

NSPA supports the European Capitals of Culture in the Arctic

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, NSPA, represents the four northernmost regions of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland), the seven eastern and northernmost regions of Finland (Lapland, Northern Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, North Karelia, North Savo and South Savo), as well as the three northernmost regions of Norway (Finnmark, Troms and Nordland).

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) network is delighted to recognise and support Bodö, Nordland, (2024), Oulu, Northern Ostrobothnia, (2026), and the candidature of Kiruna, Norrbotten, (2029) as European Capitals of Culture (ECoC). These cities, situated in the European Arctic, are important cultural hubs, attractive destinations and diverse communities where people have built resilience, fostered creativity and innovation under arctic conditions. Building on the experience and the success of the European Capital of Culture held by Umeå, Västerbotten, in 2014, the arctic regions remain committed to continuous support and joint promotion of initiatives that showcases the diversity and vitality of arctic life.

The northernmost Europe is populated by innovative people with a rich history, cultural capital and potentials. It is an area in the forefront of many areas for the future, as well as lands of different long-standing cultures, such as the indigenous Sami people and other minorities inhabiting the Arctic for thousands of years. Culture is a strong driver to engage people to collaborate and explore new windows of opportunities, unlock new mindsets, and learn more about the history of unique aspects of the Arctic, and change perspectives.

Background NSPA structural challenges

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) constituting the European Arctic, recognised under Article 174 of the TFEU, and the Accession treaties of Finland and Sweden, as regions suffering from severe and permanent handicaps due to very low population density. The NSPA-network was established as collaborative network in 2004 to raise awareness of the common issues and circumstances facing these regions within EU institutions, to influence EU policy and to provide a platform for best practice of regional development.

The regional economies are vulnerable due to certain geographical and structural challenges, such as long distances, aging populations, and a lack of critical mass as well as an economy based on natural resources, highly sensitive to global market fluctuations. Despite the hampering conditions, the arctic regions have formed abilities to overcome severe structural challenges, through continuous analysis, capacity building, collaboration and series of strategic investments via various support schemes from the EU.

Culture as a driver for sustainable development of the European Arctic

The civil society, the cultural institutions and the people of the Arctic are the most essential assets to create attractive communities and serve as the fundament for sustainable regional development. The European Capitals of Culture in the Arctic highlights how people's high ambitions of progress, diversity and cultural depth can be fostered through cohesion and cooperation spanning across distances, borders, cultures and languages. The active involvement of youth and minorities infuses the communities with life, showcasing attractive images of the European Arctic as an inclusive space for people and possibilities.

Against this backdrop, the NSPA embraces the European Capital of Culture of Bodö in 2024, welcomes Oulu in 2026, and gives Kiruna full support for its candidature in 2029.

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