UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

North Karelia adapting to change

Petri Kahila, Research Director
Karelian Institute
petri.kahila@uef.fi
(maps by Simo Rautiainen)

VASAB COMMITTEE meeting

Koli, North Karelia

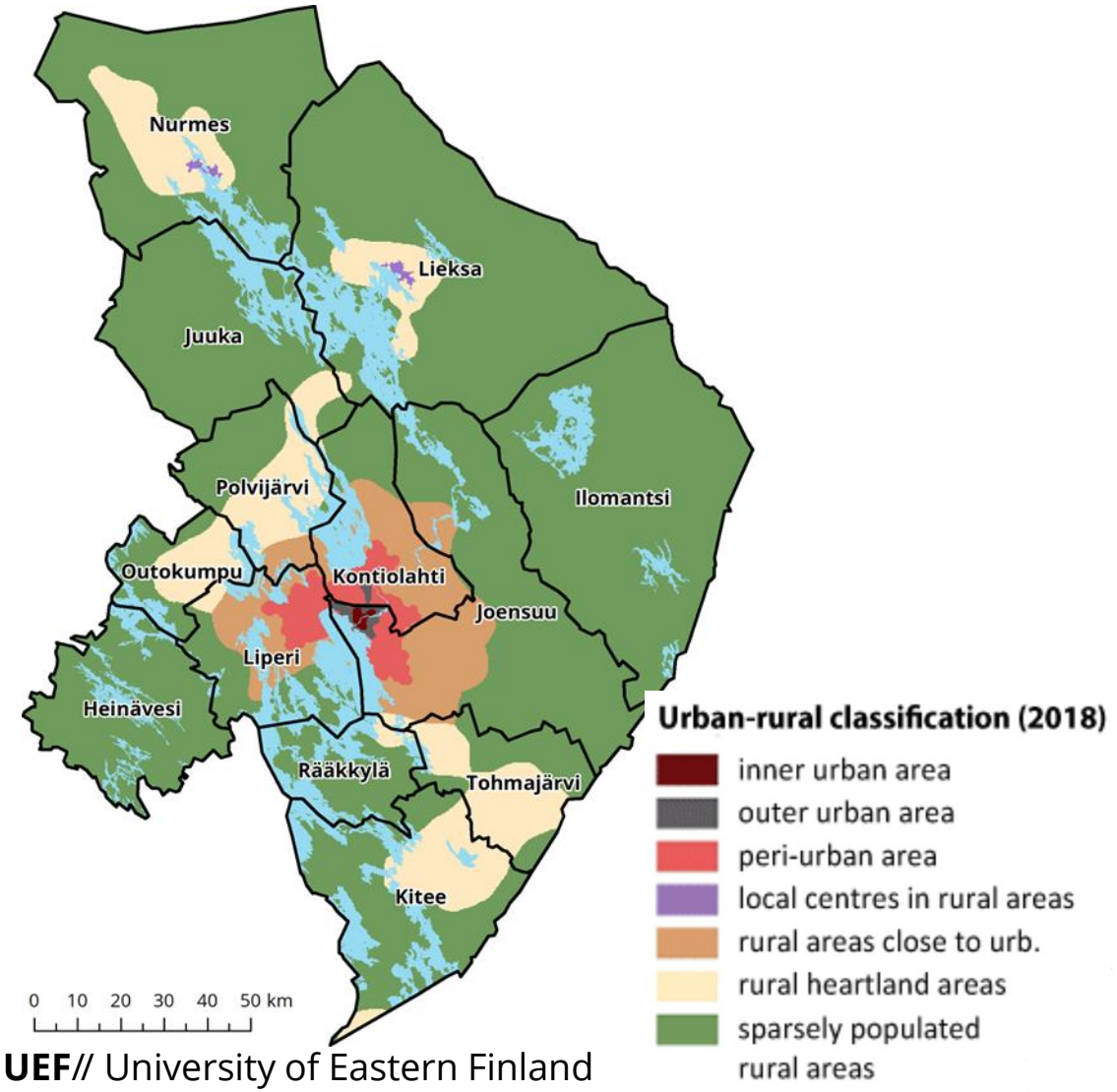
13 March 2024

Aspects based on three projects

- ESPON ESCAPE 2019-2020
  - Exploring the concepts of simple (demographic) and complex (economic and social) shrinkage
- Horizon 2020 RELOCAL 2016-2020
  - Exploring the various factors which either promote or inhibit spatial justice
- Horizon Europe RUSTIK 2022-2026
  - Exploring the sustainability transitions to design better strategies and policies for rural areas

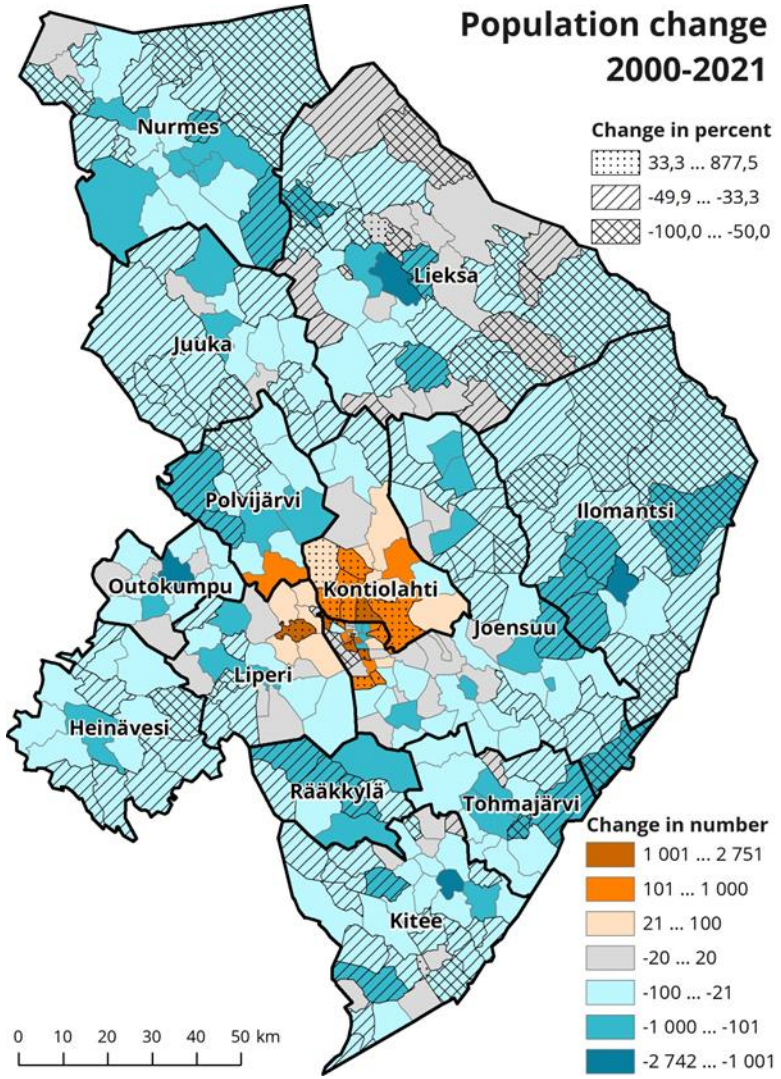
RELOCAL has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement. N° 727097
Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development
ESPON ESCAPE
Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund
RUSTIK
Funded by the European Union

North Karelia Urban – rural typology



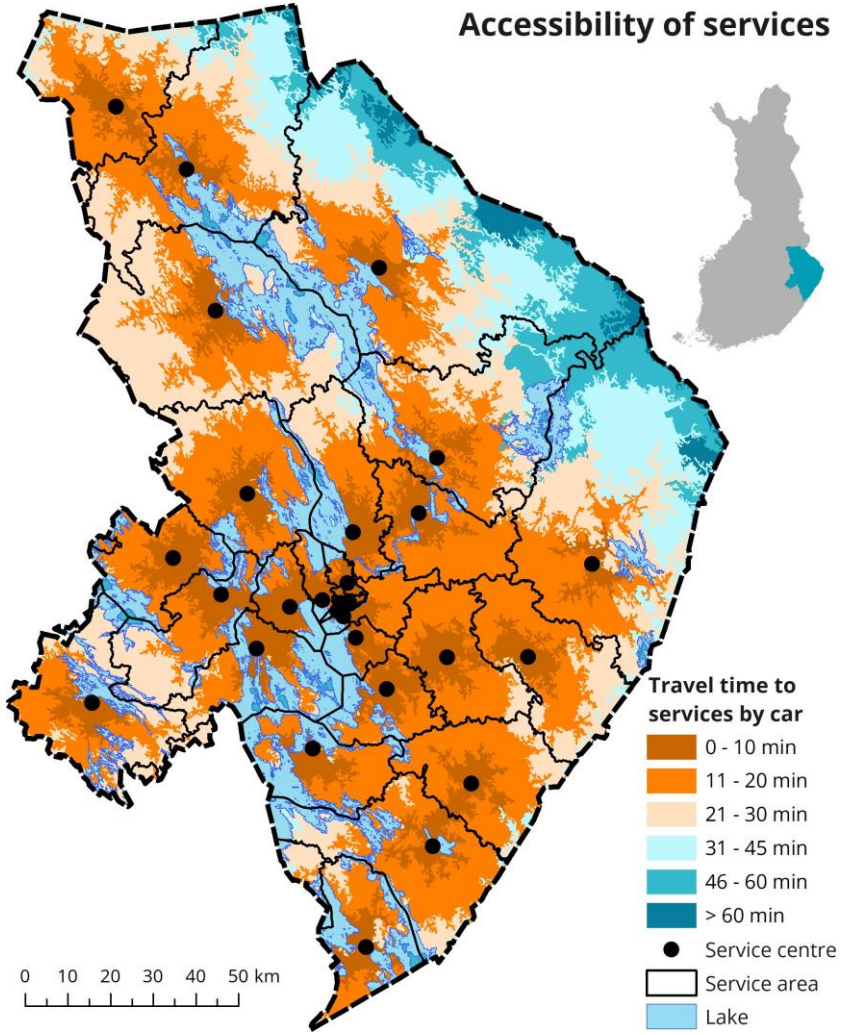
- In the urban-rural classification Joensuu is the only city in North Karelia. The urban area is surrounded by a fringe area and the nearby rural areas of the city, which are closely connected to the central area
  - 98,400 inhabitants, 61% of the population in 2021). 63,000 people, 39%, lived in rural areasl city.
- In the core rural areas, the population density is higher, and the economic structure is more diversified than in sparsely populated rural areas
- Rural local centers serve as centers for employment and services.
- The urbanisation rate of the region is 73%

North Karelia population change



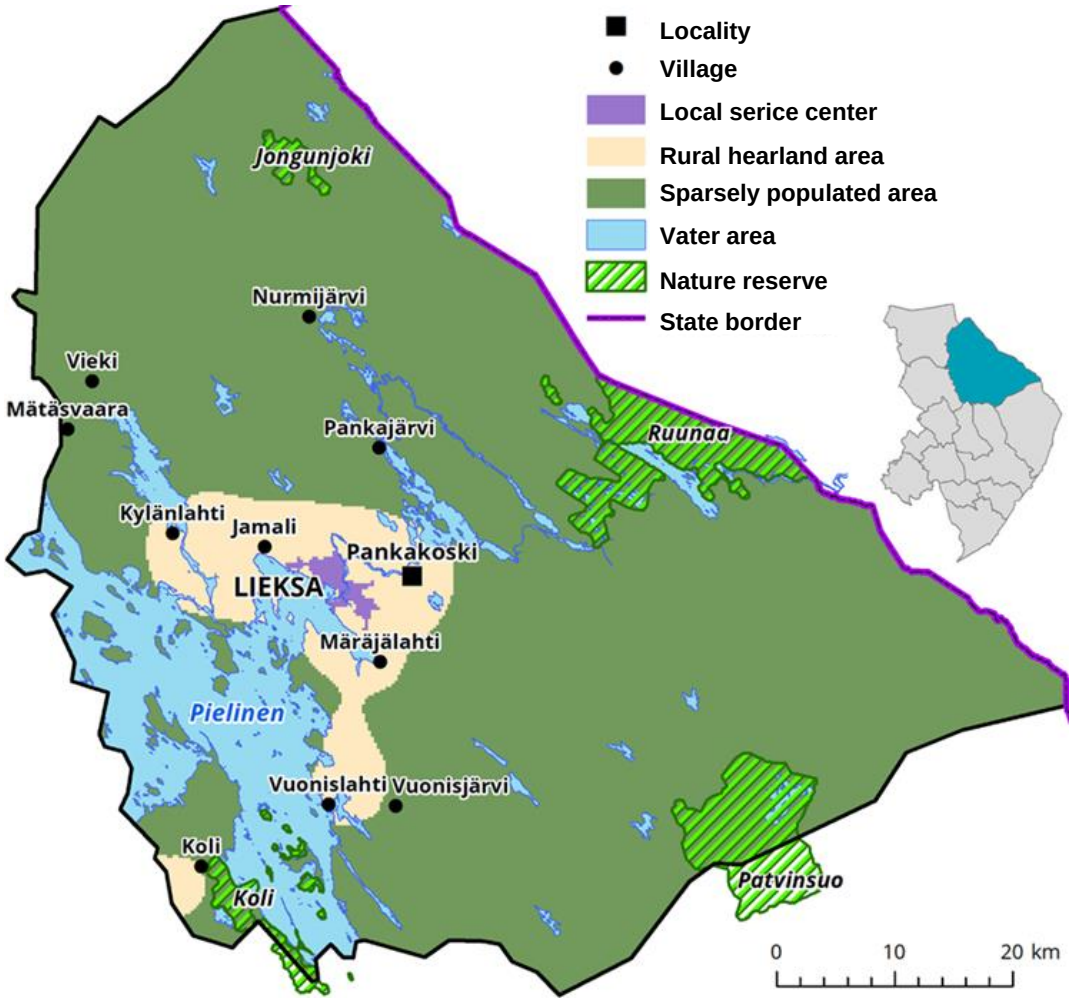
- The population increased in the vicinity of Joensuu, while elsewhere the population decreased.
- The population decreased numerically the most in rural urban areas.
- Relative to the population, the greatest decrease occurred in the peripheral areas of municipalities.

Access to services



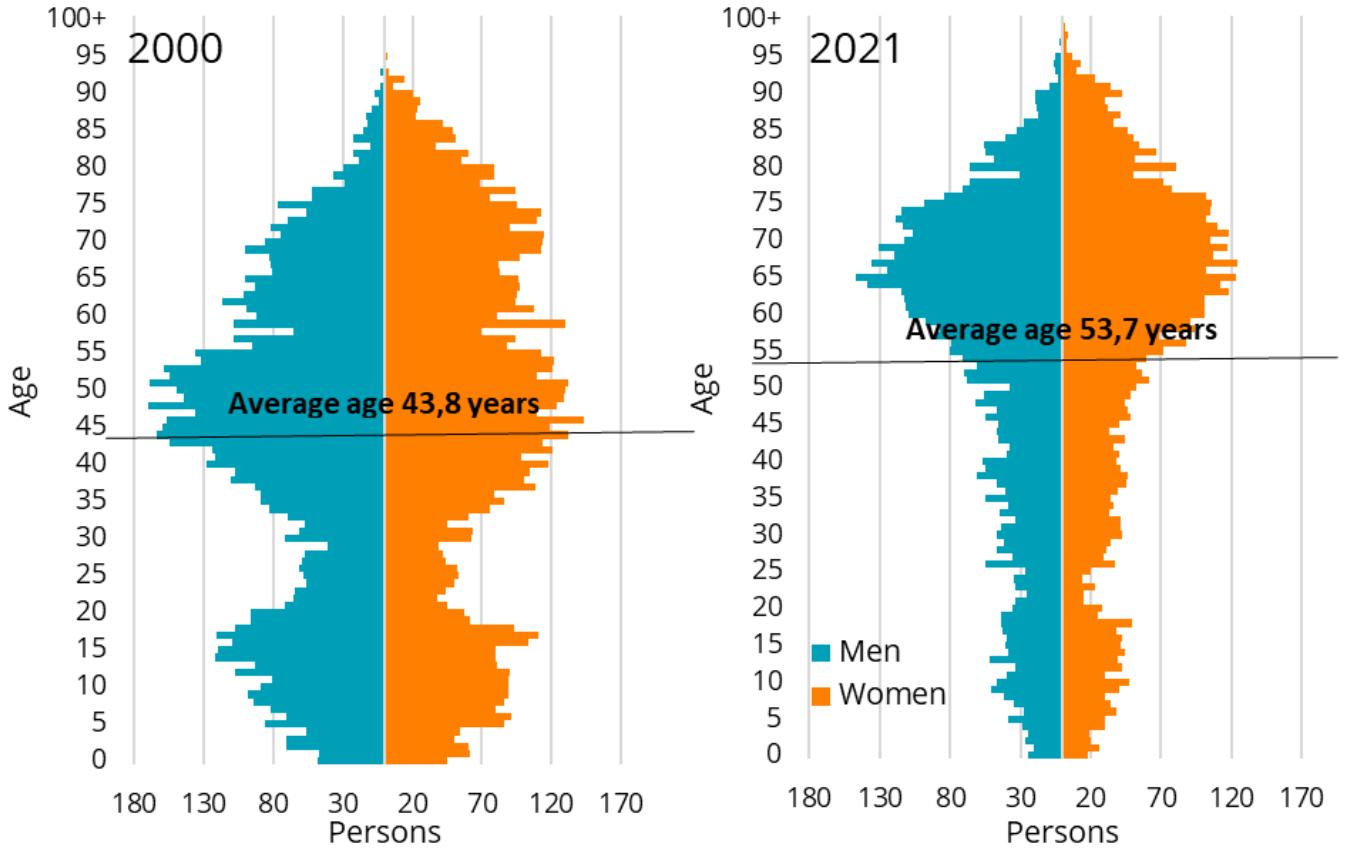
- Accessibility to services is assessed based on travel time by car from residents' homes to the nearest service center
- The region comprises 28 service centers, with five being sub-centers of the Joensuu central urban area, and a majority of the population residing close to these centers
- In 2021, 74% of North Karelians lived within a maximum of five minutes, and 95% within 15 minutes of the services, with a mean travel distance of 4.8 minutes and a median of 3.1 minutes.
- The accessibility metric considers both urban and rural areas, with most residents having relatively short travel times to reach services.
- Only a small fraction (0.2%) of individuals residing on the region's borders had their nearest service center located outside of North Karelia.

Lieksa functional area



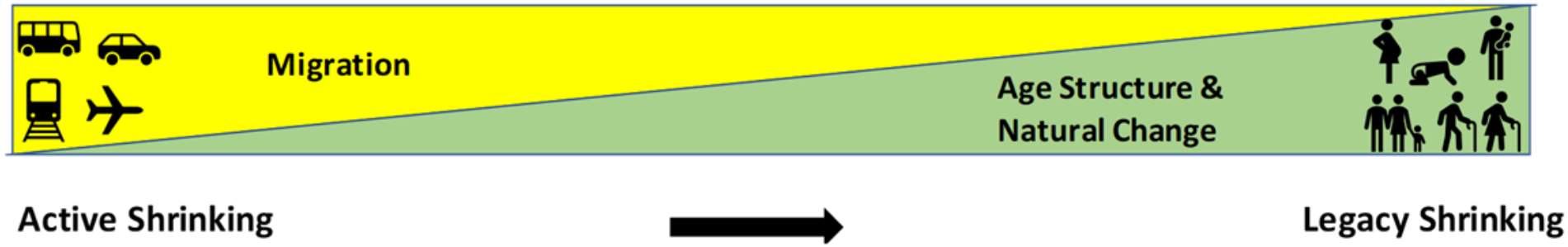
- In the urban-rural classification, the central urban area of Lieksa is defined as a rural local center.
- The surrounding area of the central urban area and the village of Koli are considered core rural areas, while other areas are sparsely populated rural areas
- The population is concentrated along the shores of Lake Pielinen, while the eastern and northern parts of the municipality are mostly uninhabited and extremely sparsely populated
- When measured by population grids, only 19% of Lieksa's land area is inhabited
- In 2021, the urbanisation rate was 69.6%, which is lower than in North Karelia (73.0%) and Finland overall (86.6%)

Lieksa age structure 2000 and 2021



- The population of Lieksa has decreased and aged from 2000 to 2021
- Age cohorts under 55 are significantly smaller than those over 55
- There were few young adults already in 2000, and by 2021, the number of children had also decreased significantly
- The average ages of the population marked in population pyramids were 43.8 years in 2000 and 53.7 years in 2021

Different types of simple shrinking



- *Active Shrinking*

  → migration driven – characteristic for NMS and Southern Europe

- *Legacy shrinking*

  → driven by distorted age structures which reflect migration processes of the past – more typical of the fringes of Western Europe

Complex shrinkage

- Careful specification of shrinkage must be set within the broader socio-economic as well as institutional and policy context
- Demographic changes and socio-economic facts in combination are potential drivers of shrinking
- Understanding rural diversity across Europe is made more complex by the dynamics of megatrends
  - Including climate change and environmental crises and socio-economic, behavioural, cultural and demographic drivers of change
- Moving beyond a purely demographic analysis of shrinking opens up the subject to explore background

Paradox of shrinking

- Municipalities can respond to population decline by
  - either decreasing the *need for adaptation*,
  - or enhancing their *capacity to adapt*
- The need for adaptation decreases when revenues/subsidies increase or when the number of expenditures/tasks decreases
- Capacity to adapt improves by increasing resources for planning and development tasks
- The increase in capacity to adapt requires additional resources, which are only obtainable by decreasing the need for adaptation

→ Interplay between reducing the need for adaptation and increasing the capacity to adapt

→ Shrinkage is basically simultaneously a demographic and economic process

Some Final Reflections

- The potential for ‘unintended consequences’ can be substantial, especially when local governance structures are complex, and responsibilities for service delivery is shared in complex ways
- Adjustments to and ‘rationalisation’ of services are often motivated by efficiency and cost effectiveness, rather than adaptation to shrinking per se
- Potential for institutional schizophrenia – ‘officially’ committed to growth, but day-to-day decisions on service delivery are adaptive

Thank you!