

An aerial photograph of a vast, dense forest. The trees are mostly green, with some yellowing, suggesting autumn. In the background, a calm lake is visible, surrounded by more forest. The sky is blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

# Listening to the Forest

Crafting Unique Sustainable Strategies for Social,  
Environmental and Economic Well-Being in Kuhmo

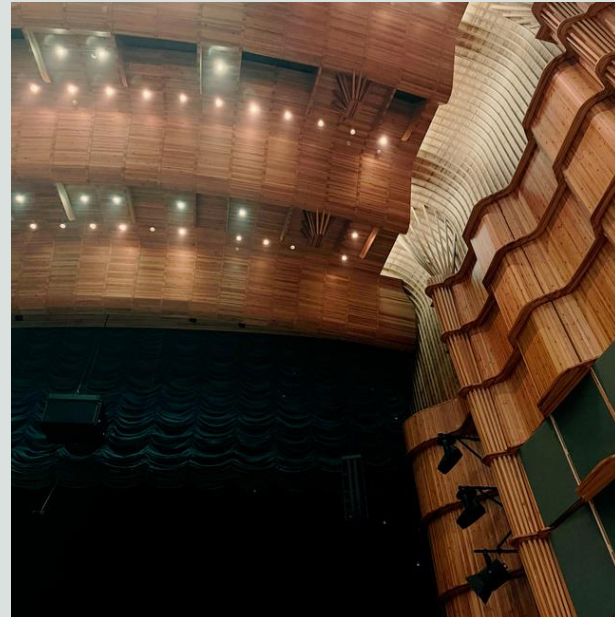
PRESENTED BY

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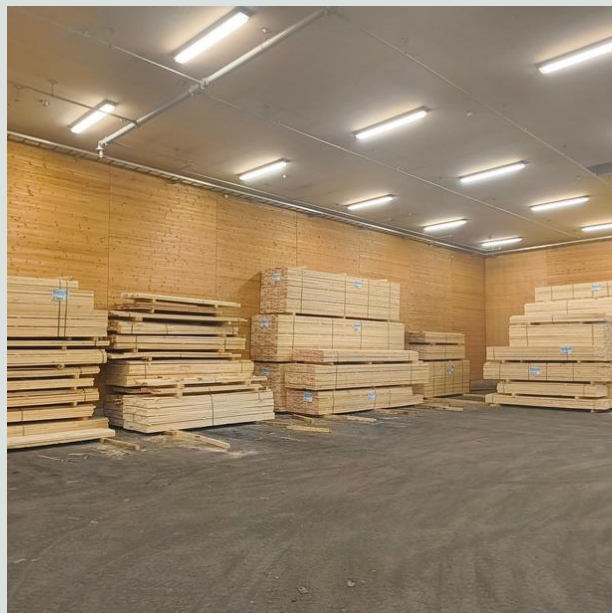




Nature



Culture



Wood



Kalevala

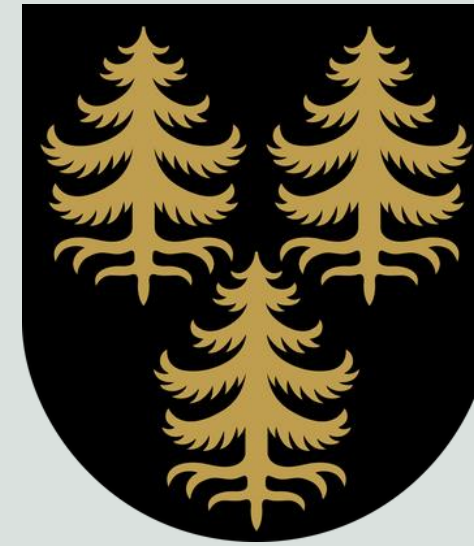


case study:  
**Kuhmo**



# Kuhmo

Kainuu Region



**population:** around 7,500

**area:** 5,450 km<sup>2</sup> - mostly forests

**economy:**

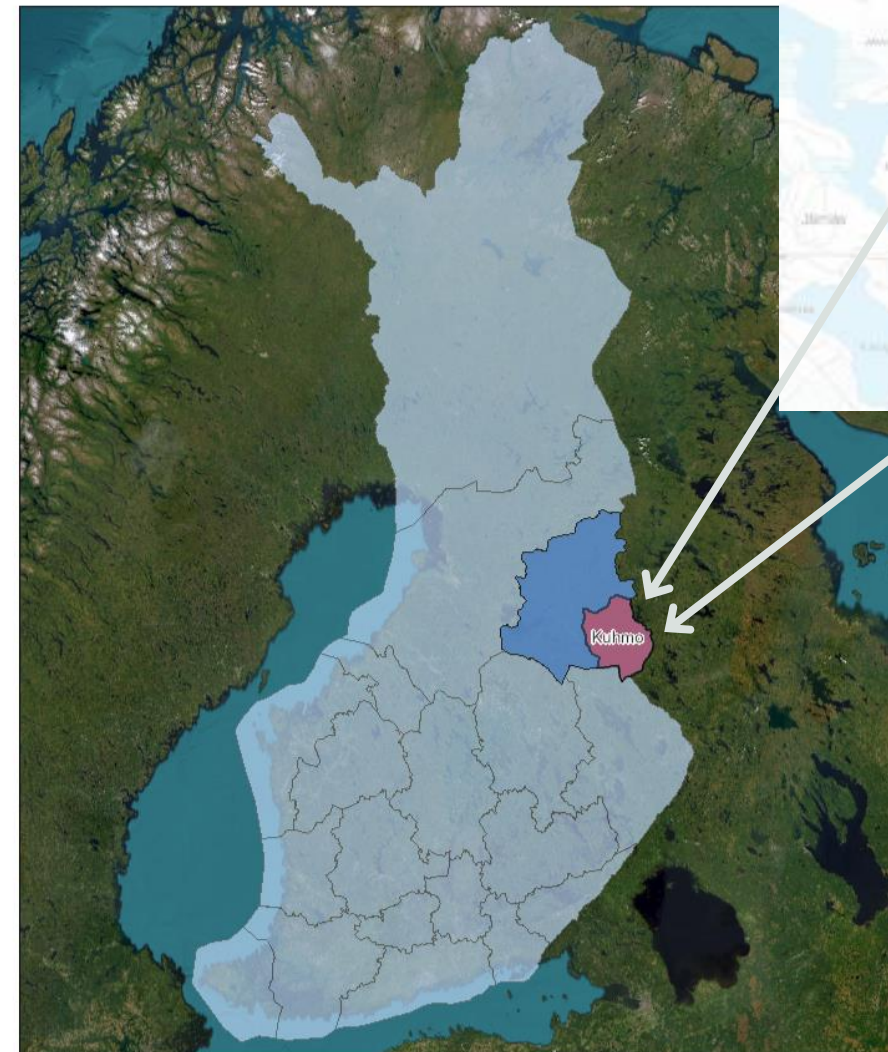
- wood-based industry
- tourism & culture

**education:**

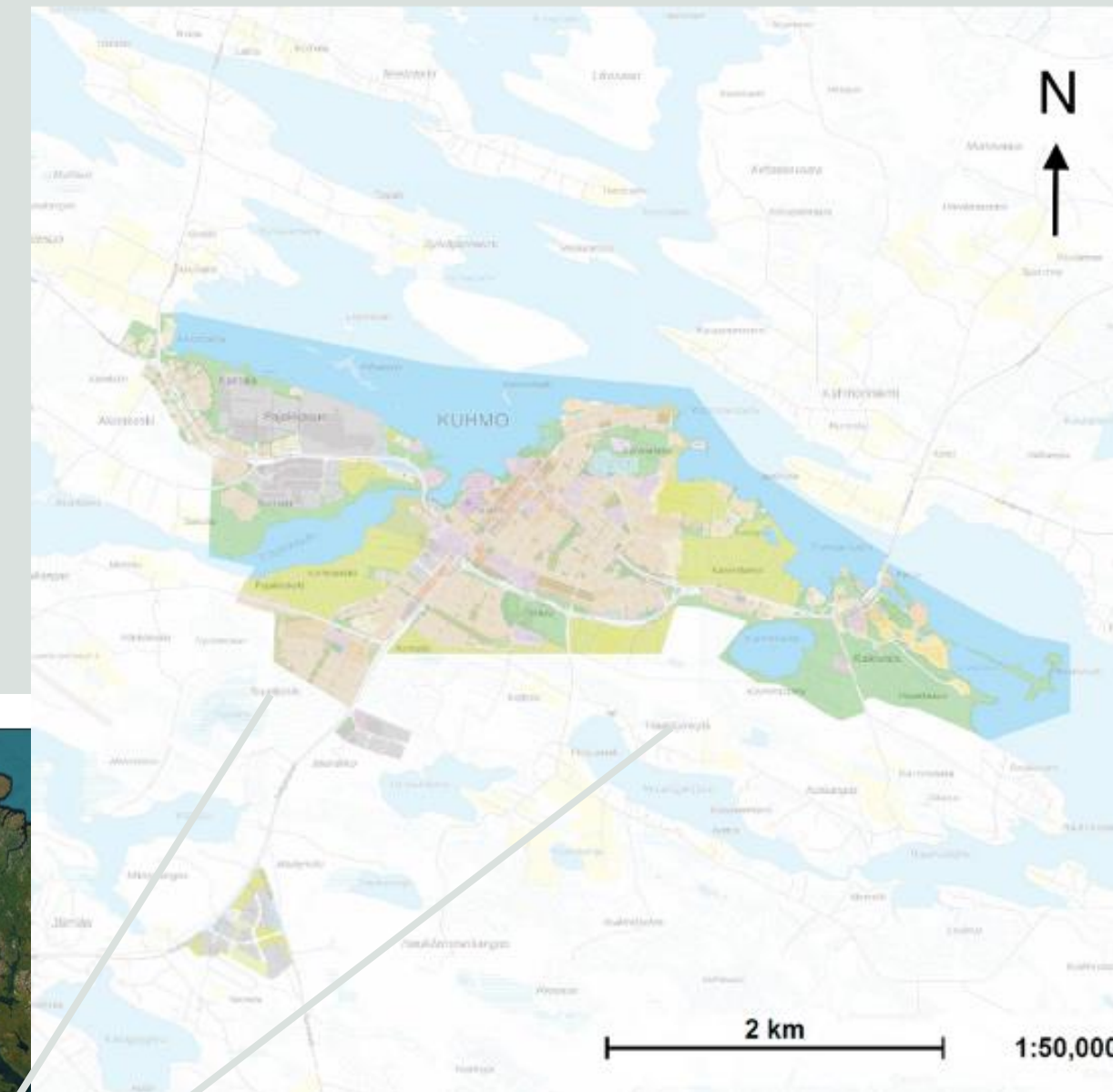
- 3 grade schools
- 1 high school
- 1 small vocational school

no railway connection

Kuhmo Municipality



0 45 90 180 mi  
1:13,000,000







# Research Outline

## Research 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?

## Implemented Methods

- online survey
- interviews (mix of expert, informal and spontaneous)
- participant observation







Data collection

# Survey

## Collection

- **Online survey** launched on May 14th and ran until May 21st
- Shared in four city Facebook groups, one ended up deleting it – after interviewing municipality, they allowed us to share our survey on the **municipal Facebook and Instagram**
- Within the survey timespan, **121 valid responses** were collected, no responses were deemed invalid
- For data analysis, **Jamovi** was used to analyze demographic and numerical data, **MaxQDA** for qualitative data

## Questions

- Consisted mostly of **open-ended questions** regarding
- **2 general questions**, asking responders about their age and connection to Kuhmo
- **9 questions focusing on peoples' perceptions** on life in Kuhmo and issues the city is facing
- In the final questions, we offered the survey participants to leave their contact information in case they would be willing to be interviewed



## Conducting interviews

- We conducted **19 total interviews** in Kuhmo
- **3 pre-planned formal interviews** (at Woodpolis and the municipality) included presentations from the interviewees and were the most in-depth
- **9 semi-structured**, utilizing connections made while in town or through the survey, **2 interviews** conducted **online** via MS Teams
- **7 spontaneous interviews** with people on the main square, in shops and cafés
- During the interviews, we never did a voice recording, instead we relied on notes made during or immediately after the interview
- All pre-planned and semi-structured interviews were made in **English** (or simultaneously interpreted from Finnish), some spontaneous interviews were done in **Finnish**
- Having only one Finnish speaker on the team was a limiting factor for conducting more interviews



# Interviews



# Participant observations and more



## Our time in Kuhmo

- After just a few days, people started to recognize us on the street
- Got invited to a Eurovision party
- Experienced first-hand some small town limitations mentioned in interviews
- Attended a number of cultural events, including in Kuhmo Arts Center



“Describe  
Kuhmo  
with three  
words”





# Unique Nature

## Reason for Visiting

both for residents and tourists

- open-air activities and hobbies
- **silence** as a key feature
- something that people miss when away

## Economic Relevance

unique resource

- forestry industry
- tourism





# Unique Culture



## Heritage and Pride

- recognition of several awards for literature and architecture
- distinctive factor for many inhabitants
- wooden architecture

## Community Buildings

- 280+ associations
- 400 music students
- Chamber Music Festival and other events
- cinema
- library

## Attractiveness

- attracting young people working in the cultural field
- unique job and career development opportunities
- provide summer jobs for music students
- attract tourists during summer



# Challenges



## Lack of Jobs and Higher Education

- job opportunities mainly in the forestry & government services sector
- lack of higher education opportunities and skilled workforce
- students move and usually do not come back

## Lack of Transport Infrastructures

- lack of a railway
- few busses to get to other cities
- need a car if you want to leave the city
- no direct connection to the airport

## Small Environment

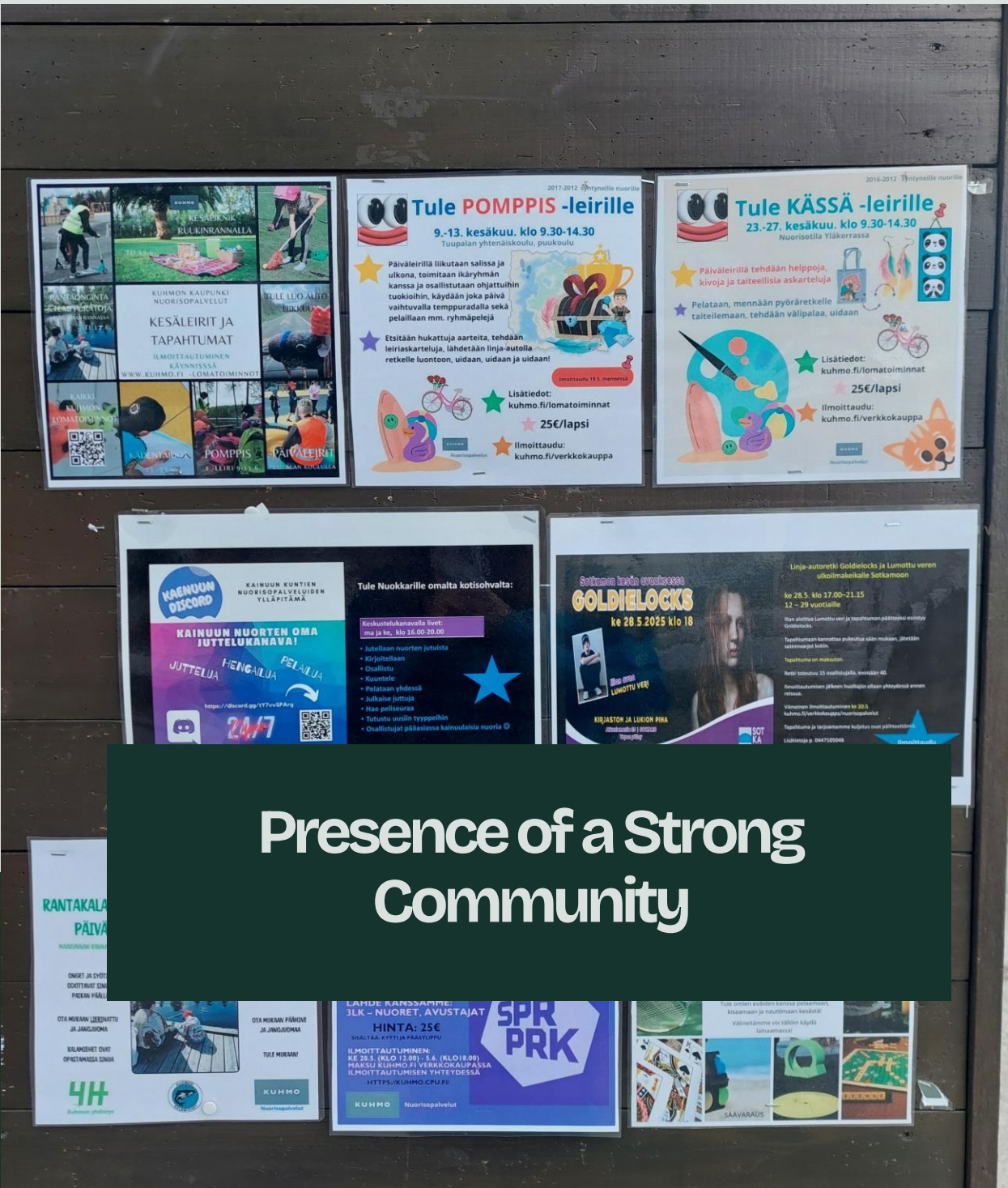
- everyone knows each other
- fear of being judged
- control your own behaviour
- perception of closed-mindedness
- might feel excluded if not well-integrated in the community

## Tourism Development

ambitious development plan of tourist facilities must take into consideration implications for the environment and for the community







# Opportunities





- enhance communication channels to reach more people
- prioritise **public participation** in municipal decision-making to include citizens' feedback
- implementing a low-barrier mini-grant program to fund residents' innovative ideas
- partnerships for the revitalisation of disused buildings as remote work locations or places for artists
- **ensure cultural events** throughout the year
- **develop the Kalevala village** responsibly for both the residents and the environment
- **develop touring routes** for hikers, cyclists, and paddlers
- **create opportunities** for newcomers to connect with **existing residents**
- foster multilocality





**Carvalacciduo - Laulu**

**Kuhmello**



Thank You

Kiitos 

Děkujeme 

Paldies 

Tack 

Takk fyrir 