

**The NSPA response to the Public Consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy**

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The NSPA network, Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, represents the interests of four northernmost counties of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, Västernorrland), seven northernmost and eastern regions of Finland (Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, Lapland, North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Pohjois-Savo and Etelä-Savo) and North Norway (Finnmark, Troms and Nordland). The NSPA represent about 10% of the total EU land area.

The NSPA highlights that **a balanced growth, in which all European regions can play a part, requires Europe 2020 strategy to take into consideration the regional specificities and provide tailor-made instruments for those regions suffering from permanent handicaps** that can hamper their abilities to reach the overall objectives of the strategy.

**1) Taking stock: the Europe 2020 strategy over 2010-2014**

The NSPA supports the Europe 2020 strategy and welcomes the comprehensive approach and efforts of the strategy to streamline different European policies towards common goals. In 2009, the NSPA commissioned a policy road map <sup>1</sup> and foresight report <sup>2</sup> from Nordregio to ensure that the NSPA development goals are in line with the larger EU policy framework, and that the regions play an active role in the implementation of the European policies. Due to the specific characteristics of the NSPA, it has a long history of dealing with the societal challenges Europe as a whole is encountering only now; fragile Arctic areas, harsh climate, long distances and aging and declining population have equipped the NSPA with a specific know-how on issues such as climate change, energy dependence and demographic change. Thus, it has the ability to play an active role and be in the forefront of providing solutions and added value for the whole of Europe.

**2) Adapting the Europe 2020 strategy: the growth strategy for a post-crisis Europe**

The NSPA stresses the importance for the strategy to take into consideration **the regional dimension**. It sees the intention of the strategy to involve the local and regional level in implementation as an improvement, but notes that reaching the targets calls for much stronger multilevel governance. The par-

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<sup>1</sup> [Policy road map for the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas](#), Erik Gløersen, Nordregio, 2009

<sup>2</sup> [Strong, Specific and Promising: Towards a Vision for the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas in 2020](#), Erik Gløersen, Nordregio, 2009

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participation of those who implement the strategy at the grass-root level should be secured. At the moment, the involvement of regional level is not evident, and, for example, majority of the targets are set and monitored at the EU Member State level. There is a **genuine need for flexibility and customised targets which take into consideration the regional differences and specificities**. Thus, the coordination tools of European economic policy (e.g. Annual Growth Survey, Country-Specific Recommendations) should take into account the territorial level differences in the EU Member States and utilise the regional data produced by for example DG REGIO and Eurostat.

**It is vital to secure the possibility to adapt and reallocate funding with regards the needs.** Europe 2020 strategy needs to adapt to the prevalent societal challenges, such as demographic change and youth unemployment. The NSPA emphasizes that rather than placing the focus on the quantitative and short sighted fulfillment of the objectives, the success of the measures should be evaluated by their long term impact on regional development. The indicators used to measure the achievements must reflect the reality that the EU programmes and spending do not have the same impact on all the regions.

Nevertheless, the NSPA would like to stress that **all European regions have the potential to act as drivers for the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and to fulfill the Europe 2020 targets. However, to realise the potential, the remote and sparsely populated areas should maintain their specific status which allows them to benefit from a variety of EU instruments and development actions.** The NSPA, being a very specific area of Europe, requires extra attention due to the sparse population, harsh climate, long distances and remoteness from the bigger markets. These characteristics create competitive disadvantages for the area, but simultaneously, when acknowledged and properly supported, the NSPA can provide added value for the whole of Europe. For example, the natural resources, such as raw materials, forests and energy supplies, the NSPA possess have the potential to be used for the development of the European industries and economic growth. Due to long distances within the region and towards larger markets, the NSPA is also in the forefront of implementing leading ICT solutions, such as distance medicine and education, applicable for roll-out in different European areas. Despite the challenging conditions, the NSPA region is characterised by a high use of renewable energies and high level of energy efficiency in urban built environment, as well as by being a world leader in the development of decentralised energy solutions. All in all, the NSPA regions create and test solutions and technologies that have a high potential for large scale replication in Europe and beyond.

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**The comprehensive approach of the Europe 2020 strategy requires increasing synergies between regional, national and EU funds which have a clear link to Europe 2020 targets and regional strategies.** The NSPA calls for more concrete guidelines from the European Commission on how the synergies and leverage should be realised. The NSPA is committed to collaboration with other European regions and aims to exploit the regional and national programmes and European structural and investment funds, as well as strategies such as the Smart specialisation, to realise its potential, achieve synergies and contribute to the targets of the Europe 2020.

*In Brussels, 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2014, on behalf of the NSPA Regions*



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