



# GRANULAR

## PRACTICE ABSTRACT

### Region Västerbotten (Regional authority)



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The European Arctic region faces unique challenges, including **vast distances, a sparse population, and a harsh climate, creating vulnerabilities** such as a small critical mass and an **economy heavily reliant on natural resources**, which are sensitive to economic shifts. The global market forces impacting European regions are particularly evident in the spatial planning of North Sweden. Despite these challenges, the region holds significant opportunities and plays a crucial economic and geopolitical role due to its natural resources—such as minerals, wood, and renewable energy—along with technological advancements and an innovative ecosystem.

There is also a **growing international tourism market centered around natural and cultural assets**, which fosters creativity and entrepreneurship. North Sweden is currently seeing some of the country's largest investments in climate-smart and sustainable technologies, as industries transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. While rural areas are undergoing substantial change in response to these growth opportunities, they face challenges in planning and investment due to limited capacity, requiring support in business development, community planning, and skill development.

The [Living Lab in Sweden](#) focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of the diversity within rural areas, specifically how the **green transition** is affecting these regions and how policies can address the challenges of **depopulation, significant green investments, and the emergence of regional growth hubs**. Many political efforts aimed at bridging the gap between urban and rural areas fail to address this complexity, often becoming compensatory measures that inadvertently reinforce existing disparities. A **territorial approach** is essential for successful policy development and to effectively promote rural development.

The relationship between urban and rural areas must be explored from various angles to foster sustainable regional development. Continued investments in urban sustainability, particularly in the sparsely populated northern regions, must be acknowledged, as cities play a crucial role in this context. North Sweden seeks to identify indicators that can strengthen the **diversification of rural areas** and provide better insights into how these areas adapt to changes.

Understanding how different trends affect rural communities is vital to developing a framework that reflects their capacity to respond to the green transition. Close collaboration with EU institutions will help tailor support measures to the specific challenges faced by these regions. The Lab's involvement in the GRANULAR project offers valuable tools to improve the understanding of key investments driving the green transition in northern Sweden.

#### Regions of North Sweeken | Sweden

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##### Thematic Priority:

- Public services
- Demographic change

##### More info:

[https://www.ruralgranular.eu/living\\_lab/living-lab-sweden-regions-of-north-sweden-sweden/](https://www.ruralgranular.eu/living_lab/living-lab-sweden-regions-of-north-sweden-sweden/)

## ABOUT THE LIVING LAB

The Living Lab in Sweden spans six regions: Västernorrland, Jämtland-Härjedalen, Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Upper Norrland and Middle Norrland, and is overseen by Region Västerbotten, a regional authority. The initiative for this Living Lab originated within the **North Sweden European Forum**, a political network focused on EU policy. Located in the northernmost part of Europe, the region is part of the European Arctic, rich in raw materials, with a strong presence in the climate sector and a thriving innovation ecosystem.

## OBJECTIVES

- **The vision of the Lab is to enhance the appeal of rural living and position North Sweden as a leader in the green transition.** In terms of the former, rural areas face challenges in being “investment-ready” due to market failures. For instance, the market value of newly constructed homes in these areas is lower than the construction costs, resulting in a situation where new developments carry high costs and risks, limiting their growth potential. This creates a barrier to population growth (or preventing further depopulation) and hampers investments in essential services like jobs, schools, and healthcare. Concerning the green transition, the goal is to explore ways to create long-term value without harming nature. This approach can help generate appealing jobs and foster healthy communities in rural regions.
- The Lab will bring together **policy advisors at regional and political levels**, along with key stakeholders such as local development areas, NGOs, and municipalities.
- Future activities will focus on **sharing knowledge and learning from how other rural areas address similar challenges**. It is crucial to identify market bottlenecks and gaps to understand how to build vibrant communities in sparsely populated areas with long distances. Additionally, there will be a focus on measuring intangible aspects such as quality of life and social progress.

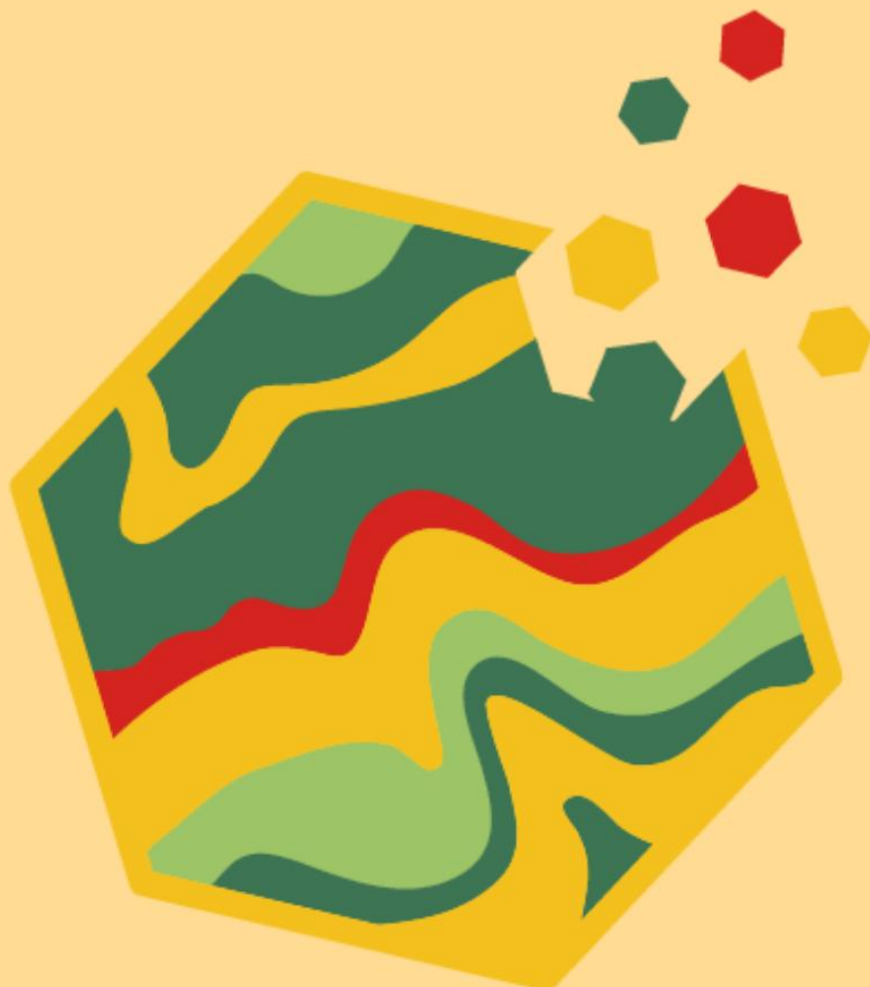
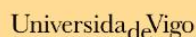
## DATA TO BE COLLECTED

The Lab aims to collect data that will help assess the readiness for transformation, or the capacity for change, in rural areas. There is a need for a deeper socioeconomic analysis that captures the dynamics of sparsely populated rural regions. The Lab also requires more effective tools to measure innovation in these areas. Better data at the regional and local levels is essential for tracking rural development. To achieve this, the Lab will organise stakeholder dialogues, conduct interviews, and carry out surveys.

- The Lab will collaborate with local and regional authorities, as well as other relevant associations.
- The Lab will examine the development challenges highlighted in the 9th Cohesion Report at the local level.
- Data will be gathered from key municipal stakeholders concerning resilience to the green transition.



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