



KVARKENRÅDET
MERENKURKUN
NEUVOSTO

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER
KVARKEN REGION



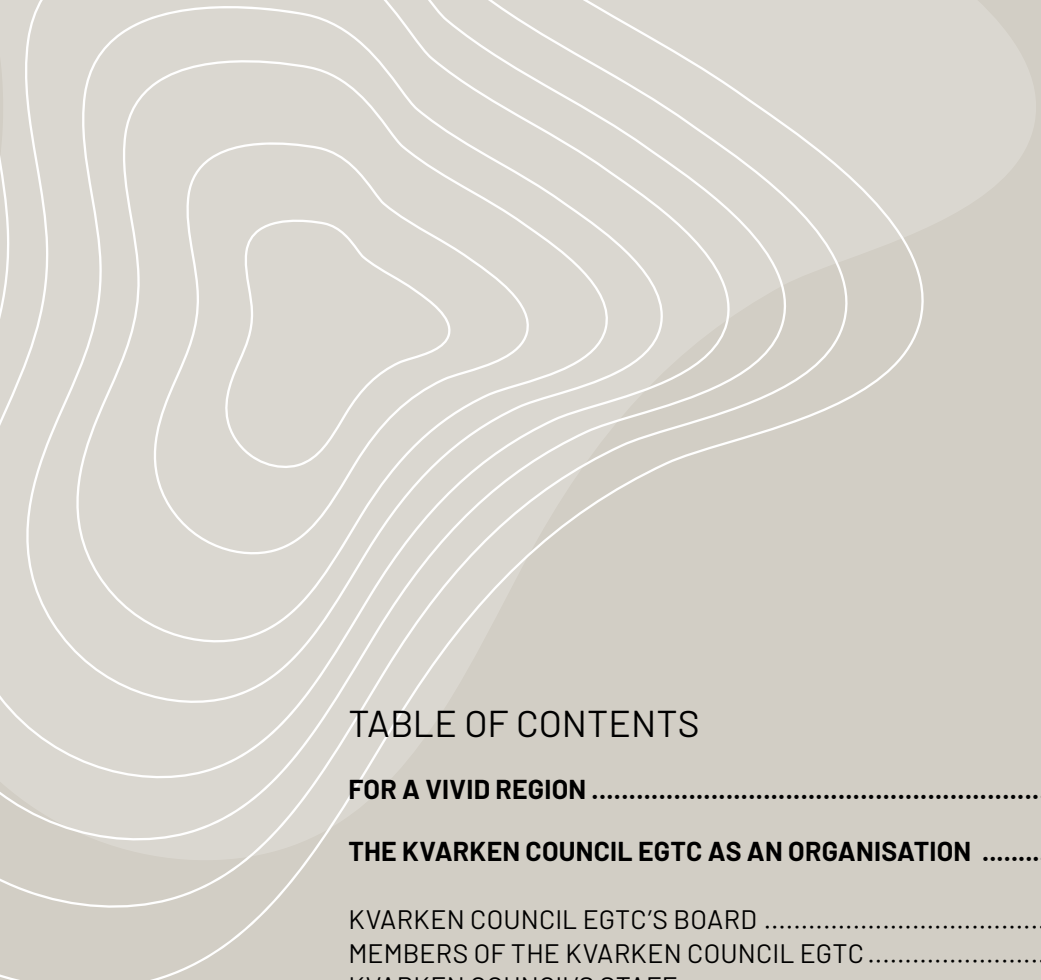


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FOR A VIVID REGION

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. 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.



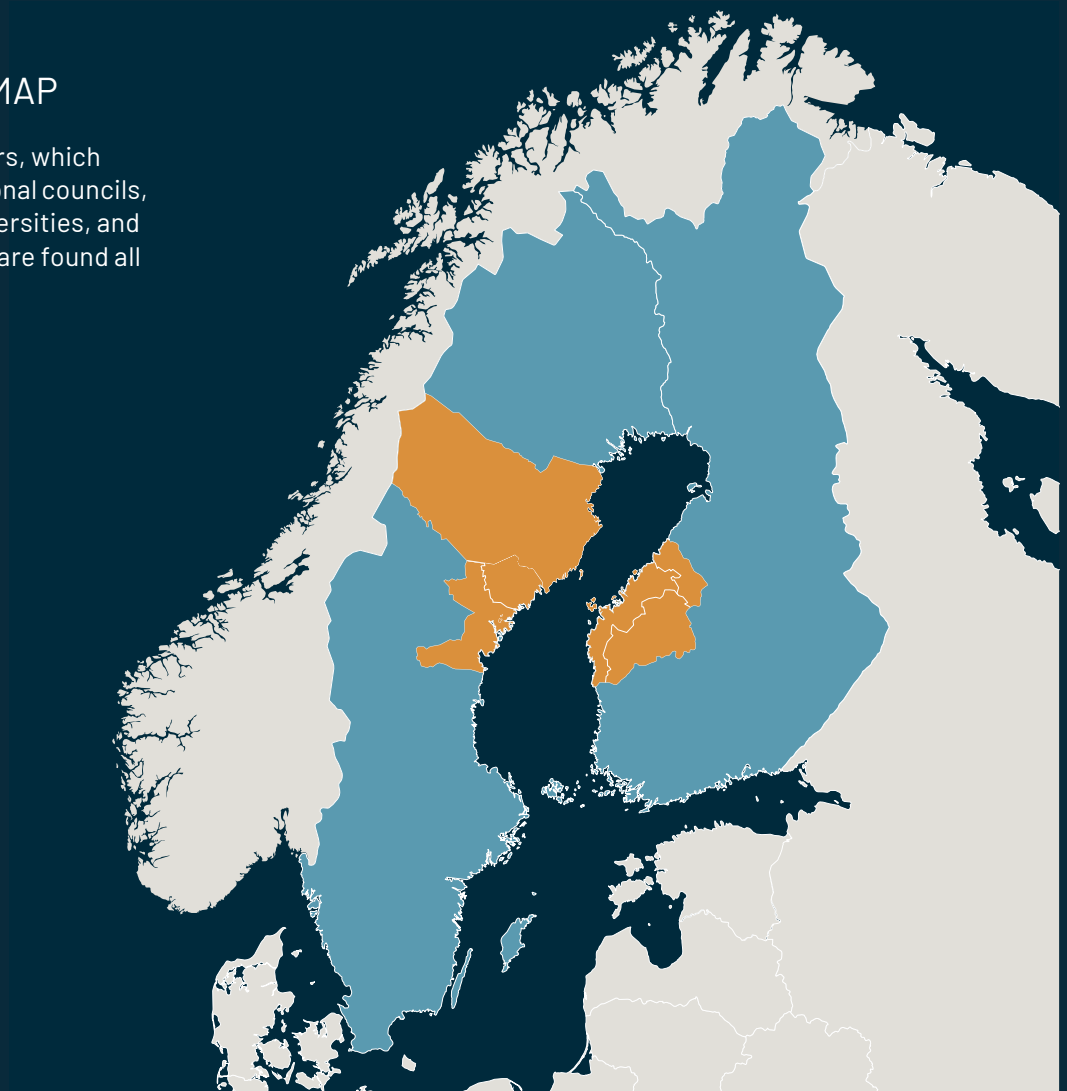
**Nordic
Co-operation**

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 23.5.2025–

FINLAND

Ordinary members

Tomas Häyry, City of Vaasa, Deputy Chairman
(Marit Nilsson-Väre)
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 Niemä, 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)
Karin Olsson, 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)
Ulrik Dahlgren, 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)

Deputy members are listed in parentheses following the primary members.

The Board of the Kvarken Council EGTC met five times during 2025. The Annual Meeting was held in Sundsvall on 22–23 May, and two other physical meetings took place in Örnköldsvik on 27–28 February and aboard Wasaline on 18 November. Additionally, the Board held online meetings on 25 April and 15 September.

KVARKEN COUNCIL EGTC'S BOARD 24.5.2024–23.5.2025

FINLAND

Ordinary members

Joakim Strand, City of Vaasa, Deputy Chairman (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 Niemä, 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 Fahlesson, Skellefteå Municipality (Andreas Löwenhök)
Jonny Lundin, Region Västernorrland (Sara Nylund)
Mattias Rösberg, Region Västernorrland (Dan Rasmusson)

Deputy members are listed in parentheses following the primary members.

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 Pietarsaari
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
Robertsfors Municipality
City of Kauhava
Lappajärvi Municipality

Organisation members

Centria University of Applied Sciences (as of 15.9.2025)
Hanken School of Economics
Into Seinäjoki
Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia
Kristinestads näringslivscentral
Metsähallitus (as of 25.4.2025)
Mid Sweden University
Novia University of Applied Sciences
Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences
SÖFUK (as of 25.4.2025)
Umeå University
University of Vaasa
Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK
VAMK University of Applied Sciences
Åbo Akademi University
County Administrative Board of Västerbotten (Awaiting final approval from the Swedish Government)

KVARKEN COUNCIL'S STAFF 2025

The Kvarken Council is a small but highly operational and efficient organization. The Development Manager and the Project and Financial Assistant are situated in Umeå. The Kvarken Council's office in Umeå is situated at Thulegatan 1. 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
Communications Manager Johanna Häggman
Communications Assistant Ida-Maria Huuhka
(parental leave 12.4.2025-)

Project staff:

Project Manager Marianne Sjöström
Event Coordinator Fredrik Furu

Accountants:

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

Chairman's greeting

A LARGER ORGANIZATION CARRIES MORE WEIGHT



When I began my term as Chair of the Kvarken Council, I had a clear vision: we needed to strengthen our membership base. Advancing the Kvarken Council's major objectives—such as the Nordic Battery Belt and the Kvarken Fixed Link—requires broad and solid support.

Our goal of increasing membership has been achieved beyond expectations. In three years, the Kvarken Council's membership has grown from 10 to 42 members. This has lent a completely new level of prestige to our work. Building on the cross-border infrastructure cooperation in the Kvarken region, the Kvarken Council now plays an active role in international discussions regarding security and the green transition.

Quadrupling our membership in such a short time has, of course, not been without its challenges. While the Kvarken Council's operations were previously quite informal, the current membership requires entirely new structures and efficient administration. This has undeniably been the most demanding aspect of our rapid growth, and we have worked actively to address this over the past year. At the same time, the increased membership has intensified the staff's workload. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the entire staff of the Kvarken Council for your vital contribution.

With our broader foundation, we are now better equipped to advance the major future issues on our agenda. The most

significant single event of 2025 was the completion of the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency's study which demonstrated that a fixed link across the Kvarken is technically and environmentally feasible. At that moment, the project shifted from a pure vision to a concrete and attainable goal. Much investigative work remains, but we are ready to roll up our sleeves.

While the fixed link is highly topical due to the global security situation, the green transition has moved slightly into the background of public debate. However, I am convinced that we must continue our long-term efforts in this area as well. Thanks to our clean energy and deep expertise in energy technology, our region is the perfect testbed for the re-industrialization that the fight against climate change inevitably requires.

The Kvarken Council's work is often intertwined with major societal issues and future visions. However, we must not forget that our work is also very much about improving the opportunities for individuals to meet and build relationships across the Kvarken. In this light, it is difficult to put into words how important the Kvarken ferry service is to us. Let us continue our vibrant and fruitful interaction across the Kvarken in the coming year.

Rickard Carstedt

Chairman, Kvarken Council EGTC

Director's greeting

NORDIC COOPERATION: MORE VITAL THAN EVER

The issues championed by the Kvarken Council have gained profound significance in recent years, reaching far beyond our own region. We are witnessing a clear surge in interest regarding Nordic cooperation—a trend reflected not least by the continued growth of our membership numbers throughout 2025.

The geopolitical landscape has shifted dramatically in recent times. The war in Ukraine, Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, and the major industrial investments planned on both sides of the Kvarken Strait have, in many ways, redrawn the map. This development has added entirely new weight to the arguments for strengthening East-West connections in the Nordic region. Our region now occupies a strategic geographic position, and the proposed fixed link across the Kvarken Strait has evolved from a matter of local interest to a question of national and European security. The debate is no longer about if, but how and when.

A fixed link – more than just regional interest

The vision of a fixed link across the Kvarken Strait has been discussed since 1972, but it has never been more relevant than it is today. In 2025, the Kvarken Council launched the FLINC project to investigate the matter further. This work is now being carried out in collaboration with both the Finnish and Swedish Transport Administrations, marking a new level of institutional support. Our goal is to have a solid basis for decision-making ready for the upcoming election cycles in both countries—data that provides concrete proof of the benefits of connecting Finland with Sweden, and by extension, with northern Norway.

This work includes a deepened Wider Benefit Analysis that looks beyond traditional calculations to include factors such as security of supply, military mobility, and energy

security. We are also exploring financing models inspired by projects like the Fehmarn Belt, where a combination of private and public capital can turn the connection into reality.

Historic membership growth

The fact that Nordic cooperation is high on the agenda is evident in the Kvarken Council's continued expansion during 2025. Since the formation of the Kvarken Council EGTC in 2021, we have grown from 10 to 42 members. We have seen a strong influx of universities, development companies, and municipalities.

What our new members have in common is that they view the Kvarken Council as an effective platform for collaboration and influence. The engagement of key decision-makers and stakeholders from outside our immediate region demonstrates that we have successfully broken through to a larger stage. The message has landed: a strong region with functioning infrastructure builds security for the entire Nordic region—and ultimately, for all of Europe.

Looking to the future

We enter the next operating year with wind in our sails. We will continue our work to secure food supply, improve resilience, boost tourism, and deepen cultural exchange in our region. Above all, we will continue to drive the infrastructure issue toward a resolution.

In times of uncertainty, we turn to those we know best. Nordic cooperation is no longer just nice to have—it is a necessity. The Kvarken Council stands ready to deliver the solutions.

Mathias Lindström



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 2025:

ECB PLATFORM

In 2024, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) established the European Cross-Border Platform (ECB Platform), replacing the former EGTC Platform. The goal of the new platform is to provide better visibility for the needs of Europe’s border regions and their inhabitants.

The ECB Platform serves as a meeting point for cross-border cooperation actors to discuss the specific conditions and needs of border regions. The platform creates permanent structures for dialogue between border regions and EU institutions through the Committee of the Regions. Furthermore, it promotes the development of political solutions that support cross-border cooperation and regional development.

EUROPEAN STRAITS INITIATIVE (ESI)

The Kvarken Council is a member of the European Straits Initiative (ESI), a partnership network of European regions located in strait areas. The network brings together regions that share similar conditions and challenges related to accessibility, transport, the environment, and regional development.

The ESI aims to highlight the specific needs of strait regions at the EU level. The network provides a framework for cooperation, exchange of experience, and joint initiatives among member regions, including active dialogue with EU institutions.

SCANDRIA ALLIANCE

The Scandria Corridor is a geographical corridor stretching from Northern Scandinavia through Oslo, Helsinki, Stockholm, Berlin, and Vienna to the northern part of Italy on the Adriatic coast. The Scandria Alliance is a cooperation platform for actors along this corridor, such as cities and regions. Its goal is to promote climate-friendly, multimodal, and resilient transport solutions to achieve sustainable regional development.

The Kvarken Council EGTC has been a full member of the alliance since 2021. Membership improves advocacy opportunities at the EU level and provides a natural partnership platform for new projects within frameworks such as CEF or the Baltic Sea Region Programme. In June 2025, the Kvarken Council’s Vice Chair, Åsa Ågren Wikström, was elected Chair of the Scandria Alliance Steering Committee.

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.

TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE WORKING COMMITTEE

The committee for transport and infrastructure working committee was the Kvarken Council's first such committee. The Council Board deemed its establishment necessary because several significant transport and infrastructure projects, central to the development of the entire region, are underway. Over the years, the Kvarken Council has implemented important projects in this sector, and this work continues.

The group is chaired by Hans Lindberg from Umeå, with Anna-Kaisa Pusa from Kurikka serving as vice chair.

ENERGY WORKING COMMITTEE

This committee was established within the framework of the Bothnia Green Energy project and continues its operations after the project concluded. The initiative for the committee came from the energy companies involved in the project. These companies wish to strengthen energy cooperation across the Kvarken region and create a common discussion platform for various actors.

The group is chaired by Stina Mattila from Kokkola, with Rickard Carstedt from Västerbotten serving as vice chair.

CULTURE AND EDUCATION WORKING COMMITTEE

The working committee for culture and education has been active since 2024. Its establishment was primarily driven by the green transition and re-industrialization, which place new demands on the availability of skilled labor and increase the need to strengthen the region's attractiveness as a place to live and work. Cooperation can enable new investments and projects that support this transformation.

The group is chaired by Jonny Lundin from Västernorrland, with Anna-Kaisa Pusa from Kurikka serving as vice chair.



The Energy working committee conducted a site visit to RISE on October 22, 2025.

EVENTS

A selection of our events during 2025

WASA FUTURE FESTIVAL

The Kvarken Council participated again this year in the Wasa Future Festival, which in August 2025 brought together experts, innovators, and decision-makers to discuss current societal issues. On 14 August 2025, the Kvarken Council and the Finnish-Swedish Chamber of Commerce co-organized a seminar on the increased importance of the Nordic countries in the global market. Presentations at the seminar highlighted, among other things, research by Maria Persson showing that the Øresund Bridge has increased trade between Sweden and Denmark by 25 percent. The seminar was attended by 240 people, and the feedback collected after the event was overwhelmingly positive.



Wasa Future Festival 14.8.2025



Project Manager Marianne Sjöström opened the Bothnian Coastal Route closing seminar in Oulu.

BOTHNIAN COASTAL ROUTE PROJECT CLOSING CONFERENCE

The Bothnian Coastal Route project culminated in a closing conference in Oulu on 26 November 2025. The message from the international tour operators attending was clear: the northern coastal regions of Finland and Sweden have everything required to become a genuine alternative to traditional Nordic travel destinations. Tourism entrepreneurs reported that the project has already generated direct bookings, and according to Wasaline, the cooperation has opened up entirely new markets for the company.



Project Manager Sofia Törmä at the Bothnia Green Energy closing conference.

BOTHNIA GREEN ENERGY PROJECT CLOSING CONFERENCE

The Bothnia Green Energy closing conference was held in Örnsköldsvik on 23 October 2025. Under the theme "Beyond Borders," participants had the opportunity to learn about the project's results and exchange ideas. The most significant outcome of the project has been the creation of new networks and contacts through regular meetings and the exchange of experiences between energy companies on both sides of the Kvarken.

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.

BOTHNIAN COASTAL ROUTE

A new cross-border travel destination in the north

The Bothnian Coastal Route project, which concluded in 2025, was a success in many ways. The northern coastal areas of Finland and Sweden possess unique nature and a rich cultural heritage rooted in strong traditions. The project aimed to promote the Bothnian Bay route as a well-known travel destination and build a new, attractive brand around it.

Concrete results were already achieved during the project in the form of new tour packages and bookings from key European markets. At the closing conference, tour operators described the route as an exceptionally authentic and unique destination with enormous potential. A clear follow-up plan has been established to utilize the project's results and continue developing the route.

The marketing platform at bothniancoastalroute.com offers engaging videos and practical travel planning tools. As part of the project, a new web-based tool was developed to help plan tours around the Bothnian Bay. This tool facilitates the work of tour operators and makes the destination even more attractive to travelers. The high level of interest in the project from destinations along the route exceeded the Kvarken Council's expectations.



Image: Lola Akinmade Akerstrom

Project budget: 2,712,677 euros

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

Funders: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland, Region Västerbotten, Kvarken Council EGTC, Umeå Municipality, Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK, City of Kalajok, Luleå Business Region AB and Luleå Municipality, City of Oulu / BusinessOulu, Visit Skellefteå AB, City of Vaasa, Kokkolan Matkailu Oy, Haparanda Municipality (Haparanda-Tornio), Bothnian Arc, City of Pietarsaari, Piteå Municipality, Kemin Matkailu Oy, NLC Ferry Ab Oy.

Project period: 1.1.2023–31.12.2025

FLINC

Financing large-scale cross-border infrastructure - case Nordic Connector



In sparsely populated areas, traditional cost-benefit analyses alone are insufficient to justify large infrastructure investments. Therefore, new methods are needed to assess societal benefits and models for financing such projects.

The FLINC project complements the previous feasibility study by the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency. It uses the Kvarken fixed link as a case study for how to invest in large-scale infrastructure in sparsely populated areas. The goal is to produce scientifically evidence-based material to support future political decision-making. The methods and results developed within FLINC should also be applicable to other large-scale cross-border infrastructure projects in the Nordic region and within the EU.

The project's studies focus on the following areas:

- Economic and societal benefits – industrial competitiveness and investment, logistics, and the energy transition
- Military mobility and readiness – bottlenecks, capacity requirements, and two-way transport
- Financial analysis – methods for financing large-scale cross-border infrastructure

Project budget: 599,600 euros

Project partners: Kvarken Council EGTC (sole beneficiary)

The reference group includes representatives from, among others, the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency, Traficom, and the Swedish Transport Administration.

Funders: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland (national co-financing), Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency, City of Vaasa, Umeå Municipality

Project period: 1.4.2025–31.12.2026

BOTHNIA GREEN ENERGY

Energy cooperation continues beyond the project



Concluded in 2025, The Bothnia Green Energy project was successful from the start. The project implemented four pilots focused on Power to Talent, DC grid development, waste heat utilization, and energy solutions for the construction and real estate sectors.

Six Finnish and Swedish energy companies participated in the project and will continue their cooperation now that it has ended. This collaboration will take place both through the companies' own activities and within the energy preparatory working committee established during the project.

Project budget: 1,918,400 euros

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

Funders: 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 period: 1.1.2023–31.12.2025

FAIR 2

Mapping demand for sustainable cross-border regional aviation



FAIR 2 project partners' workshop in Skellefteå, October 9–10, 2024

The FAIR 2 project investigated the demand for sustainable regional aviation in the northern Nordic region. The project mapped current travel habits to gain a clear picture of how residents of the Kvarken region move within the current transport offering. The research was supplemented by corporate interviews and a survey aimed at regional residents. The results show a curious and positive attitude toward electric and hydrogen flights. Furthermore, the study confirms that there is potential demand for flight routes across the Kvarken and the Bothnian Bay.

Project budget: 450,430 euros

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

Funders: 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 period: 1.6.2023–31.3.2025

KVARKEN UNICOLLAB

Building bridges between regional higher education institutions

Six higher education institutions from the Kvarken region participated in the Unicollab project. The project aimed to promote cooperation between the institutions and explore how they could jointly strengthen their position in the international educational field.

Four seminars were organized within the project—two in Finland and two in Sweden—to explore opportunities for cooperation in education and research. The participating institutions were Umeå University, Mid Sweden University, University of Vaasa, Hanken School of Economics, VAMK University of Applied Sciences, and Novia University of Applied Sciences.

Project budget: 39,971 euros

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

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

Project period: 1.9.2024–31.5.2025



In the Unicollab project, Swedish and Finnish universities and colleges met to explore potential opportunities for collaboration.

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.

The New North project aims to develop a sustainable transport system for the North Calotte region, taking into account the opportunities offered by future mobility. The Regional Council of Lapland serves as the lead partner.

One of the project's work packages focuses on sustainable aviation. This section is managed by the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten in cooperation with the Kvarken Council. During 2025, the work package has built upon the knowledge base created by the previous FAIR electric aviation project.

Throughout 2025, the project has also played a decisive role in increasing the visibility of east-west connections within the Interreg Aurora region. For the Kvarken Council, this has meant a strategically significant partnership where joint efforts have been directed toward identifying the challenges and opportunities for the entire region.

Project budget: 1,980,592 euros

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

Funders: 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 period: 31.8.2023–31.10.2026

KVARKEN FILM HUB

Strengthening the film industry through cross-border cooperation



The Kvarken Film Hub was launched in autumn 2025—a cross-border initiative aimed at strengthening the audio-visual sectors in Västerbotten and Ostrobothnia. The project's goal is to shape the Kvarken region's film scene into a flexible and creative ecosystem for film and TV productions. The cooperation will improve educational opportunities and competitiveness in the sector, enabling larger, cross-border productions.

Project budget: 1,172,702 euros

Project partners: Novia University of Applied Sciences, Film i Västerbotten / Region Västerbotten, Kvarken Council EGTC

Funders: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland, Novia University of Applied Sciences, Region Västerbotten, Kvarken Council EGTC

Project period: 1.9.2025–31.8.2028

HERITAGE IN MOTION

Developing the world's northernmost pilgrimage route – St. Olav Trail



The Heritage in Motion project develops the St. Olav Trail (St Olavsleden), the world's northernmost pilgrimage route, which passes through Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The project aims to create a new route section between Umeå and Sundsvall, improve infrastructure on the Ostrobothnian section of the route, and engage associations, companies, and cultural actors on both sides of the Kvarken.

The project includes the creation of a digital training package, a podcast series, and the development of themed hikes. The Kvarken Council EGTC is a member of the project's reference group.

Project budget: 1,265,478 euros

Project partners: Region Västernorrland, Kvarnen Municipal Association, SÖFUK, Kristinestad Development Center

Funders: Interreg Aurora, Regional Council of Lapland, funds and foundations

Project period: 1.9.2025–31.8.2028

Interreg

Aurora



Co-funded by
the European Union

OUR INITIATIVES

NORDIC CONNECTOR

Nordic Connector is an initiative exploring the implementation of a fixed link across the Kvarken. The link is not an end in itself, but a tool to create societal benefit for the entire northern Nordic region and Europe more broadly. A fixed link would have significant positive impacts on logistics, industry, security of supply, and the energy transition.

The current Finnish government program commissioned a study on the Kvarken Fixed Link, and the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency completed the feasibility study in spring 2025. The study confirmed that building a fixed link across the Kvarken is technically possible but emphasized the need for a deeper analysis of the project's broader benefits. These follow-up analyses are being conducted in the FLINC project, which also involves the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency and the Swedish Transport Administration (Trafikverket).

In 2025, the Kvarken Council launched the FLINC project, which focuses on investigating the link's broader societal benefits and developing models for project financing.

KVARKEN UNIVERSITY

With 70,000 students, the Kvarken region is a significant hub for higher education. The area attracts students from all over the world, with higher education offered in several different locations. The largest student populations are in Vaasa, Finland, and Umeå, Sweden.

On our website, www.kvarkenuniversity.com, you can find a list of the key higher education institutions on both sides of the Kvarken.

POLITICAL INNOVATION GUIDE

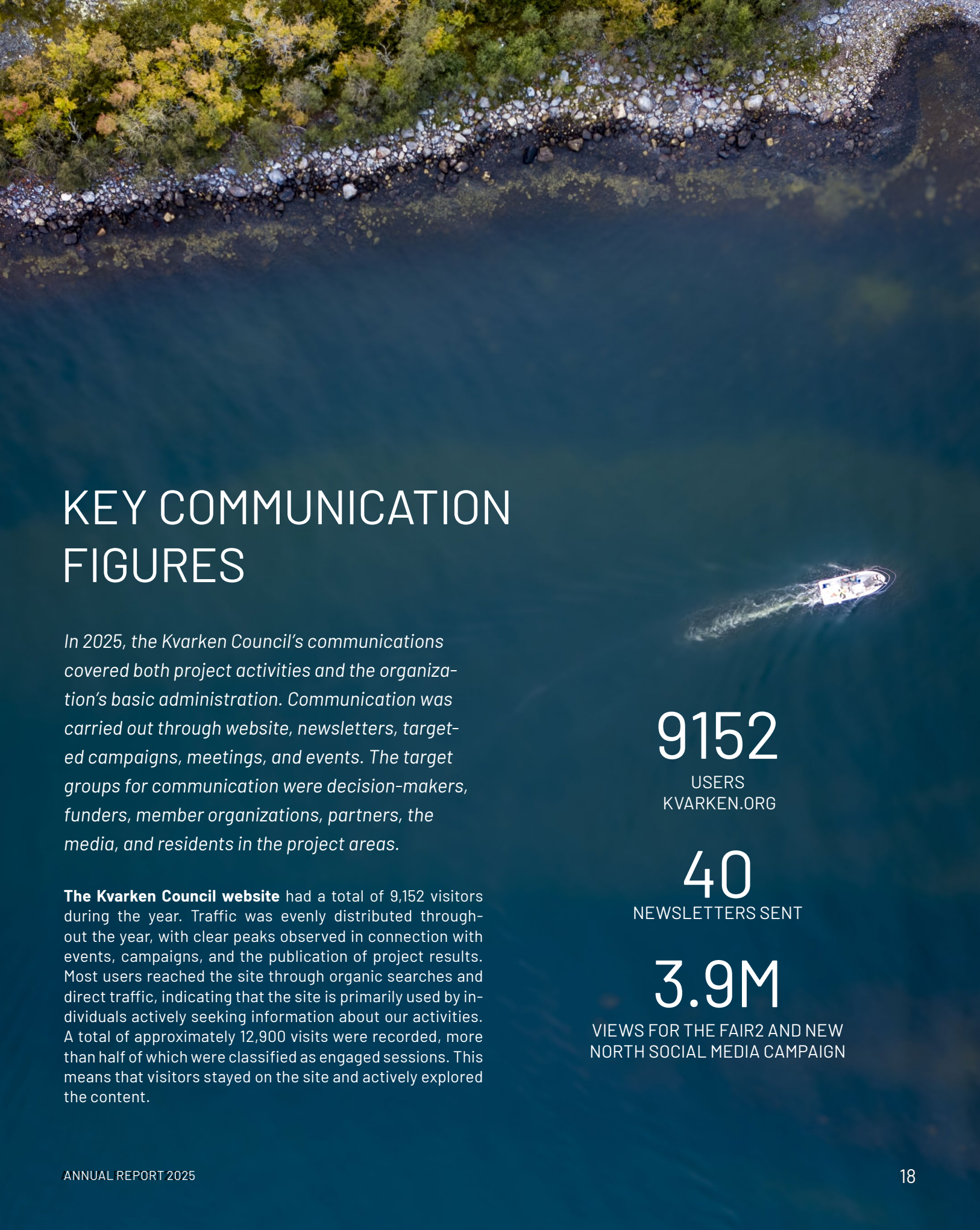
The Political Innovation Guide is an initiative aimed at finding new cooperation strategies for cross-border regions. The goal is for cities and regions to organize their activities and network in close cooperation with their neighbors. This allows them to better solve administrative issues that do not fall directly under the responsibility of national authorities.

The initiative was carried out in 2024–2025 and is a collaboration between the three sister organizations: the Kvarken Council, STRING, and the Mälardalen Council. The guide is available here: <https://www.kvarken.org/en/project/political-innovation-guide/>



70 000

HIGHER EDUCATION
STUDENTS IN THE
KVARKEN REGION



KEY COMMUNICATION FIGURES

In 2025, the Kvarken Council's communications covered both project activities and the organization's basic administration. Communication was carried out through website, newsletters, targeted campaigns, meetings, and events. The target groups for communication were decision-makers, funders, member organizations, partners, the media, and residents in the project areas.

The Kvarken Council website had a total of 9,152 visitors during the year. Traffic was evenly distributed throughout the year, with clear peaks observed in connection with events, campaigns, and the publication of project results. Most users reached the site through organic searches and direct traffic, indicating that the site is primarily used by individuals actively seeking information about our activities. A total of approximately 12,900 visits were recorded, more than half of which were classified as engaged sessions. This means that visitors stayed on the site and actively explored the content.

9152

USERS
KVARKEN.ORG

40

NEWSLETTERS SENT

3.9M

VIEWS FOR THE FAIR2 AND NEW
NORTH SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN



ONLINE VISIBILITY AND NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters maintained their position as a key channel for targeted communication in 2025. A total of 40 mailings were sent during the year, four of which were the Kvarken Council's primary newsletters, while the remainder were project-specific updates. The newsletters included articles and updates from ongoing projects, along with information on their activities and results. The primary newsletters were published in Finnish, Swedish, and English. Their open rate was 30–50%, which is significantly higher than the average for similar newsletters.

CAMPAIGNS AND VIDEO COMMUNICATION

Targeted campaigns were implemented in projects to reach residents of the project areas. The **FAIR 2** and **New North** campaigns, which focused on sustainable regional aviation, reached approximately 1.45 million people by the time of reporting and gathered nearly 3.9 million impressions on Meta and TikTok. The campaign generated over 4,600 hours of viewing time—equivalent to more than half a year of continuous viewing—along with active interaction in the form of comments and shares. Reach and engagement continued to grow even after the reporting period.

The Bothnian Coastal Route project concluded in December 2025 with a targeted video campaign presenting the project results in a concise and visual format. The campaign consisted of a main video lasting 3 minutes and 33 seconds, along with shorter versions tailored for specific channels such as TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn. By the reporting date, the campaign had gathered over 980,000 video views. On YouTube, the campaign reached approximately 155,000 viewers and collected nearly 396,000 impressions. The main video was watched in its entirety by 20.47% of viewers, and 45.3% watched at least 30 seconds of the content.

MEETINGS AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

In addition to digital communication, the Kvarken Council organized and participated in numerous meetings and events focused on project information, dialogue, and personal contacts. One of the largest events of the year was the Wasa Future Festival, which brought together 240 participants. Feedback on the event's content and organization was positive, and discussions addressed questions related to the work of the **FLINC** project. **The Bothnia Green Energy project** also promoted communication during the year through seminars, meetings, and the sharing of expertise in cross-border energy cooperation.

Alongside project communication, long-term initiatives in the Kvarken Council's basic administration, such as **Nordic Connector** and **Political Innovation**, required active communication. Within the framework of Political Innovation, a comprehensive report was completed during the year in Finnish, Swedish, and English, documenting the Kvarken Council's working methods, experiences, and examples of cross-border political innovation.

Overall, 2025 was characterized by targeted project measures and dialogue with decision-makers, funders, and member organizations. The priority was to make project content and results visible. The year's experiences also serve as a foundation for further work to clarify the organization's mission and the role of projects in long-term, cross-border societal development.



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NEUVOSTO



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