE ON ENERGYWEEK

The Bothnia Green Energy project (BGE) organised a seminar related to energy solutions in buildings on March 13th, 2025, during EnergyWeek in Vaasa.



Bothnia Green Energy project's seminar on EnergyWeek.

THE KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC'S ANNUAL MEETING AND ENERGY SEMINAR

The Kvarken Council's annual meeting was organised May 24th, 2025, in Kokkola. The Bothnia Green Energy project arranged an energy seminar the day before the annual meeting. The participants also took part in a study visit to Kokkola Industrial Park and enjoyed dinner with entertainment in the evening.



Norwegian Ambassador to Finland, Wegger Christian Strømme, at Wasa Future Festival.

WASA FUTURE FESTIVAL

The Kvarken Council, in collaboration with the Finnish-Swedish Chamber of Commer-



The Kvarken Council's board at the annual meeting in Kokkola. Photo: Julia Rahikka.

ce, organised a seminar with accompanying discussions during Wasa Future Festival, on August 8th, 2024. The seminar focused on the development of Nordic defence cooperation and economic opportunities.

THE TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE AGENCY'S STUDY VISIT TO UMEÅ AND VAASA

On September 3rd–4th, 2024, the Kvarken Council organised a study visit for the Transport Infrastructure Agency's working group to Umeå and Vaasa, showcasing the fixed connection's regional significance and its broader geographic reach (e.g. from central Finland to the Norwegian coast). The visit included presentations from prominent figures in industry, regional development, and politics.

The Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency leads the Kvarken Fixed Connection Feasibility Study, an extensive investigation into the technical, environmental, and economic conditions for the fixed connection. The Kvarken Council is part of the study's steering group and provides a cross-border

perspective to ensure the planned connection meets both local and national needs in Finland and Sweden.



The Kvarken Council's study visit for the Transport Infrastructure Agency's working group to Umeå and Vaasa.

WEBINAR TOGETHER WITH SCANDRIA ALLIANCE

On October 25th, 2024, Scandria Alliance hosted a webinar titled "Fixed Links: A Strong ScanMed Corridor in the North" in collaboration with the Kvarken Council. The Kvarken Council presented the Nordic Connector project, which aims to establish a fixed link between Finland and Sweden across the Kvarken. Other large-scale planned, built, and ongoing fixed links in the ScanMed Corridor was presented during the webinar.

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 2024

BOTHNIAN COASTAL ROUTE

Coastal experiences all year round, with sustainability in focus.

The Bothnian Coastal Route (BCR) project has firmly established itself on the international map of attractive Nordic destinations during 2024. Through active participation in about 10 marketing events across Europe, where the project representatives have met with international travel operators, the project has increased both the visibility and awareness of BCR. Additionally, the efforts in travel media have further strengthened BCR's position as a sustainable destination with great potential.

The official website, bothniancoastalroute.com, together with the innovative and groundbreaking planning tool for round trips, has garnered significant attention. This tool not only simplifies planning for travel operators but also enhances the travel experience and the route's attractiveness.

Thanks to the project group's determined efforts to highlight reasons to visit, the project has successfully created demand that benefits tourism companies. With one year left, the project team can already proudly state that the first cooperation partners have included the region in their travel offerings.

Budget: 2 712 677 euro.

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



Photo: Lola Akinmade Akerstrom

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 and Luleå Municipality, 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.



The Bothnia Green Energy project has made excellent progress during 2024, with four ongoing pilot projects focusing on Power to Talent, the development of DC networks, the use of excess heat, and energy solutions in construction and real estate. Furthermore, the project has contributed to the establishment of a Working Committee for Energy at the Kvarken Council EGTC, the organization of an energy conference in connection with the Kvarken Council's annual meeting, and the development of cooperation among energy companies in the Kvarken region.

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.

FAIR 2

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



Photo: Marketing agency Someone.

During 2024, FAIR 2 has explored the demand for sustainable regional aviation in the Kvarken region. Current travel patterns have been mapped using mobile phone data to understand how the region's residents move with the existing transport options. Interviews with Finnish and Swedish companies, along with a larger survey of the region's inhabitants, have examined their attitudes towards new technology for sustainable aviation and how new flight routes could affect their travel. The results show curiosity and a positive attitude towards electric and hydrogen-powered aviation. The responses also indicate that people might consider flying relatively frequently across the Kvarken strait and Bothnian Bay if the opportunity existed.

Budget: 450 430 euro.

Project partners: 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: 1.6.2023–31.3.2025.

CULTURAL PLATFORM KVARKEN

Bringing people closer through cultural collaboration.



The Cultural Platform Kvarken project brought together over 40 cultural actors from the region in two workshops, one in Umeå and one in Vaasa, with the goal of identifying the need for a physical meeting place for those working in culture in the Kvarken region. The feedback from the field was clear: there is definitely a need for such a meeting place. A physical platform would, in many ways, strengthen the cross-border cooperation of cultural actors. The importance of being aware of each other's projects, finding new synergies, creating better cross-border communication, and learning from one another was highlighted during the workshops. The final report is being analyzed by the project partners as the next step towards a larger implementation project.

Budget: 40 000 euro.

Project partners: Kvarken Council EGTC (sole beneficiary, EGTC).

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Kvarken Council EGTC and Regional Council of Lapland.

Project time: 1.4.2024–31.12.2024.

KVARKEN FILM NETWORK

Aims to create a cross-border network for film and tv stakeholders.



The Kvarken Film Network project aimed to explore the possibility of creating a cross-border network of key actors in the Kvarken region's film and TV industry. The goal of such a network is to strengthen the region's film industry and provide a shared platform for filmmakers and the audiovisual sector. A survey was conducted as part of the project, with 64 responses from Finland and Sweden. The results indicate significant interest in cross-border collaborations and co-productions from both sides of the Kvarken.

The project team plans to apply for funding for a full-scale Interreg project. The goal is to establish the network, strengthen cross-border cooperation, and create new opportunities for professionals in the film and TV industry.

Budget: 40 000 euro.

Project partners: Kvarken Council EGTC (lead part), Svenska Österbottens förbund för utbildning och kultur, Novia University of Applied Sciences, and Region Västerbotten.

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland, Kvarken Council EGTC, Svenska Österbottens förbund för utbildning och kultur, Novia University of Applied Sciences, and Region Västerbotten.

Project time: 1.4.2024–31.12.2024.

KVARKEN UNICOLLAB

Cross-Border University Cooperation.

The Kvarken Unicollab project was launched in autumn 2024 with the aim of identifying common goals and challenges to promote cooperation between educational institutions in the Kvarken region, involving six universities. The project's steering group met four times during 2024 to explore collaboration opportunities in education, research, and cooperation. In-depth questions have been developed to form the basis for four physical sessions to be conducted in spring 2025. The steering group's chairperson has twice participated in cross-border conferences to present the project and emphasize the importance of cross-border university collaboration in the Nordic countries.

Budget: 39 971 euro.

Project partners: Kvarken Council EGTC (sole beneficiary, EGTC).

Financiers: Interreg Aurora, Kvarken Council EGTC and Regional Council of Lapland.

Project time: 1.9.2024–31.5.2025.

PROJECTS CO-FUNDED BY THE KVARKEN COUNCIL AND OWNED BY OTHER PARTIES

NEW NORTH

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

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. The year 2024 began with a procurement and appointment of project management. A technical overview was produced and updated during the year, summarizing technological developments in electric aviation. These insights have been used as assumptions in a systems analysis that examines the possible role of electric aviation in the region's transport system relative to land-based alternatives. Two digital webinars were held as part of a competence network established by the project: one providing an introduction to sustainable aviation, focusing on opportunities and challenges, and the other presenting the FAIR 2 study on potential demand for regional sustainable aviation in the Kvarken region.

Budget: 1980 592 euro.

Project partners: Regional Council of Lapland (lead part), 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



Co-funded by
the European Union

OUR INITIATIVES

Kvarken Council works on various initiatives based on the organisation's focus areas.

NORDIC CONNECTOR

Nordic Connector is a proposed fixed connection across the Kvarken strait, which would have a long list of positive effects on, among other things, business, transportation, and preparedness. The matter has recently become highly relevant due to the current geopolitical situation.

In order to establish a sustainable financial basis for a future fixed connection, the Kvarken Council has applied for funding for the FLINC project (Financing Large-scale Infrastructure – Nordic Connector) through Interreg Aurora. FLINC, a separate study, aims to explore funding solutions and wider benefits for large cross-border infrastructure investments, such as Nordic Connector.

KVARKEN UNIVERSITY

With its diverse and high-quality study opportunities, the Kvarken region has attracted higher education students from across the globe. Higher education is offered in many locations in the Kvarken region, with Vaasa having the most students in Finland and Umeå in Sweden. On our website www.kvarkenuniversity.com you can explore the diverse study opportunities and find a list of all the main higher education institutions on both sides of the Kvarken.

KEY COMMUNICATION FIGURES

The Kvarken Council's website had 14,536 users in 2024, with an average visit lasting 3 minutes and 20 seconds. During their visit, users viewed approximately 2.7 pages. The active interaction time (i.e. active scrolling or clicking) averaged 1 minute and 2 seconds. The remaining 2 minutes and 18 seconds were spent passively, which could mean that users had the page open without active engagement or were using the time for reading.

The number of users increased by 524 compared to the record year of 2022, and by nearly one thousand compared to 2023. However, visit duration decreased by 27 seconds compared to the average of the previous two years, and the number of pages viewed per visit dropped by almost one. The two most popular pages were the homepage and the news page. The most active users came from Sweden and Finland, with Ireland in third place.

The Kvarken Council's newsletter, which was sent in three languages, had an average of 1,171 email recipients. The average open rate was 38.3%, which is considered high. According to the newsletter service Mailchimp, the industry average open rate for newsletters is approximately 21.33%.

The Kvarken Council also actively participated in a large number of meetings and events, often with presentations or as speakers. It also organized several international events aimed at stakeholders and decision-makers, either independently or in collaboration with others. The largest of these were the Wasa Future Festival, the Annual Meeting, and a visit by the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency, which together attracted 250 participants.

We were active in seven projects during the year. In addition, there were two initiatives without project funding. Communication efforts included 11 newsletters and information letters sent from the Bothnian Coastal Route project to various target groups. A communication strategy, website, and basic materials were created for the Nordic Connector initiative, and a website was also produced for the Kvarken University initiative. In the FAIR 2 project, a social media video campaign was filmed and launched in cooperation with the New North project. The campaign consists of a total of eight videos aimed at increasing public awareness about the development and opportunities of sustainable aviation. The campaign will continue in 2025.

