



LISTENING TO THE FOREST

CRAFTING UNIQUE SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL,
ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING IN KUHMO



**CASE STUDY OF KUHMO,
FINLAND**

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AUTHORS:

Anna Vavassori, Viktorija Alise Kukite,
Kevin Wells, Saana Niskanen, Brianna
Marie Cunliffe, Matous Saidl

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1 Executive Summary

As local and global forces converge on the municipality of Kuhmo, a tight-knit village centre amongst the vast forests of the region of eastern Kainuu bordering Russia, and population decline poses a challenge to its continuing vitality, identifying the assets and characteristics that make this community unique can provide valuable guidance as decision-makers chart a path forward. Kuhmo offers a unique combination of culture, with its long-running Chamber Music Festival and status as a UNESCO World City of Literature based on its prominent role in the Kalevala (Finland's national epic), and nature, surrounded by many national parks, public lands, and opportunities for recreation and peace and quiet. It also is the recipient of remarkably strong place attachment and commitment among its residents, both present and former, with Kuhmo roots, and the possibility of a sustainable, meaningful life in a well-connected community acting as a strong retention factor and potential attraction factor among residents who have moved away but are eager to return if possible. The municipality's current strategies, focused on stability and economic developments intended to maintaining the well-being of the community rather than to spark rapid growth, are synergistic with Kuhmo's unique value, with efforts directed toward nurturing responsible cultural and nature-based tourism and continue to support a well-integrated wood economy at Woodpolis with an emphasis on more value-added, environmentally-responsible enterprises added to the value chain locally. However, there are opportunities to cultivate more community participation in local decision-making and the implementation of sustainability strategies, to bolster local buy-in and feelings of efficacy. Kuhmo has an additional, unique valuable resource in its involved, committed residents and their innovative ideas and proposed solutions, and with investment and collaboration, new initiatives could make use of existing resources to fill some of the gaps that the municipality and its residents are acutely aware of, creating new possibilities for long-term vibrant life in Kuhmo.

2 Introduction

In recent decades, many rural regions across Europe have faced population decline, aging demographics, and the gradual withdrawal of economic activity (Sousa & Pinho, 2015; Leick & Lang, 2018.) In Finland, these shifts are especially visible: the country has one of the oldest populations in Europe and a fertility rate well below replacement level. More than two-thirds of Finland's municipalities are experiencing population decline, with the most pronounced losses occurring in Eastern and Northern regions (Kytö & Kral-Leszczynska, 2013; Eskelinen, 2022). In contrast, population growth and economic activity have become increasingly concentrated in a small number of urban centres and their surrounding areas (Kytö & Kral-Leszczynska, 2013).

This geographic polarization reflects a broader structural shift currently underway. Job opportunities, educational institutions, and key services are increasingly clustered in the urban south and southwest, drawing young adults and working-age populations away from smaller places (Kytö & Kral-Leszczynska, 2013). These regional disparities have been further intensified by the recent health and social services reform (fi: *hyvinvointialueuudistus*), which transferred responsibility for public healthcare and social services from municipalities to larger regional wellbeing services counties (Kunta Liito, 2022). While the reform aimed to improve efficiency and equal access, in practice it has often led to centralization of services, especially emergency care, maternity services, and mental health support, into regional centres, reducing availability in smaller, more remote municipalities.

Instead of viewing the demographic realities of places like Kuhmo as a crisis, a new planning paradigm is emerging, one that embraces the concept of smart shrinkage. Smart shrinkage challenges the assumption that growth is the only path to development. It invites us to ask: What if smaller populations, deeply rooted in place, could lead more sustainable and meaningful lives? What if strategic adaptation, rather than resistance to change, could help build resilience? (Eskelinen, 2022; Kahila et al., 2022.) Contextual factors such as geography, local identity, and cultural and environmental assets play a central role in shaping how shrinking cities can envision and enact transition (Mabon & Shih, 2018).

At the heart of this conversation is the need to redefine innovation. Traditionally understood through a technological and urban lens, innovation in the periphery increasingly means something different: social cohesion, cultural production, and ecological sensitivity (Pugh, Kristensen, & Dubois, 2024). As noted in recent research, peripheral regions are not simply “left-behind places” but can serve as potential incubators of non-technological innovation and community-led sustainability transitions (Forrest & Wiek, 2014; Pugh, Kristensen, & Dubois, 2024). This style of

innovation can be led not solely by the market but by communities themselves identifying gaps and needs and envisioning solutions grounded in their particular context and vision of a future that is holistically sustainable. This shift will require not only new policies but also new narratives. Rather than imposing urban-based growth models on shrinking communities, we must explore how natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and local knowledge can serve as core resources in shaping sustainable futures (Leick & Lang, 2018; Grundel & Magnusson, 2023).

2.1 Research Outline

Our research explores these issues through the case of Kuhmo, a small city in Eastern Finland known for its forests, borderland location, and vibrant cultural life. Kuhmo exemplifies many of the tensions and possibilities that Finland's rural municipalities face: it is remote, sparsely populated, and demographically aging, but also deeply connected to its environment and cultural heritage.

Guided by the voices of Kuhmo's residents, this study focuses on reconsidering what sustainable strategies for the future might mean in a rural Nordic context. As defined by the Brundtland report (1987), sustainability refers to “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” We approach sustainability as a multidimensional concept including environmental, social, and economic dimensions. These aspects are seen as equally essential for the long-term well-being of communities. The aim is to explore how small municipalities can take an active role in transitioning beyond growth toward more sustainable futures by building on their natural, cultural, and community-based assets. This leads to the central research question:

- 1. Among many peer municipalities experiencing depopulation, what are the assets, resources, and community values that make Kuhmo unique?**
- 2. How can development be integrated synergistically with natural and cultural assets to create long-term sustainability for Kuhmo?**

To inquire into these questions while weaving together knowledge from both expert stakeholders and community members, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Our public survey invited Kuhmo residents to share their experiences of living in the city, their perceptions of its challenges, and their vision for its future. In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, municipal representatives, and current and former residents allowed for in-depth exploration of key

themes and possibilities. The research also incorporates direct observations made during field visits, which helped contextualize and complement the other data. Together, these methods worked toward a more comprehensive understanding of Kuhmo's current situation, allowing for the recommendation of locally relevant strategies for promoting long-term sustainability.

3 Background

3.1 Location

Kuhmo Municipality (fi: *Kuhmon kaupunki*) is in the Kainuu region of eastern Finland. It shares an approximately 125 km long border with Russia on its east along with the Vartius border crossing, although this is currently closed (Restrictions at the Border Crossing Points on the Eastern Border of Finland, n.d.). Just across the border lies the Russian town of Kostamus (ru: *Kostomuksha*), with which Kuhmo has long had strong cultural and economic ties, including a formal twin-city partnership established in 1989 (Malinen, 2021). For decades, the border enabled active cross-border cooperation, employment, and exchange, although these activities have largely ceased due to recent geopolitical developments. Within Finland Kuhmo borders (from north to south) Suomussalmi, Hyrynsalmi, Ristijärvi, Sotkamo, Nurmes, and Lieksa municipalities (National Land Survey of Finland, n.d.). Kuhmo Municipality covers an area of 5450 km², of which 4800 km² is land and 650 km² is fresh water (National Land Survey of Finland, 2018). Kuhmo City is the administrative, commercial, industrial, and cultural centre of Kuhmo Municipality and is near the geographic centre of the municipality on the shores of Lammasjärvi and other smaller bodies of water.



Figure 1: Map of the location of Kuhmo Municipality (Esri 2025)

Kuhmo City (fi: *Kuhmon keskustaajama*) is accessible only by road (or private plane) with the nearest train services being in Nurmes (80 km away) and Kajaani (100 km away). Kuhmo City is 205 km from Kuopio, 250 km from Oulu, and 590 km from Helsinki. There is daily coach service

between Kuhmo City, Sotkamo and Kajaani, plus between Nurmes and Kuhmo City on Fridays and Sundays (“How to Get to Kuhmo,” n.d.).

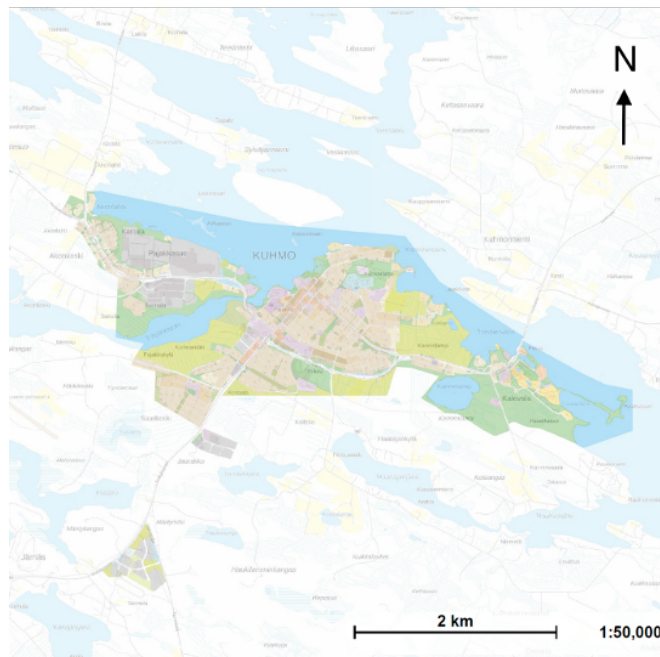


Figure 2: Map of Kuhmo City (Karttatiimi, n.d.)

Most of the area of Kuhmo Municipality is forested with a mixture of pine and spruce, but there are also significant amounts of birch, and other tree species. There is a small amount of agriculture as well. The natural assets of Kuhmo Municipality are a touristic draw within Finland and there are many picturesque lakes, rivers, hiking trails, and campgrounds; Hiidenportti National Park is 40 km from Kuhmo City in neighbouring Sotkamo. Lentua Nature Reserve is a water-focused nature reserve area 15 km from Kuhmo City. Kuhmo is also home to five of the six Friendship Parks, established in 1990 with the partnership of Kostamus, a community across the Russian border.

3.2 History

After the last Ice Age, the Kuhmo region gradually became inhabited by hunter-gatherers, forming early settlement patterns rooted in a wilderness-based economy. These early livelihoods left their mark on the landscape, and many local place names still reflect the presence of ancient Sámi and Karelian cultures. (Tervo, 2006; Kuhmon kaupunki, 2025). In the 16th century, as Finland became part of the Swedish Kingdom, more settlers arrived, mainly from Savonia. They brought slash-and-burn farming methods, and permanent villages began to take shape. Kuhmo's eastern border was officially fixed in 1595 in the Treaty of Teusina, making it one of Europe's oldest unchanged national borders. (Tervo, 2006; Kuhmon kaupunki, 2025.) Being located between East and West, Kuhmo has experienced both cultural exchange and conflict throughout its history. The region's written history begins in 1605, when the first taxation records were made. Kuhmo was

originally part of the Sotkamo parish, but in 1854 it became a parish of its own. It gained independent municipal status in 1865, officially changed its name from Kuhmonniemi to Kuhmo in 1937, and was granted city status in 1986. (Tervo, 2006; Kuhmon kaupunki, 2025). The city was heavily affected by the Winter War (1939–1940). Intense battles were fought in the area, and Kuhmo was one of the most heavily bombed places in Finland (Tervo, 2006; Kuhmon kaupunki, 2025). After the war, the city had to be largely rebuilt (Tervo, 2006). The legacy of war is still visible in Kuhmo's landscape and collective memory. Remnants of Winter War battle sites can still be found in the forests surrounding the city.

3.3 Demographics

In Kuhmo there are approximately 7,500 residents. Of these, 4,800 live in Kuhmo City (Statistics Finland, 2024). The sex ratio is 1.06 men per woman, and the age profile skews older (see Figure 3). According to Statistics Finland, in March 2025, there were 713 children (0-14 years old), 1619 people aged 15-44, 2048 people aged 45-64, and 3068 people aged 65 and over. Therefore, there are 3667 people of working age and 3781 that are not.

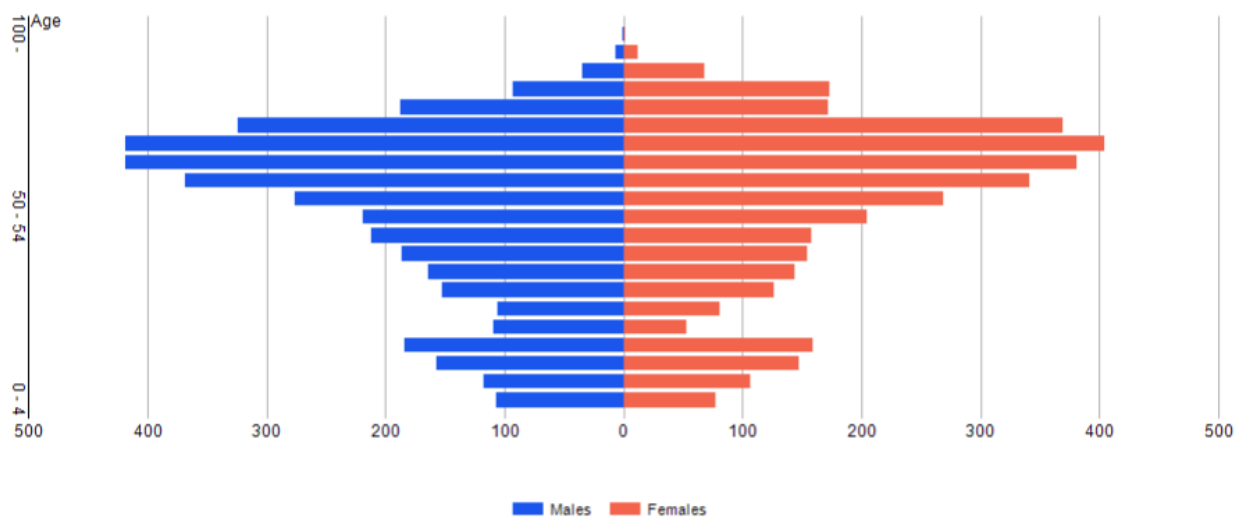


Figure 3: Population Pyramid for Kuhmo in March 2025. Note the disparity in the cohort aged 20-24 and 25-29 (Statistics Finland, 2025).

Kuhmo's population peaked in 1978 when there were just over 14,000 residents. It remained steady until the mid 1980s but has dropped every year since then (see Figure 4).

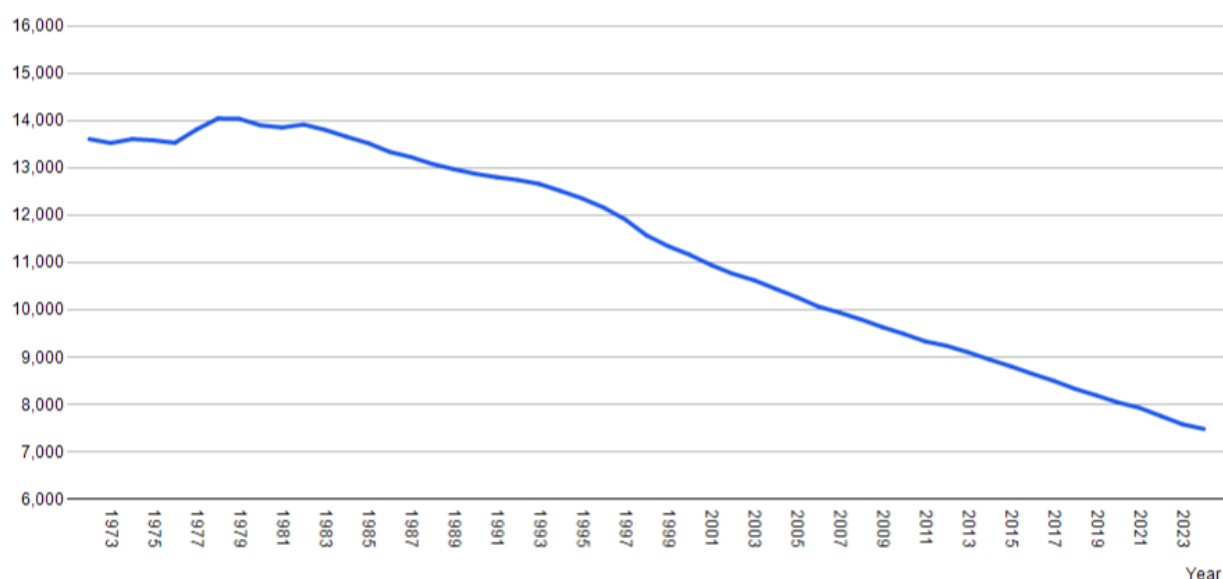


Figure 4: Population trend since 1972 in Kuhmo. The last year of positive growth was 1982 (Statistics Finland, 2025).

Kuhmo has had net positive international migration every year since 1990, totalling 401 individuals or an average increase of 12 per year (see Figure 5) (Statistics Finland, 2024).

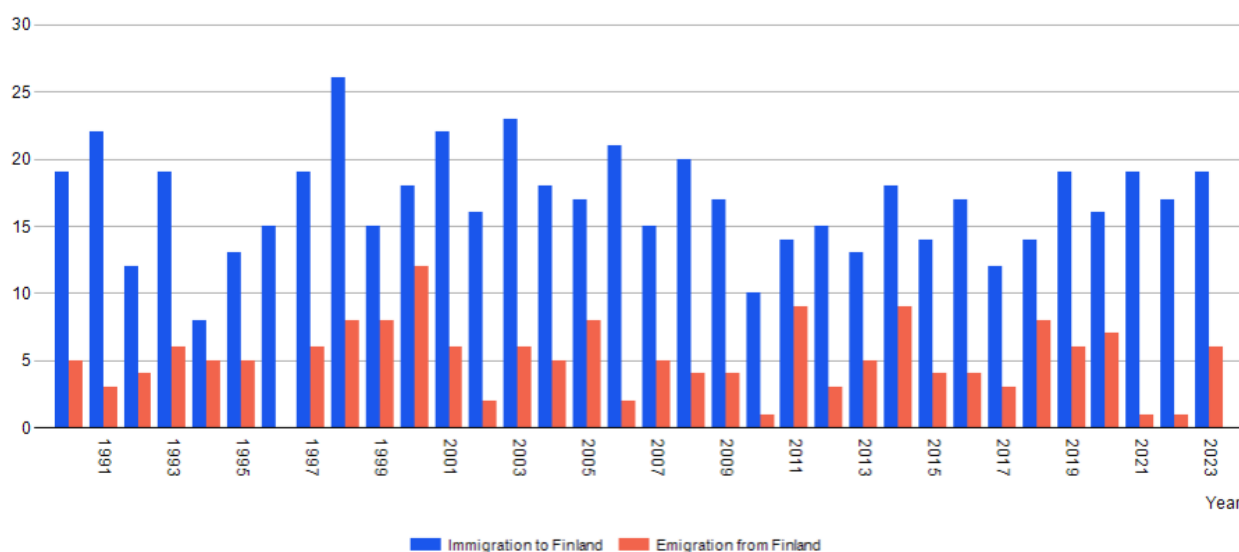


Figure 5: Number of people in Kuhmo immigrating to Finland and those emigrating out of Finland (Statistics Finland, 2024).

However, migration within Finland has been negative every year in the same period (aside from 2021). The net change to internal migration is -3,909 people, averaging -115 per year. The rate of departure from Kuhmo was highest in the 1990s when there was an average of -173 people leaving per year. In the 2000s this was -137 people, and in the 2010s it was -67 people. Reduced population

does not account for all the slowing of outmigration as the proportion of residents leaving Kuhmo in the 2010s is less than in the 1990s (Statistics Finland, 2024).

3.4 Economy

Kuhmo's economy has long been rooted in its forests. Historically, the city was a global centre for tar production: in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kuhmo was considered the largest producer of tar in the world, with annual volumes exceeding six million litres. Tar burning, along with slash-and-burn agriculture (fi: *kaskenpoltto*), sustained local livelihoods for centuries. As these practices faded in the early 20th century, agriculture and forestry evolved into more modern forms, supporting significant population growth throughout the first half of the century (Kuhmon kaupunki, 2025).

Today, Kuhmo's economy is driven by forestry, wood-based industry, public services, and tourism. According to data from Kuhmo (Horttanainen, 2025), the largest employment sectors are government services and timber-related industry. The largest employers in Kuhmo are the Kainuu regional health authority (fi: *Kainuun hyvinvointialue*) with 306 employees, Kuhmo with 266, and Kuhmo Oy, a sawmill, with 164 employees. Kuhmo has led a project, with the cooperation of other levels of government and institutions, to strengthen and expand the timber industry in Kuhmo. This project is called Woodpolis, and it is located close to Kuhmo City centre, adjacent to the Kuhmo Oy sawmill. Starting with unsawn timber, the goal is to do as much value-addition to the wood before shipping it out of Kuhmo. There are many companies operating in Woodpolis including companies making high value products from wood like cross-laminated timbers, log houses, window frames, etc.

Kuhmo is also a popular destination for domestic tourism in Finland, and the municipality is working to attract more international tourists. Domestic tourism is mostly attracted to Kuhmo by outdoor sporting in Winter and Summer with activities like skiing, boating, cycling, angling, and camping, among others, being easily accessible from Kuhmo City. It is also an important place to the creation of Finland's national epic the Kalevala, which could be used to stand out from other places with similar natural assets. In Kuhmo City centre is the Juminkeko, which is the national centre of Kalevala, with the world's largest collection of Kalevala related objects. This was closed during our research visit for renovations. About 3 km from Kuhmo City Centre is the Kalevala Village (fi: *Kalevalakylä*), which opened in 1989. There is a health and wellness centre, hotel, museum, sports facilities, and paths already, but the municipal government has plans to improve this area, with the ultimate goal of attracting international tourists who would like an alternative to Santa's Village in Rovaniemi (Horttanainen, 2025).

3.5 Culture

Kuhmo has also played a meaningful role in the cultural history of Finland. In the 19th century, it was closely linked to the national romantic movement known as Karelianism. Scholars and artists, including Elias Lönnrot, who compiled the Finnish national epic Kalevala, visited Kuhmo in search of traditional stories, songs, and inspiration. (Nieminen, 2006; Visit Kuhmo, 2025.) Through these encounters, Kuhmo made a significant contribution to the formation of Finnish national identity.

Kuhmo has also received recognition for its cultural contributions both nationally and internationally. Since 2019, the city has been part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network as Finland's only City of Literature. This designation recognizes Kuhmo's deep literary heritage, including its historical connection to oral storytelling traditions and its role in preserving and collecting folklore that helped form the Finnish national epic. As a City of Literature, Kuhmo promotes reading, storytelling, and cultural education through community programs, schools, festivals, and international collaboration. (Visit Kuhmo, 2025.) Building on this cultural identity, Kuhmo was also named the Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture for 2023. The title reflects the city's commitment to supporting linguistic and cultural diversity, especially its connections to Finno-Ugric peoples and traditions.

Kuhmo City is home to the renowned Kuhmo Arts Centre (fi: *Kuhmo-talo*), opened in 1993, which houses the internationally celebrated annual Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival which has been running since 1970. The arts centre has two performance areas, one with 668 seats and one with 99 and is built with timber from Kainuu and stone from Suomussalmi ("Why Is There an Arts Centre in Kuhmo," 2025). The festival takes place in the summer over two weeks, and for 2025 there are 57 ticketed concerts. Beyond the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival, there is the Sommelo Ethno Music Festival, the Kuhmo Winter Festival (fi: *Kuhmon Talvi*), Jolly July (fi: *Hilpeä Heinäkuu*), Römppä Week (fi: *Römppäviikko*) which all rely on the arts centre (Kuhmo Chamber Music, n.d.; Sommelo Ethno Music Festival, n.d.). The arts centre is also used for individual performances throughout the year of varying sizes, from touring music acts to local school performances. Music education is popular in Kuhmo, and these burgeoning musicians have the opportunity to hold free concerts before and after the music festivals in partnership with the arts centre. Kuhmo City also has a cinema with frequent screenings.

3.6 Education & Health

Kuhmo has three grade schools, in Kuhmo City there is the Tuupalo school which offers education from Grades 1 to 9, and there are two village schools for kids from Grades 0 to 6. Kuhmo also has a high school that offers a general study track and a specialised music track (Kuhmo High

School, n.d.). Nearby Sotkamo Municipality provides some adult learning courses in Kuhmo, and until the early 2010s there was a larger vocational school in Kuhmo teaching (Määttä, 2021). Kuhmo City is now working with Kainuu Vocational School to offer some vocational training in Kuhmo City centre in a dedicated facility (fi: *Kuhmo Taitotehdas*) (“Kuhmon Taitotehdas,” n.d.). Primary health care is available at the government operated Kuhmo Health Centre (fi: *Kuhmon terveystasema*) and at a privately operated clinic run by Mehiläinen. Additional specialised health care services are provided such as home care, rehabilitation, dentistry, family planning, and more.

3.7 Governance

Kuhmo is responsible for delivering many services to its residents. This includes land use planning, strategic planning, business development, education, health, early childhood education and care, library services, athletics, fire, rescue, roads, and environmental services. The municipality is also responsible for water and district heating delivery which it does through Kuhmon VesiEnergia Oy (*Vesi Ja Kaukolämpö [Water and District Heating]*, n.d.). Kuhmo has prepared various strategies, plans, and other guiding documents that outline the priorities for the future of Kuhmo like the Kuhmo Municipal Strategy (fi: *Kuhmon Kaupungin Strategia*), the Woodpolis development project (fi: *Woodpolis2020-kehityshanke*), and the in-progress Kuhmo Tourism Master Plan project (fi: *Kuhmon Matkailun Master Plan -hanke*). These plans contain grounded metrics that focus on well-being and community cohesion in addition to economic development—for example, goals around ensuring each community member has access to hobbies and friends, in addition to pursuing stable enrolment at the local school and supporting small and medium entrepreneurial enterprises (Kuhmon kaupunki, n.d.). Kuhmo has also been an active participant in storytelling and marketing efforts to develop a strong brand on the regional level with the Kainuu Regional Council (Kainuun Liito, 2025).

4 Theoretical Framework

The following set of theories constitute the framework upon which we based our research and analysis. They helped us to better understand the underlying dynamics of the gathered data, answering the research questions, as well as in structuring the final recommendations.

4.1 Asset-Based Community Development

No strategy can be truly sustainable without robust community support and a grounding in the context of the place it is intended to serve (Fixsen et al., 2020). Asset-Based Community Development, or ABCD, is a framework which acknowledges this and approaches the development of programs and policies intended to improve communities with a focus on the assets and unique affordances of a particular place, rather than its deficits (Kammer-Kerwick et al., 2022; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Rather than assuming all places share the same desired track of development toward a uniform standard, ABCD emphasizes the importance of place-based policy and participatory approaches to planning which involve the wisdom and vision of community members to inform trajectories toward a desired future (Boyd et al., 2008; Fouché & Brent, 2020; Kammer-Kerwick et al., 2022).

In the case of Kuhmo, as the attitudes of both residents and municipal leaders demonstrate, this grounded, pragmatic approach must mean thinking beyond a single-minded focus on growth and considering how to strategically nourish well-being grounded in lasting, abundant cultural and natural resources (Leick & Lang, 2018). Abundant resources, knowledge, and commitment to a vital future already exist within Kuhmo, and an appreciative inquiry approach can support external researchers in identifying how recommendations can best build on these existing strengths (Armstrong et al., 2020; Barrett & Fry, 2005). This hinges on meaningful engagement, not just with those in formal positions of leadership, but with community members representing a variety of perspectives, needs, and lived experiences (Boyd et al., 2008; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Both ABCD and related participatory, place-based approaches to planning and development can also be approached from a social action lens, moving community members up the ladder of engagement and civic engagement with an eye toward cultivating leaderful, connected communities skilled in collective decision-making (Hendricks et al., 2022; Lowe et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2012).

4.2 Well-being Economy (Beyond Growth)

The concept of well-being economics (WE) has gained considerable traction as a potential paradigm shift beyond traditional growth-oriented economic models, particularly in European

discourse and especially in Finland. While many advocates see WE as a transformative approach to societal well-being, in which the needs of people and the planet are prioritised over continued economic growth, its spread has raised questions about the potential dilution of its radical post-growth content. At its core, a WE fundamentally questions the pursuit of economic growth as the ultimate societal objective, particularly for high-income nations. This perspective advocates for moving beyond sole reliance on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of prosperity, instead focusing on a broader set of indicators that reflect genuine human and ecological well-being (Hayden, 2025). This involves focusing on "balanced sufficiency, equity, and sustainability as drivers of wellbeing," moving away from frameworks that merely aim to make conventional growth more "socially or environmentally acceptable" (Hayden, 2025, p. 2). It is a process that requires continuous dialogue, adaptation, and a focus on qualitative measures of success, beyond mere quantitative growth figures.

Finland, as a founding member of the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo), is a prime example of a nation grappling with the practical implementation of a WE. While globally recognised for its high levels of wellbeing and sustainability, Finland faces challenges in sustaining these levels, including skill shortages, inequalities, and mental health issues. The Finnish "economy of wellbeing" approach, initiated by civil society in 2012, has evolved from a focus on social sustainability to a broader decision-making framework that balances economic, social, and ecological dimensions (Pellikka & Hätönen, 2025). The case of Kuhmo, a rural municipality in Finland, further illustrates the complexities and aspirations surrounding the WE in practice. Kuhmo faces significant demographic challenges, despite this, the municipality's vision ("Full life in the realm of forests and culture") and mission ("to create opportunities - be a safe and open hometown to fulfil dreams and think big") resonate with wellbeing principles (Kuhmon kaupunki, 2024). Kuhmo participates in Finland's National Sustainable City Program, reflecting a commitment to sustainable development based on the UN's sustainable development goals (Kuhmon kaupunki, n.d.). The ongoing efforts in Kuhmo to diversify its economy, attract new residents, and nurture its unique cultural and natural assets, while navigating demographic decline and infrastructure challenges, embody the complex and contested journey towards a genuine Wellbeing Economy.

4.3 Social Infrastructure

As people leave in search of better opportunities for education or employment, rural areas face a shrinking process: population decreases, industries decline, and the local economy is forced to undergo a restructuring process, often leading to a loss of services (Tomaney et al., 2024). Shrinking, however, does not only concern the financial aspect, but the availability of services or

infrastructures. It also has an impact on the cultural and emotional levels, with possible implications for the sense of belonging, which may be reduced or get lost (Tomaney et al., 2024).

Place attachment, however, plays a key role in activating collective engagement and civic behaviours (Tomaney et al., 2024), and shrinking processes reduce - if not eliminate - both physical and non-physical places where these can happen (Tomaney et al., 2024). Moreover, the sense of belonging is often what motivates many to stay in a shrinking place, despite the worsening conditions and provision of services, or what motivates them to come back (Tomaney et al., 2024).

Within this context, the relevance of social infrastructures (SIs) becomes clear. Defined as both physical locations and institutions, they allow people to gather and engage, influencing their behaviours towards the community and the city (Tomaney et al., 2024). In a shrinking context, they allow for the generation of projects, ideas, and concepts that can fortify the community, facing issues where formal institutions might have failed (Tomaney et al., 2024). This assumes particular relevance when thinking about sustainable transition practices. In a context where the implementation of policies to foster sustainable transition has mainly been limited to urban environments, studying if and how smaller communities develop and adopt such strategies can offer meaningful insights on success factors later adaptable to other contexts (Forrest & Wiek, 2015), nonetheless allowing for the community to thrive.

Disruption in SIs is both a cause and a consequence of population decrease (Tomaney et al., 2024). Development of SIs, in fact, often happens through a bottom-up approach, relying on the presence of an active community and its sense of belonging (Tomaney et al., 2024). However, shrinking population can cause the disappearing of these places and institutions, generating the inhabitants' discontent and feeling of unease. Allowing space for the formation of SIs is in the own interests of the city, and Kuhmo can count on a well-established community that revolves around culture, actively engaging people in different activities, but also creating opportunities to gather and interact. Kuhmo cultural environment is not only a unique asset of the city, but it's also what can make a difference for it to thrive: not only it allows for generation of new ideas and establishment of a sense of community, but can also attract people and help them to build a sense of belonging in the area.

4.4 Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism represents a critical paradigm for the development of the global travel industry, ensuring its long-term viability and positive impact. Sustainable tourism planning is crucial for maximising the benefits of tourism while minimising its potential negative impacts,

particularly in peripheral areas. This form of planning integrates ecological, economic, and socio-cultural factors, adopting a long-term viewpoint (Kauppila, Saarinen & Leinonen, 2009).

In the context of Kuhmo, this translates to protecting Kuhmo's natural resources, such as its forests, lakes, and wildlife, which are fundamental to its tourism appeal. This aligns with the emphasis on nature, silence and peace that locals and visitors identify as key. As well as the region's focus on non-motorized activities like husky safaris, horse-riding, and reindeer sled rides. Local operators, often small and family-run, are committed to preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage, ensuring guides educate customers on respecting nature and practicing zero-waste (Wild Taiga, n.d.).

Rural tourism actively contributes to the development of areas in decline, creating additional employment opportunities and reducing out-migration. Reiterating that rural tourism plays an important role in regional development and in maintaining the livelihoods of rural populations is more than simply stating its economic contribution. It highlights its capacity to address wider socio-economic challenges such as depopulation and limited employment opportunities in peripheral regions. The emphasis on local entrepreneurship also reflects a community-oriented approach to development. This means that sustainable rural tourism in Finland is not just an economic activity, but a strategic tool for improving the resilience and vitality of rural communities. Its success contributes directly to the well-being of local people, transforming tourism from a service industry into a driver of comprehensive regional development (Sunni & Komppula, 2014). Also, economic sustainability is a part of Kuhmo's sustainable tourism, ensuring that tourism contributes to the local economy by generating income and employment for residents. This is particularly important in a region facing challenges like out-migration and unemployment.

The socio-cultural dimension requires respecting the authenticity of host communities, preserving their tangible and intangible cultural heritage, traditional values and promoting intercultural understanding and tolerance (Carbone & Yunis, 2004). Moreover, from a socio-cultural sustainability perspective, respecting and preserving Kuhmo's cultural identity, traditions and the well-being of its people is a big part of sustainability. This includes maintaining the community spirit and addressing concerns about the impact of tourism on local life.

4.5 Integrated Wood Economy

The integrated wood economy aims at producing wood products in a manner that minimizes waste during the manufacturing process, utilizing the most out of the wood resources and promoting material efficiency, thus creating a more economically and environmentally sustainable production environment. In many parts of Finland, the historically dominant forest industry went through

structural changes (Husgafvel et al., 2018), and better product utilization together with adding value to the primary resource is a way to create a competitive advantage on the global market. In an integrated wood economy, actors in the wood industry, including commercial forestry, all stages of processing, and post-life cycle management cooperate a closed loop system beneficial to all economically while being more environmentally sustainable and giving those cooperating a competitive advantage (Husgafvel et al., 2018).

Climate change is expected to bring disruptive challenges to the wood production industry, which Finland and Kuhmo in particular is dependent on. Both abiotic (windstorms, drought, forest fires) and biotic (increase of major insect pests and pathogens on trees) risks to Finnish forests are expected to increase. Snow caused damage has historically not been such an issue in northern Europe (Venäläinen et al., 2020), this may change though, as the period of the year for which the ground is frozen is shrinking, therefore making forests more vulnerable to snow damage. The European spruce beetle, being the most important pest in European forests, has so far been the most detrimental in Central European forests, but with warming temperatures, it is expected to cause further damage in the Nordic countries in the coming decades. Like pests, forest fires have previously been seen as an issue in more southern climates, but forest fires in Sweden in 2014 and 2018 have shown that with warming temperatures, the Nordics will be more vulnerable in the future. Kuhmo, an area heavily dependent on forests as an economic tool, will have to adapt to all those coming changes in order to continue operating (Venäläinen et al., 2020).

About two kilometres west from downtown Kuhmo lies Woodpolis, an industrial area with many stages of raw wood processing present, with individual producers cooperating to utilise most of the primary product in the most cost-effective and environmentally sustainable way. 21% of the working population of Kuhmo is working in Woodpolis and livelihoods of many more in the area are dependent on Woodpolis indirectly. A sawmill run by Kuhmo Oy is the biggest private employer in the area, and timber produced by Kuhmo Oy is the raw material used by the rest of the companies. Those companies create prefabricated housing and other materials used in construction, pellets, animal bedding and a variety of other products (Mäkeläinen, 2025).

Woodpolis also includes transportation companies, transporting the products from Kuhmo either to ports, particularly Oulu, for international shipping, or to Finnish customers, who are usually located in southern Finland. As Kuhmo is not connected to the Finnish train network, all the transportation is done by trucks, which increases cost and decreases competitiveness of Kuhmo made products, further creating a need to create higher value products in order to stay competitive against those with more favourable transportation possibilities.

Some products, such as the pellet production, utilizes waste created by other production processes in other companies, and is efficiently transported by fixed infrastructure from one company to another. Waste not utilized in any other product is then used in the thermal power plant on site, which powers the Woodpolis plants and sends excess capacity into the grid for generic use. The area continues trying to attract new businesses, particularly producers giving additional value to local wood. The municipality is also utilizing Woodpolis products, particularly in building construction and renovation. Within Woodpolis itself, the wood economy is well integrated within the possibilities of individual manufacturers. Both the Kuhmo and the European Union have invested in further development of Woodpolis (Mäkeläinen, 2025).

5 Methods

As mentioned above, we implemented different methods to gather data about our case study. Mixing methods allowed us to verify the validity of the information received, as well as to reach as many people as possible. We conducted an online survey and different kinds of interviews – some more structured and some more spontaneous. Moreover, during our 5-day visit to Kuhmo we engaged in participant observation of public life in Kuhmo City and visited some natural attractions in Kuhmo. We actively participated in the life of the city: some group members attended a dance performance at the Kuhmo Arts Centre, everyone attended a brass band performance in the market square, and we all explored local recreation areas hiking. By attending these events, eating in local restaurants and pubs, striking up conversations at grocery stores and other local businesses, our research team was able to gather insights that formal interviews would not offer, build trust and familiarity, and experience firsthand some of what makes Kuhmo a compelling place to visit and live. It must be acknowledged that it was not possible to implement more structured data collection methods that required advanced planning due to the limited amount of time our research time spent in the community and the explorative nature of this research. From our short time in Kuhmo and the necessarily limited subset of the community we were able to connect with, and given our status as outsiders, we cannot claim to make any definitive statements about this place, its people, or its future. However, the data we have here collected and analysed represents a rich base that can suggest fruitful directions for future inquiry and spark continuing conversations.

5.1 Survey

As our time in the community of Kuhmo was limited to 5 days (14 - 18 May 2025) we focused on two methods of active data collection to maximise our efficiency. On the first night we launched an online survey and shared it on four local Facebook groups ("*Kuhmo*", "*Puskaradio Kuhmo*", "*Kainuun ilmoitustaulu*", "*Kuhmolaiset*"). It was removed from "*Kuhmolaiset*" but remained up on the others. The survey was mostly open-ended questions that focused on individuals' perceptions of different topics related to life in Kuhmo and in what way they are connected to Kuhmo. We created questions based on the goals of our research project, as well as the contextual meetings and research on regional challenges that we conducted before arriving to Kuhmo. For a full list of the survey questions see Appendix 1: Survey Text. The survey was open from 14 May to 21 May, and we received 121 valid responses. No responses were rejected as invalid. In the survey we solicited for contact details of people that would be willing to meet with us for a longer discussion, and we were able to interview 3 people as a result. Kuhmo City helped us by sharing, on their social media

accounts, the link to the survey and an open call to anyone to come to the square and talk to, and be interviewed by, us immediately following a brass band performance.

For the 121 survey results we received, our research team generated descriptive statistics for the numerical and demographic survey data using Jamovi, and used MaxQDA to analyse the qualitative data from the open-ended questions. Using a thematic coding approach (see Appendix 2: Interview Codebook) guided by preliminary impressions from our time in community, as well as the focuses of our research questions, we identified key common threads and divergences among respondents belonging to different age groups, residency statuses, and more.

5.2 Interviews & Participant Observation

We conducted semi-structured interviews (N = 19, see Table 1) using multiple methods for finding interviewees. Three were organised before we arrived in Kuhmo, these were the most formal and included a presentation to our group before the interview. Three interviewees were contacted based on their response to the question in our survey looking for volunteers to talk with us. Of the 19 total interviews, 17 were done face-to-face and the other 2 were done online using Microsoft Teams. We were introduced to 3 interviewees by other people we met while in Kuhmo. Some of these interviews were done in group settings, but everyone we spoke with has been counted individually, as they all offered their own unique perspectives.

Interview Type	Count
Pre-planned, formal	3
Semi-structured	9 (2 on Microsoft Teams)
Spontaneous	7
Total	19

Table 1: Interview types and counts.

We also interviewed people (N = 7) as we spent time in Kuhmo in shops, restaurants, and in the square in Kuhmo City centre. We did not record audio for any of our interviews, but we took notes either during the talk or immediately afterward. The people of Kuhmo were friendly to our group and often expressed surprise and pleasure that our group was there to hear their stories and opinions; there was no feeling of research fatigue in Kuhmo. One interview was done with an interpreter (between Finnish and English), but the rest were done either in Finnish by the Finnish-speaking member of our group, or in English. Having only a single Finnish speaker in our research group constituted a limitation as it possibly prevented us from interviewing more people who are unable or not willing to speak English.

The data gathered through interviews have been collected and interpreted through thematic analysis, a method mainly implemented to analyse qualitative information. The goal of the analysis is to identify recurring themes, usually related to ideas and concepts, and to understand which topics the interviewees gave more relevance. The notes took during and after the interviews formed the starting point of our analysis.

After an initial familiarisation with the data, we identified key codes that helped us grasp the feelings of the interviewees towards specific aspects of Kuhmo. As our scope was to grasp a general understanding of how the city is perceived both by its inhabitants and by tourists, in order to inform our recommendations for unique place-based sustainability strategies, the identified codes are related to subjective perceptions and were defined as follows:

- sense of optimism or pessimism towards a specific aspect of Kuhmo;
- perception of something as challenging or as an opportunity;
- perception of something as a unique value of Kuhmo.

Subsequently, we identified the main themes to which these perceptions referred and linked sub-themes which were impacted or related to them. The following table (Table 2) summarises the identified codes, themes, and sub-themes:

Perception (<i>code</i>)	Theme	Sub-theme
positive	community	attraction of new workers/residents
negative	culture	business development
unique value	demographic	reason to leave
challenge	economy	cost of living
opportunity	education	community building
	energy	environmental impact
	growth	infrastructures
	mobility	resources
	nature	smart specialisation
	services	tourism
		wellbeing
		work

Table 2: Interview Thematic Analysis Codes and Themes.

6 Results

6.1 Thematic Analysis of Survey Data

The response to our online survey was surprisingly robust, with 1.64% of Kuhmo's population participating within the seven days the survey was live. Three survey respondents later connected with us for interviews, so there is some overlap in the interview and survey datasets. Through focusing on open-ended question, we were able to gather respondents' unique perspectives on Kuhmo's present, challenges and future trajectories, as well as identify more general trends.

Respondents to our survey included all age categories, as well as residence statuses, as summarized in Table 3 and Table 4. Surprisingly, a greater number of younger residents responded than might be expected based on the demographics of Kuhmo, perhaps due to the influence of the method of response solicitation (social media).

Age	Number of Responses
16-24	10
25-34	34
35-44	18
45-54	23
55-64	19
65 or older	17

Table 3: Survey Respondents by age group

Residence Status	Number of Responses
I was born in Kuhmo and currently live in Kuhmo	61
I was not born in Kuhmo and I currently live in Kuhmo	21
I used to live in Kuhmo but not now	28
I live for part of the year in Kuhmo	6
I am visiting Kuhmo	5

Table 4: Survey responses by residence status

When asked to rate their average satisfaction with life in Kuhmo (on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, 1 being least satisfied, 5 being the most satisfied), these 121 respondents had an average satisfaction level of 3.81, indicating overall positive experiences of life in Kuhmo. Reported satisfaction was relatively consistent among age groups, with no statistically significant differences in the means between categories, although, as discussed in the analysis, qualitative data indicates that the factors driving these perceptions were different among these groups.

61 respondents (50.4%,) were born in Kuhmo and currently live there, a pattern which corresponded with insights from interviews, in which many people who live in Kuhmo could trace their family roots back many generations. The 28 responses from people who used to live in Kuhmo but no longer do indicate that many former residents still closely follow city happenings, participate in Facebook groups, and generally take pride in their roots and are invested in Kuhmo's success, with one respondent stating:

"I feel like Kuhmo is home even though I have lived elsewhere for years."

(35-44 y.o., born in Kuhmo, lives elsewhere)

Many respondents belonging to this group indicated that they would like to move back to Kuhmo, and would do so if jobs were available, but especially for respondents with higher education, they were pessimistic about their ability to find suitable work, as one respondent stated:

"There are no jobs. I would move back there if it were possible to find an interesting job that matches my education in Kuhmo. There are no jobs for anyone other than lumberjacks and other labourers."

(24-35 y.o., Born in Kuhmo, lives elsewhere)

In the open-ended survey questions, as seen in Figure 6, 92% of respondents mentioned the natural environment and access to nature at least once as a key aspect of life in Kuhmo, with the other most frequently mentioned aspects being a lack of job opportunities (mentioned by 58% of respondents), connections to family and roots (50%), the silence, peace, or tranquillity that they experience (45%), and the cultural happenings in Kuhmo (42%).

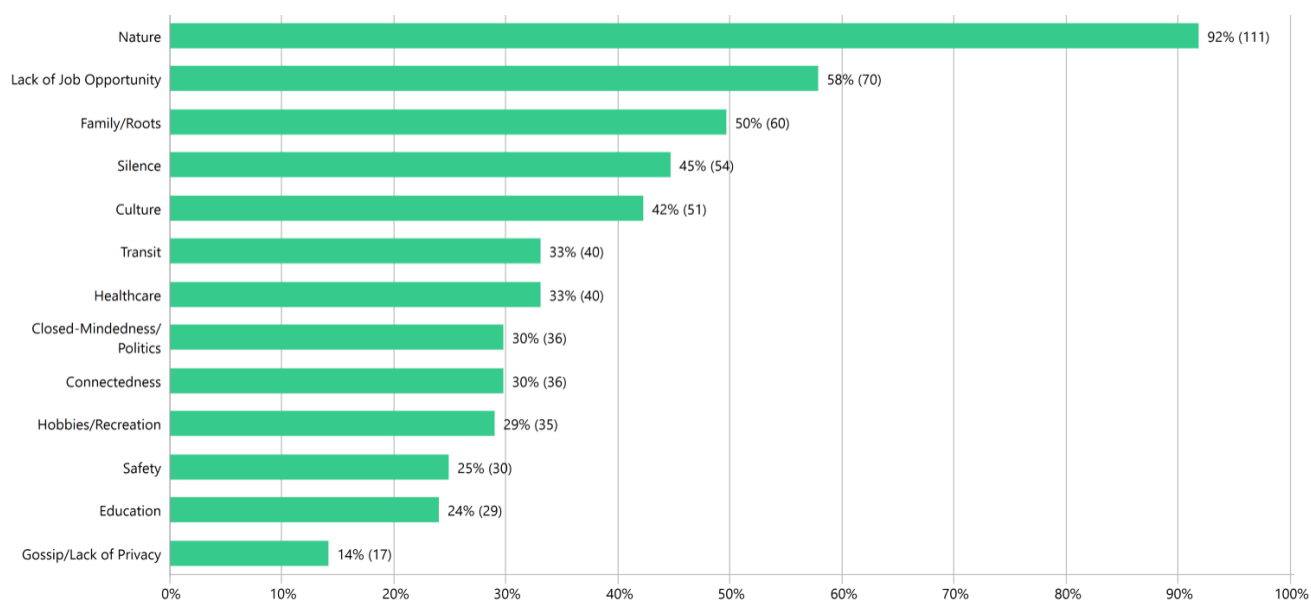


Figure 6: The percentage and number of survey respondents whose responses mention different key aspects of life in Kuhmo.

In these survey responses, as was also the case during the interviews, most residents remarked not just on the nature alone or culture alone, but the uniqueness of being able to experience both valuable aspects in the same walkable city centre, alongside peace and quiet and family. Many respondents, when asked which aspects of Kuhmo they missed while away, replied with a combination of these key factors, with one representative response reading:

“[I miss] family, animals, nature, friends and acquaintances, lakes, forests, bogs, silence, a good winter, Kuhmo House and Kaesa's café [local performing arts space and cafe], food and relaxed conversation, funny coincidences and meetings on the streets, concerts and other events!”

(45-54 y.o., lives part-time in Kuhmo)

As seen in Figure 7, respondents who indicated that they had visited Kuhmo or lived there for part of the year indicated that nature, culture, silence, and family roots were the dominant factors driving their visitation.

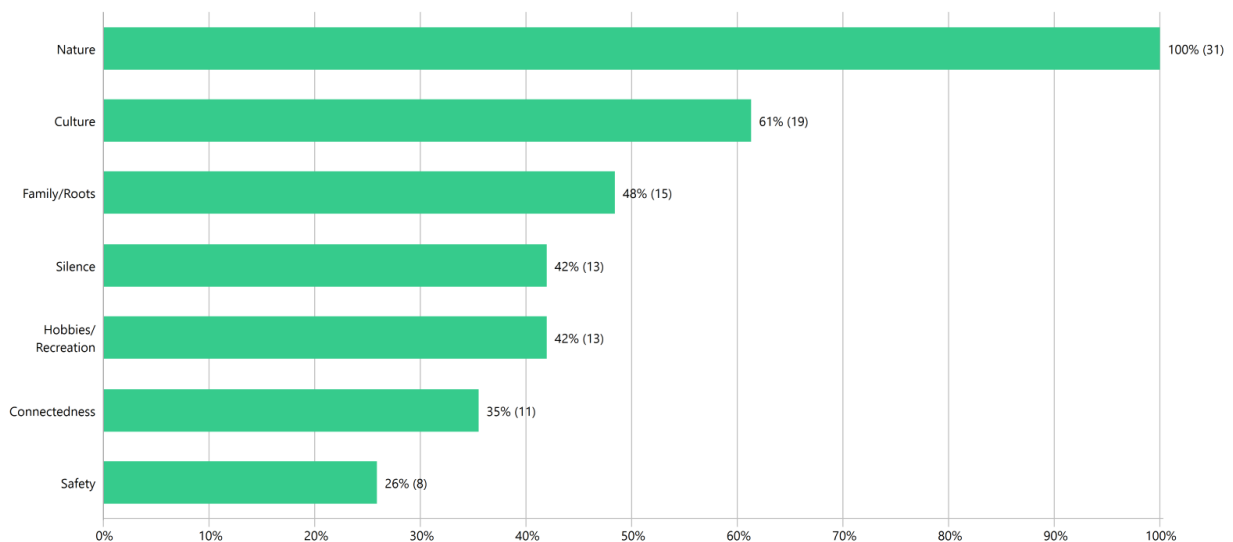


Figure 7: Codes most frequently mentioned by respondents identifying as visiting or part-time residents.

Overall, survey respondents had more negative or critical comments to offer than interviewees—a dynamic likely influenced by the anonymous nature of the survey and a less acute social desirability bias than in the face-to-face interviews, with respondents not feeling the need to “host” or please us as outside researchers (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Nonetheless, very few surveys (4 out of 121) had solely negative comments about Kuhmo, with the vast majority of even the most critical respondents also mentioning aspects of life in Kuhmo that they highly valued, suggesting nuanced lived experiences of a place with much to treasure which also faces daunting challenges. Among the survey respondents who expressed negative perceptions, the most frequently mentioned challenges were the lack or deterioration of services, lack of job opportunities, and negative community feeling (see Figure 8). Survey respondents, as well as interviewees, also specifically mentioned included issues with transit, including the need to travel long distances, and a perception of closed-mindedness, personal misalignment with local politics, or lack of privacy amidst gossip and enmeshed community dynamics.

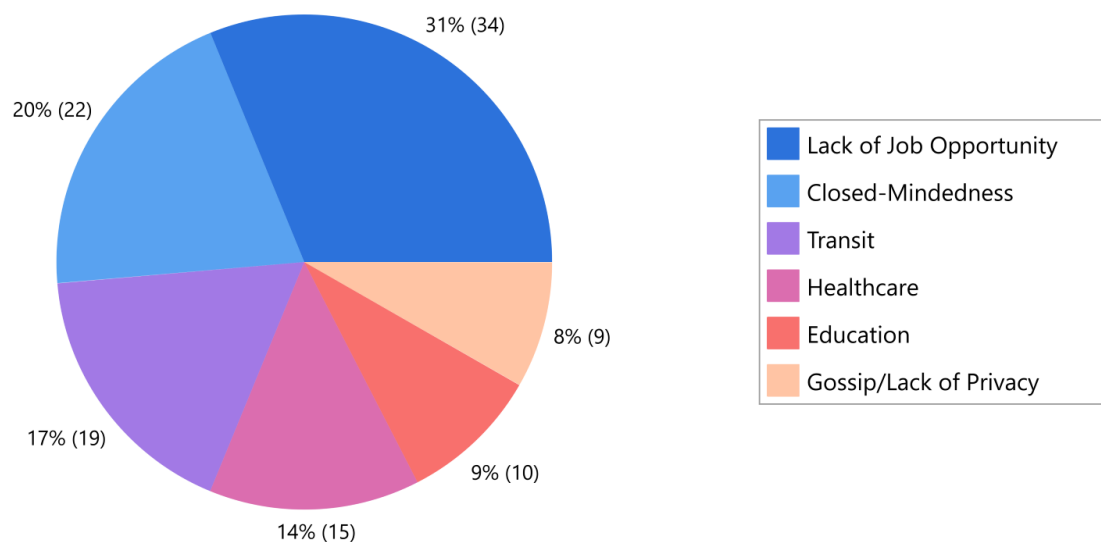


Figure 8: The number and percentage of interviews mentioning key drivers of negative perceptions among respondents.

The perception of deteriorating services was often mentioned in connection with either the elderly or families with children, who are the groups most concerned about access to pivotal healthcare. Most respondents who offered comments which were critical of transit mentioned long distances to services, and limited and declining bus service. Comments on education, especially from older respondents, often mentioned the loss of Kuhmo’s once-significant vocational school as a significant blow to the city’s vitality and future prospects. Above all other negative, a lack of job opportunities loomed largest, especially among younger respondents and interviewees. These community member concerns aligned well with those identified by experts from the municipality and regional council, indicating a clear shared understanding of the most relevant challenges at hand for Kuhmo, as well as alignment on the importance of maintaining critical services to the greatest extent possible and enhancing employment opportunities.

In a synthesis of the different meanings people attach to life in Kuhmo, when asked what three words come to mind when they describe this place, 73 respondents included “nature”, 52 included either “peace”, “tranquillity”, or “quiet”, and 27 included “home” (see Figure 9). Other popular responses mentioned music, culture, family, forest, safety, and remoteness. Less frequent but still significant were responses that associated Kuhmo with smallness, emptiness, aging, and decline. Overall, these emergent themes speak to Kuhmo residents’ willingness to be clear-eyed about the challenging realities facing their city while also continuing to attach great value to its unique assets and devote themselves to its future.



Figure 9: The most frequent recurring responses to the question: "When you think of Kuhmo, what three words come to mind?", with frequency visualized by size on a linear scale, from most mentions ("nature", 73), to least ("envy", 2).

6.2 Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Conducting more extended interviews, in addition to gathering a broad array of survey responses, allowed us to grasp an overall feeling of Kuhmo, the way it is perceived by residents, and a deeper understanding of the dynamics that drive people to leave, but also to desire to return. Due to the structure of the interviews, and their knowledge of the themes of our research, people were willing to be open about the challenges that Kuhmo faces. Nonetheless, the majority of interviewees expressed extremely positive opinions about life in Kuhmo, and even though they raised some issues, we noticed a tendency to focus more on the positive aspects, which initially surprised us, given our awareness of the community's acute challenges. We acknowledge that it might have been harder to express concerns and a negative attitude during a voluntary interview, particularly for those interviews that were spontaneous talks with people in the streets during festive community events. We can also speculate that the unplanned nature of these interviews might have partly influenced their answers, as formulating full critiques could require more time. Overall, though, interviewees often offered in-depth commentary on the municipality's numerous opportunities and resources that it can invest to pursue a more sustainable future, especially concerning its long-term liveability.

In addition to identifying the challenges and opportunities of Kuhmo, our primary interest was in understanding the factors which makes the community unique and can possibly play a significant role in its future development. A robust, multidimensional understanding Kuhmo's distinct assets is

pivotal information for making recommendations for sustainable strategies for business development and citizen retention grounded in an asset-based community development approach. What emerged from the interviews - and has been confirmed by the survey results - is the relevance of Kuhmo's intersecting access to nature and culture for both attracting and retaining inhabitants and tourists.

The first key asset of Kuhmo that interviewees identified was its surrounding nature, which plays a role both in the local economy and in the everyday life of inhabitants. Nature, for our interviewees, meant forests for wood production, but also lakes and trails for hiking and skiing, bright summers, and northern lights during winter, all of which are both attractions of tourists and reasons for which Kuhmo inhabitants enjoy living there. In one aspect or another, nature in Kuhmo was mentioned by all the interviewees, whether they were tourists, inhabitants, business owners or local representatives.

People living in Kuhmo highlighted nature as one of the best things about their city, with its location allowing them to do outdoor sports such as hiking, cross-country skiing, and swimming, among others. The possibility of experiencing unspoiled nature is also one of the reasons why tourists come to Kuhmo. Even though residents only talked positively about the local nature, two tourists camping in the Pajakkakoski Suvanto expressed their concern and disappointment at finding industrial activity so close by, within sight and hearing. They highlighted how they were not expecting to be so close to this activity, and how the noise from the Woodpolis complex impacted their otherwise enjoyable stay (personal communication, May 2025).

If nature is mainly seen as a recreational and cultural value by inhabitants and tourists, it represents a primary economic resource for both the municipality and the local businesses. The latter are indeed mainly based on wood harvesting, processing, and manufacturing, with Woodpolis being the industrial core of the city. Born out of the desire to stand out from competitors by creating an integrated system that includes value-added products and minimizes waste, Woodpolis is an example of smart specialisation in the forestry sector, which represents the main non-service-sector employment opportunity in the Kuhmo area. From a conversation with the project's representatives, it became clear that, even though Woodpolis has continued to be a successful project, its growth faces some limitations, such as the lack of a skilled workforce and the high costs of transportation, which is now on wheels (personal communication, May 2025).

The lack of higher education is an issue raised by many, identified as the cause for a great part of the population to leave over the years. When talking about education, the majority of interviewees not only portrayed it as a huge issue driving depopulation but also expressed their desire to have more local opportunities to be able to retain the young generations in the area, so they do not have

to become disconnected from my roots. Some interviewees, especially those who were former inhabitants who left Kuhmo to study and came back after retirement or after finding a job, outlined local education as something that should be strengthened in the Kuhmo area. Respondents to the survey also mentioned the lack of jobs related to the higher education they had gained somewhere else as the primary reason keeping them from moving back to Kuhmo, highlighting how the two issues are interrelated, creating a negative feedback loop limiting opportunities for educated workers to settle long-term in Kuhmo.

Driven by this knowledge, many decision-makers, community leaders, and stakeholders are already looking beyond traditional forestry-related jobs by seeking to encourage the expansion of existing tourism facilities, especially those at Kalevala village, to build Kuhmo's status as a domestic and international tourist destination, not only for individual sports lovers but also for families (personal communication, May 2025). Within this pursuit, the surrounding nature plays a relevant role as the main attracting factor, along with the cultural events already famous, such as the Chamber Music Festival, that is taking place during summer. The possibility of ending up with the opposite issue, overtourism, seems not to represent a real problem right now for the municipality. At the moment, the presence of tourists does not bother residents, who mainly see them as a resource and a factor that makes the city lively.

The second unique characteristic of Kuhmo that can bolster tourism and development is its cultural environment, and, more precisely, music and dance. It plays a crucial role in citizens' lives, but also in the branding of the city, acting as an attractor of both visitors and new workers. Particularly, the active cultural scene represents the reason why the majority of young people we talked with moved to the city, even without having any previous connection with the city – which represents the main reason for people coming back according to those we interviewed and their peers. During our stay, we noticed how every single day there was at least one cultural event in which we could participate, and all the people we talked to highlighted this as a strength of the city. It, in fact, allows residents to continuously engage with the community, but it must be noted that this alone is not enough to build a sense of belonging and vitality for everyone. One of the interviewees, in fact, highlighted how it is very easy not to feel part of it if you do not share an interest in dance and music (personal communication, May 2025).

Along with a well-established cultural centre, Kuhmo has around 280 associations, and many interviewees confirmed that they help them to be continuously engaged, fostering their sense of belonging to the place and the community. The latter has been described by many interviewees as strong and open, even though some survey responses contain a contrasting perception. Some perceive this sense of belonging as an essential feature for Kuhmo to survive, as it is necessary to

cooperate in small communities where everyone knows each other. However, as for cultural activities, not all citizens experienced them in the same way. Some people expressed difficulties in integrating into the local community due to different reasons: not belonging to any association, not having relatives or parents living in the area, or coming from a very different background. Even though a strong and small community has its pros, it also has many cons, as was mentioned by many interviewees who lamented the exposure to gossip and unpleasant scrutiny due to the size of the city. This not only has consequences for the social life and well-being of people but may also represent a factor preventing new inhabitants from moving in or causing others to leave. Young working people have expressed their concerns about this, even though it might simply mean that they must constantly be aware of their behaviours.

Difficulties with community belonging and the lack of higher education are not the only factors that may cause people to leave. People complained about the incessant decreasing of services such as health-care facilities and, most of all, public transport. Travelling to the nearest larger city, Kajaani, is possible only by bus, and the number of trips per day is limited. This not only affects citizens' wellbeing, but also the accessibility of the area to tourists, who might instead choose a different destination. Despite the fact that travelling around the region (and the country) represents an issue, the ease of moving around the city centre has been mentioned by many as a positive aspect of Kuhmo. Many praised the easy access to all basic services and stores, and some of the inhabitants even manage to live without a car or a driving license. They can rely not only on family and friends or colleagues, but also on an active social media platform that facilitates car sharing (personal communication, May 2025). The importance of accessible transportation is known to the municipality too, which is actively asking for better links with the major airports and train stations of the region to improve tourism above others.

The initial understanding of Kuhmo grasped from the interviews data is that of a lively community whose core lies in its unique culture and nature. Its inhabitants are facing the issues typical of shrinking regions, but we also notice a proud feeling due to the unique positive combination of high-quality music, culture, history, and natural beauty, resulting in strong place attachment and many residents who are determined to stay there as long as possible.

7 Discussion

Though Kuhmo community members varied in their perspectives, experiences, and opinions, common threads emerged from our surveys, interviews, and participant-observation that offer valuable guidance for the development of sustainability strategies grounded in Kuhmo's unique assets. Throughout this analysis, we identify key insights, connect these insights to theoretical foundations, and lay the groundwork for understanding how Kuhmo might rise to its significant challenges and make the most of the opportunities afforded to it by its rich existing resources.

7.1 Generational Differences & Future Prospects

Among the various age groups in Kuhmo, lived experience and desired changes display both similarities and divergences. On some topics, such as the importance of nature, survey and interview responses were consistent across different age groups. However, some topics were mentioned predominantly by older residents, including services, healthcare, and culture, and some most frequently mentioned by younger residents, including lack of job opportunity, education issues, silence/peace/quiet, family/roots, and a perception of closed-mindedness or political discontent. The emphasis on peace and quiet and family/roots from younger respondents was initially surprising, but considering the common dynamic in which young Finns are often forced to move to large cities to earn livelihoods and receive education, these respondents might more highly value these aspects of life in Kuhmo after experiencing their opposite in Helsinki, Oulu, or Tampere.

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 or older
Community Feeling (Negative)		2.9%	11.1%	34.8%	15.8%	35.3%
Closed-Mindedness/Politics	50.0%	35.3%	16.7%	34.8%	26.3%	17.6%
Gossip/Lack of Privacy	20.0%	8.8%	5.6%	13.0%	21.1%	23.5%
Community Feeling (Positive)		5.9%	38.9%	56.5%	36.8%	35.3%
Silence	50.0%	70.6%	72.2%	21.7%	26.3%	11.8%
Connectedness	50.0%	29.4%	33.3%	34.8%	15.8%	23.5%
Safety	30.0%	26.5%	33.3%	17.4%	15.8%	29.4%
Lack of Job Opportunity	80.0%	50.0%	50.0%	56.5%	68.4%	58.8%
Services	40.0%	58.8%	61.1%	56.5%	73.7%	76.5%
Transit	20.0%	38.2%	27.8%	47.8%	36.8%	11.8%
Education	40.0%	17.6%	22.2%	13.0%	31.6%	35.3%
Healthcare	10.0%	29.4%	33.3%	39.1%	52.6%	23.5%
Hobbies/Recreation	10.0%	29.4%	11.1%	26.1%	42.1%	47.1%
Family/Roots	70.0%	52.9%	55.6%	34.8%	57.9%	35.3%
Culture	30.0%	35.3%	38.9%	52.2%	31.6%	64.7%
Nature	90.0%	88.2%	100.0%	95.7%	89.5%	88.2%
# N = Documents	10 (8.3%)	34 (28.1%)	18 (14.9%)	23 (19.0%)	19 (15.7%)	17 (14.0%)

Figure 10: Crosstab table showing the percentage of interviews in each age category mentioning each code.

An ABCD approach focused on well-being emphasises capitalising on the attraction and retention factors that already exist—family/roots, nature, culture, and peace and quiet—rather than trying to create new ones (Kammer-Kerwick et al., 2022). It is not feasible to develop such robust educational opportunities in Kuhmo that a young person would never have to leave home. A sustainable, pragmatic approach would instead focus on cultivating opportunities for young people or people starting families to return home, where they have support networks and available housing, but currently lack employment opportunities with the possibilities for advancement.

Within this framework, the importance of building a sense of belonging in Kuhmo assumes even greater relevance. As Tomaney et al. Notes (2024), personal experiences and history allow for the establishment of commitment to the place, motivating actions such as the future desire to come back or the will to be actively involved in the community even though far away. This is exemplified by the personal experience of many of the interviewees who returned after years spent in other cities, or by the participation in the survey of those who don't live in Kuhmo anymore. This strong attachment and commitment to place is a key contributing factor that makes Kuhmo unique and provides a pathway to sustain its well-being in the future.

7.2 Community Feeling/Attitude & Welcoming Newcomers

In general, the community feeling is most positive among those who can trace their roots back to Kuhmo, with perceptions of strong connectivity and safety. Among those who have moved to the

area, and among some young people, the perception is more mixed, with concerns about the integration of newcomers. This is an area where work is ongoing, with a robust “Mover’s Guide”, as well as targeted events and programs, and some newcomers reporting an easy, smooth integration. However, social change is slow, and challenges with integration are noted to be more acute to those from diverse backgrounds, with some respondents identifying discriminatory attitudes toward people of foreign origin, LGBTQ+ people, and young people in general.

Among those who reported negative community feelings, some frequent complaints were: “resistance to change”, “narrow perspective”, “closed circles”, “granny mentality”, unfriendliness to outsiders, and a generally pessimistic attitude and lack of willingness to take risks and innovate.

In the words of respondents:

“People gossip. People long for everything new but complain about new things like the market stage renovation or new companies.”

(16-24 y.o., born in Kuhmo)

“Now I’m starting to think a little bit like “what’s the point?” The people of Kuhmo should be more courageous in getting involved in different things.”

(34-45 y.o., Moved to Kuhmo)

“The so-called close-knit community can be challenging for someone moving to Kuhmo from outside.”

(34-45 y.o., moved to Kuhmo)

“With a narrow perspective, the entire community will wither away.”

(65+ y.o., born in Kuhmo)

Some mentioned the possibility that formalising some of the informal “whisper networks” that characterise rural places, by ensuring there is broader information-sharing about social and community events, could help build a broader sense of belonging. As noted by Tomaney et al. (2024), the existence and sustaining of social infrastructures can be key for Kuhmo—market square gatherings, pubs, churches, coffee shops, the library, and outdoor recreation spaces—and

respondents noted that especially for adults, there could be more places to gather that don't centre around alcohol. In a shrinking context, the feeling of being "left behind" can originate from the closing of public places, shutting down of services and commercial activities, with consequences on the personal feeling of inhabitants (Tomaney et al., 2024). Within this framework, it appears clear how some of Kuhmo's inhabitants might feel left out of the community and not listened to, which has repercussions on their wellbeing and their overall perception of the community as demonstrated by the contrasting feedback received. Finally, one possible consequence of this dynamic is the desire to move somewhere else to start a new life and possibly feel more included.

These concerns about insularity and perceived negativity were not universal: some respondents had very positive perceptions of the community feeling in Kuhmo, mentioning a warm sense of connection to others, friendliness, honesty, and safety. For these people, many, but not all of whom, were born in the area, the problem was not so much Kuhmo itself as a lack of awareness about all that it has to offer:

"Kuhmo has a lot of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, countless successful people are from here, all sorts of interesting things have happened in Kuhmo, and Kuhmo is often seen as a sleepy Twin Peaks."

(34-45 y.o., moved to Kuhmo)

As in the interviews, survey respondents frequently expressed a desire for more ways for those born in Kuhmo who had left for educational or work opportunities to be able to return, and shared interviewees' concerns about the deterioration of healthcare opportunities and the vacant buildings. However, unlike interviewees, who were largely positive about the community's leadership and decision-making priorities, survey respondents frequently indicated some frustration with the lack of community involvement or ambition in city planning:

"[I'm disappointed by] the city's lack of desire to invest in promoting the vitality of Kuhmo. Kuhmo would have a lot of potential for many things if only the people of Kuhmo were listened to better and collaborative projects were organized where ordinary residents would be involved in coming up with ideas."

(65+ y.o., Moved to Kuhmo)

"The new council is [...] stuck making decisions that lack courage."

(25-34 y.o., Born in Kuhmo, Lives in Kuhmo)

Some of the criticisms called for more action from the city in areas where it already has active programs or projects in place. Some examples are encouraging entrepreneurship, enhancing well-being, and encouraging the development of high-value cultural and nature-based tourism, indicating that there is room for improvement in ensuring that residents are informed about or involved in these efforts (Kuhmon Kaupunki, 2024).

Respondents also offered solutions and suggestions ranging from the general to the specific, from calling for “bold investments” to suggesting demolishing certain buildings, rehabilitating air quality in the recreation centre, or introducing cultural events that appealed to a broader variety of ages. All suggestions were oriented toward addressing deficits in services, creating local job opportunities, and improving community feeling. Many expressed concerns about perceived negativity, pessimism, and lack of openness to change, which can be addressed by the storytelling, branding, and purposeful work around cultivating a positive regional identity that the regional council and municipal government are doing. However, it is key that local people can build trust, perceive change, and feel involved and valued in the process.

Respondents, particularly those who were critical of what they perceived as the pessimistic or closed-minded attitude of their fellow residents, remarked on all the assets that Kuhmo has, and the unique possibilities for well-being, connection, and meaningful work, life, culture, and connection to nature available in the community:

“Even though there are shortcomings and room for improvement, it is still a good place to live and be.”

(55-64 y.o., born in Kuhmo, lives in Kuhmo)

“Living in Kuhmo is a world of its own and many young people really want to stay here because it's good to be here. There are many who move away, but also many who stay. It's not about being rude or lacking in culture, but about loving Kuhmo and this peaceful life. Not everyone wants the hustle and bustle around them.”

(25-34 y.o., born in Kuhmo, visiting Kuhmo)

This remarkable consistency among resident perspectives indicates that from a well-being economy perspective, Kuhmo has thus far, despite the challenges posed by shrinking, remained a place where residents and visitors can enjoy the foundational aspects of a good life. One

interviewee remarked on the differences in perception between those who have never left Kuhmo, and those who have chosen to return, saying:

“They should go somewhere else and then they’d see how good this place is. [...] People complain, but they have everything: services, culture, nature... but if something is too near for you, you don’t see it.”

(45-54 y.o., lives part of the year in Kuhmo)

What emerges from both interviews and survey is the different attitudes of people who participated in our research. By acknowledging it, we also claim that despite the different perspective, their desire to make their voices heard – either through a survey or an interview – is a sign of connection and commitment to the place, which can potentially play in favour of Kuhmo future development. Acknowledging the diversity of its population and its needs also allows for the development of a specific plan focused on the specific assets that make it unique, as theorised by Kammer-Kerwick et al., 2022 and Mathie & Cunningham, 2003.

Moreover, testimonies of people in Kuhmo show how many of its inhabitants are not interested in achieving a big growth but rather manage to maintain the wellbeing status that they currently experience, in line with what theorised by the concept of well-being economics. Many of the interviewees stated that they would enjoy seeing some new developments or modest growth, but their main concern and aim is ensuring that Kuhmo remains as liveable as it is now. From a planning perspective, however, the ability of achieving such a wish is highly dependent on the availability of economic resources, which often can translate into the development of strategies solely focused on economic growth. Thus far, unlike other municipalities, Kuhmo has not pinned its future hopes on large development projects like biorefineries, pellet plants, or windmills, but has adopted a balanced strategy of encouraging local value-added integrated wood economy, strengthening local branding to attract tourism and investment, and nourishing existing local cultural and natural resources. Crucial for the municipality is therefore to continue to operate in balance between the three axes of sustainability – social, environmental, and economic – so to ensure the presence of services and the necessary funds to maintain them, without compromising Kuhmo’s unique character and distinctiveness. Particular attention must be given to environmental sustainability, as nature represents one of the key assets of the city, unifying the perspectives and ideas of all participants.

7.3 Multi-Locality, Tourism, and Seasonal Visitation

The concept of multi-locality, which can be understood as people's engagement with multiple places as homes, is a relevant one for Kuhmo's population. For many residents, it was evident that they had strong ties to both Kuhmo and other regions, often through summer homes, family connections, work, or education. Multilocality, internal migration dynamics, and a high degree of rural mobility, are all important contributors to the population composition and social fabric of Kuhmo. Whether through Kuhmo locals spending time elsewhere or through residents of cities living part of the year in Kuhmo, multilocality has the capacity to exist synergistically with smart shrinking, with seasonal living contributing to the city's vitality, and time away from Kuhmo for education or job training contributing to the human and knowledge capital of the city. However, this potential can only be realized if those who leave Kuhmo temporarily are able to return, which will require the cultivation of employment opportunities outside of traditional primary sectors.

Additionally, for seasonal residents or recurring visitors, their contribution to local vitality will be greatest if they feel a meaningful connection to the place and its community outside of recreation and amenities. Leveraging the growing availability of remote work could support both of these aims—both by providing Kuhmo locals with non-place-bound employment opportunities aligned with their skills and interests, and by allowing seasonal residents to work from Kuhmo, potentially spending more time in the city than they otherwise might, as one of our interviewees had begun to do. Understanding these multi-local dynamics is essential for developing tourism and employment strategies that cater to diverse groups and foster a wide variety of connections with Kuhmo.

Even though this category of residents may play a relevant role in the city development, it is important to stress the necessity of creating places for seasonal residents who do not already have roots in Kuhmo to build some. Tracing back to the theoretical framework, creating social infrastructures and places for gathering for newly comers assumes even more relevance in relation to the possible environmental outcomes. Developing strong international tourism businesses and rely on remote workers only might have negative consequences for the inhabitants' quality of life and, in the specific case of Kuhmo, also on the surrounding nature, as already happened in other parts of Europe. Both new facilities for tourists and remote workers need to integrate ecological, economic, and socio-cultural factors, considering not only the short-term benefits but also the long-term outcomes, as theorised by Kauppila, Saarinen & Leinonen (2009). If developed with the due diligence, tourism and remote workers can successfully contribute to the well-being of locals, for example by sustaining local businesses and contributing to make spaces lively – which is something that many inhabitants advocate for.

When envisioning the expansion of Kuhmo, residents advocate for balancing a steady, modestly growing wood industry that generates local wealth with the area's highly valued natural beauty and quiet by ensuring that each aspect of life has its own space, with Woodpolis housing the noisy machinery away from protected landscapes. Still, tensions can emerge at the boundaries, as exemplified by the experience of visiting hikers at Pajakkakoski, and if expansions do occur in the future, this could become a greater point of contention and conflict.

Although additional innovative value-added timber-related enterprises could provide much-needed employment opportunities in Kuhmo, residents insist that expansion must be conducted in a responsible way, whether it concerns touristic or industrial facilities. Wood represents a great resource for Kuhmo, but future expansion of the current industry might have negative consequences for the surrounding biodiversity, as well as for inhabitants and visiting tourists. Even though it seems not to bother residents yet, tourists complained to us about the disturbance created by the industry, which is something we also noticed as newcomers to the area. Moreover, due to climate change, wood production might face new challenges in the coming years, with consequent need for adaptation of the current industries to be able to thrive. Within this perspective, ensuring that industrial actors in Kuhmo maintain their commitment to an integrated wood economy approach will allow for future development trajectories which take into consideration the environmental concerns as long as the economic and social ones, especially in a place that is so dependent on nature and wood production.

7.4 Culture in Kuhmo: Successes and Room for Expansion

Most of the young people we interviewed were employed and living in Kuhmo because of the cultural activities in the city—the music school, arts centre, Chamber Music Festival, or cultural tourism offered them meaningful long-term employment opportunities where they could seize opportunities that would not be available in larger places. Students in Kuhmo have unique opportunities to get top-quality music instruction and paid performance experience in their home city, and many have gone on to vibrant careers in the arts. However, it was mostly older respondents that highlighted culture as a valued aspect of living in Kuhmo, and several interviewees noted that, particularly for the chamber music festival, attendees were most commonly from older generations. Though some cultural events have been scheduled in an effort to distribute visitation and liveliness across the year, there is still a strong peak during a few weeks of summer. This is a valuable short-term infusion into the city's economy but has its limitations when it comes to facilitating the long-term cultivation of livelihoods and community-building.

As already mentioned in other sections of this report, culture represents a unique asset of Kuhmo, something that its inhabitants and public authorities are proud of. Building on the current existing network allows for the strengthening of the community that revolves around it. It also constitutes a branding tool that can be used to enhance its visibility on a global scale. Differentiating from the surrounding realities can not only attract more people to the city but also allow for the construction of a sense of belonging among its residents, making them proud of their city.

When talking about culture, we refer not only to the Chamber Music Festival and the well-established school of music and dance, but also to the other unique features of Kuhmo, like its status as a UNESCO literature city of Finland, the cultural and military history of the Kalevala area, and international recognitions for innovative wood buildings, such as the architecture award recently received for the Kuhmo Kide open theatre (Aalto, 2025). Although the existing network has been praised by many, there were also some concerns regarding the accessibility of this community. We advise that future developments allow more room for integration of other kinds of arts, perhaps starting by listening to what the inhabitants who feel excluded wish for. This would not only allow for the strengthening of the existing community but may also act as an attractor of other external newcomers who might even have had nothing to do with Kuhmo before.

8 Recommendations & Conclusions

Despite the many possibilities and uniquely valuable offerings, the challenges Kuhmo faces are not to be underestimated. Though net migration is positive, the aging nature of the community places stress on public resources and, in a context where elderly community members are the key knowledge-holders and leaders of associations and cultural activities, risks acute losses to Kuhmo's shared identity. The need for innovation is most acute when it comes to work opportunities, since although Kuhmo's forestry and service jobs are economically pivotal, they lack unique attractiveness and entrench economic vulnerabilities associated with reliance on a few key industries and employers. Outmigration of young people seeking educational opportunities, especially young women, threatens to drive their permanent relocation, unless Kuhmo succeeds in developing robust opportunities for meaningful employment and professional growth locally, or leaning strategically on multilocality. The decline of services, especially healthcare and transportation, compromises residents' quality of life and the attractiveness of the area for potential in-migrants, especially given the difficulty of accessing more major hubs due to long distances and sparse transit connections. This inaccessibility, especially combined with the closure and tensions surrounding the Russian border, poses a barrier to many ambitions surrounding development, energy, and economic vitality, and decreases Kuhmo's competitiveness among other tourist destinations, such as those in Lapland, where connections are more robust and a strong brand identity is already dominant. The combination of these challenges means that attracting external investment and consistent in-migration is a daunting task. Nonetheless, Kuhmo's active participation in forward-thinking strategic planning is laying the groundwork for pragmatic development centring the continuing vitality of a place with unique and valuable cultural and natural assets and potential for widespread appeal within Finland and beyond.

Based on the insights from our gathered data, as well as drawing on sustainability strategies employed in other shrinking localities in Finland and other peer nations, we offer the following recommendations that Kuhmo either as a municipality, through its associations, or through small to medium innovative enterprises, might consider implementing. Kuhmo might consider:

- Evaluating and updating their existing communication channels to try to reach more residents and others interested in Kuhmo. Despite the many innovative initiatives the municipality is implementing, many residents remarked on a perceived lack of activity in this direction, pointing to a gap between leadership and public awareness. Measures

to address this could include a regular newsletter that includes progress updates, upcoming events in Kuhmo, and ways to get involved and participate.

- Prioritising an increase in public participation in municipal decision-making. Resident input can strengthen strategic planning processes, as well as build buy-in, involvement, and positive community feeling. To accomplish this without expending too many resources, the municipality could focus on consulting community members through biannual public forums, engaging existing associations, and maintaining a presence at community events (for example, staffing a booth and asking for brief community input on a particular question or project).
- Implementing a low-barrier mini-grant program, where residents can fund innovative ideas to fill gaps in services and to build a sense of community. Grants can start from €500 and go higher depending on budget. The municipality could fund this in partnership with local industrial leaders, NGOs, or international funding schemes like LEADER.
 - This could be a vehicle for enlarging the current cultural offerings by including proposals from other residents not actively involved in music or dance or prioritizing proposals from young people to attract new audiences to Kuhmo.
 - These mini-grants could also provide an opportunity for the creation of recreational spaces for adults that are not centred around alcohol or bars. This would help strengthen community connections and offer inclusive social environments. For example, the municipality could make use of vacant shops or underused buildings for community-based activities and shared spaces.
- Consider pursuing partnerships that would allow for the revitalization of some centrally located disused buildings as “third spaces” that facilitate collaboration during remote work and provide dedicated spaces for artists and craftspeople, and small entrepreneurs.
- Collaborating between organisations to ensure that cultural events are planned to be spaced out as much as possible in the calendar, to bolster the year-round economic and social vitality of Kuhmo and to give seasonal residents and tourists additional reasons to visit Kuhmo in the autumn and spring.
- Ensuring that the planned development of the Kalevala village brings maximal local benefits by focusing on sustainable tourism, using local building materials, sharing local food customs, promoting human- and electric-powered transportation.

- Developing a touring route to attract hikers, cyclists, and paddlers to the area for extended stays and building knowledge of Kuhmo as a high-quality recreation destination. This “touring route” can be cultivated and publicized with minimal capital investment through collaborating with land managers and university students interested in mapping projects and destination development.
- Creating opportunities for young people and newcomers to Kuhmo to connect with existing residents, especially those over 65 years old, so that knowledge and leadership can be passed on to maintain the vibrancy of associations and cultural practices.
- Forming a welcome committee for newcomers from volunteers with different backgrounds that actively engages people moving to Kuhmo, supplementing the Movers' Guide and individual events for new residents with continual support and a peer network that can help them integrate with the community.
- Maximising possible benefits of multilocality by publicizing the availability of kuhmo as a place from which people can work remotely, including as seasonal residents who have a growing presence in Kuhmo during the off-peak season.

These recommendations are intended as a menu of possible options, and a starting point for discussion, and stem directly from the resident input collected during our time in Kuhmo. Although funding constraints and capacity issues may make some more feasible than others, these are intended to provide the greatest possible co-benefits while incurring minimal costs, laying the groundwork for innovation around sustainability in Kuhmo that is driven by distinctive local priorities. Our research was guided by the questions:

1. Among many peer municipalities experiencing depopulation, what are the assets, resources, and community values that make Kuhmo unique?
2. How can development be integrated synergistically with natural and cultural assets to create long-term sustainability for Kuhmo?

In our view, Kuhmo is made unique by its vibrant cultural heritage and high-quality musical, artistic, and historical offerings, as well as its natural beauty and tranquillity, and, above all, the attachment, commitment, and pride it engenders in those who consider it home. Any truly sustainable strategies for Kuhmo's future must prioritize the aspects of the community its residents most value, and rather than pursuing a uniform strategy driven by growth, cultivate these rich assets with a long-term view. Through nurturing sustainable cultural and natural tourism attractions

distributed throughout the year, as well as opportunities for meaningful multilocality, and focusing on environmentally responsible, well-integrated, value-added innovations for wood products, Kuhmo can create local opportunities for meaningful, high-quality jobs. This may allow those who had to move away to return to Kuhmo, or for new residents to discover it for the first time, contributing their knowledge, capacity and energy, and, if they are well-integrated, strengthening the social fabric of the community. The possibilities for meaningful lives and robust well-being which have kept so many devoted to Kuhmo can also draw in new neighbours, adding vibrance and vitality and creating possibilities for more sustainable futures, built, not on growth and extraction, but on “what the voice of the forest says” -- on Kuhmo's rich, abundant beauty, incomparable culture, and deep forest roots.

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10 Appendix 1: Survey Text

Elämä Kuhmossa / Life in Kuhmo

Tämän kyselyn täyttäminen vie korkeintaan viisi minuuttia, ja voit vastata suomeksi tai englanniksi. Osallistumisesi auttaa tutkimusprojektia, joka käsittelee älykästä sopeutumista ja sitä miten pienet paikkakunnat voivat säilyä elinvoimasina tulevaisuudessakin. Tutkimus on toteutettu yhteistyössä Itä-Suomen yliopiston kanssa. Osallistu kyselyyn vain, jos olet yli 16-vuotias. Kaikki vastaukset käsitellään anonyymisti, ja tiedot tallennetaan EU:n tietosuoja-asetuksen (GDPR) mukaisesti. Jos sinulla on kysyttävää, voit ottaa meihin yhteyttä: saananiskanen1@gmail.com

This survey should take no more than five minutes, and you can answer in either Finnish or English. Your participation will help our team of researchers, in partnership with the University of Eastern Finland, better understand your community, as part of our project studying smart shrinking and how to insure that small communities remain livable into the future. Only take this survey if you are over the age of 16. All answers are anonymous and data is stored in compliance with GDPR. Please contact us with any questions at saananiskanen1@gmail.com





















- 1) Suostun tietojeni keräämiseen ja käsittelyyn edellä mainitussa tutkimustarkoituksessa / I consent to the collection and processing of my data for the aforementioned research purposes. Vastaus vaaditaan.
 - A) Kyllä / Yes
- 2) Mihin ikäryhmään kuulut? / Which age group do you belong to?
 - A) 16-24
 - B) 25-34
 - C) 35-44
 - D) 45-54
 - E) 55-64
 - F) 65 tai vanhempi / or older
- 3) Valitse vaihtoehto, joka kuvaa sinua parhaiten: / Pick which best describes you:
 - A) Olen syntynyt Kuhmossa ja asun tällä hetkellä Kuhmossa / I was born in Kuhmo and currently live in Kuhmo
 - B) En ole syntynyt Kuhmossa, mutta asun tällä hetkellä Kuhmossa / was not born in Kuhmo and I currently live in Kuhmo
 - C) Asun osan vuodesta Kuhmossa / I live for part of the year in Kuhmo
 - D) Olen käymässä Kuhmossa / I am visiting Kuhmo

E) Olen aiemmin asunut Kuhmossa, mutta en enää / I used to live in Kuhmo but not now

F) En ole koskaan asunut Kuhmossa / I have never lived in Kuhmo

- 4) Mitkä kolme sanaa tulevat mieleesi, kun ajattelet Kuhmoa? Voivat olla positiivisia tai negatiivisia / Which three words do you think of when you think of Kuhmo? These can be positive or negative.
- 5) Kuinka tyytyväinen olet Kuhmossa asumiseen? 1 tarkoittaa erittäin tyytymätön ja 5 erittäin tyytyväinen / How satisfied are you with living in Kuhmo? 1 being the least satisfied, 5 being the most satisfied
- 6) Mistä pidät Kuhmossa asumisessa? / What do you like about living in Kuhmo?
- 7) Mikä on mielestäsi suurin haaste Kuhmossa asumisessa? / What is the biggest issue about living in Kuhmo for you?
- 8) Mikä voisi saada henkilön muuttamaan pois Kuhmosta tai estää heitä muuttamasta tänne? / What might make someone leave Kuhmo, or prevent them from living here?
- 9) Millaisia muutoksia toivoisit tapahtuvan Kuhmon yhteisössä? / What, if any, changes would you like to see in the community in Kuhmo?
- 10) Kaipaanko jotain Kuhmosta ollessasi poissa sieltä? / When you are away from Kuhmo, is there anything that you miss about it?
- 11) Jos olet turisti tai vierailija, mikä sai sinut valitsemaan Kuhmon matkakohteeksi? / If you are a tourist or visitor, what made you choose Kuhmo as a destination?
- 12) Onko jotain muuta, mitä meidän pitäisi tietää Kuhmosta? / Is there anything else we should know about Kuhmo?
- 13) Oletko halukas keskustelemaan kanssamme lyhyesti haastattelun merkeissä? Jos olet, jätä yhteystietosi alle (puhelinnumero tai sähköpostiosoite) / Are you willing to talk with us for a brief interview? If so, please let us know how to contact you (phone number or email).

11 Appendix 2: Interview Codebook

 Codes	2226
▼  Community Feeling (Negative)	24
 Closed-Mindedness/Politics	46
 Gossip/Lack of Privacy	20
▼  Community Feeling (Positive)	54
 Silence	91
 Connectedness	42
 Safety	38
 Lack of Job Opportunity	90
▼  Services	109
 Transit	44
 Education	35
 Healthcare	57
 Hobbies/Recreation	50
 Family/Roots	94
 Culture	71
 Nature	221
 Mixed perceptions	47
 Negative perception	62
 Positive perception	99