



Cooperation for a sustainable Arctic future

Building lasting partnerships through EU support
for Arctic communities and regions



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the European Union

ARCTIC URBAN AND REGIONAL COOPERATION





WELCOME

The Arctic has long been a region of strategic importance for the European Union. At a time of rapid geopolitical and environmental change, as well as growing global attention, cooperation among Arctic communities is more important than ever. Strong local partnerships strengthen resilience, foster innovation and contribute to sustainable development across the region.

The Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation (AURC) initiative has demonstrated the value of working together. By connecting 15 Arctic cities in a network of exchange and mutual learning, AURC has fostered lasting partnerships, inspired innovative solutions, and strengthened local capacity. The achievements highlighted in this brochure show how collaboration across borders can deliver tangible benefits for cities and their residents.

The European Union is proud to support this cooperation. Through the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), we have accompanied the AURC network on its journey and are committed to continuing support for collaboration among Arctic cities. This includes support for the Arctic Mayors' Forum (AMF), which provides an important platform for local leaders to share experiences, strengthen their voice, and advance common priorities for the Arctic.

As this brochure illustrates, strong partnerships create lasting impact. We look forward to seeing the connections forged through AURC continue to grow and contribute to a sustainable and prosperous future for Arctic communities.

Peter Wagner,
Director – Head of Service
Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), European Commission



TOWNS AND CITIES TACKLING ARCTIC CHALLENGES LOCALLY

The following pages highlight positive changes in 15 Arctic towns and cities inspired by the Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation network since its launch in 2024. This cooperation is particularly welcome for Arctic communities facing increasing uncertainty, driven by climate change and geopolitical and geo-economic competition. The European Union sees local authorities as valuable actors in its efforts for a safe, stable, sustainable, peaceful and

prosperous Arctic: AURC is helping them take action locally to improve sustainable development and resilience, to benefit Arctic communities including Indigenous Peoples and future generations.

As a result these Arctic towns and cities are developing new actions and trusted cooperation, particularly in the following key areas.



Citizen engagement and youth participation

- *Participatory budgeting*
- *Citizen academies*
- *Inclusive engagement*
- *Youth councils and youth-led initiatives*



Attracting and retaining talent

- *Engaging universities, businesses and other stakeholders*
- *Youth retention and professional development schemes*
- *International Welcome Houses and other innovative services, supporting liveability*



Sustainable tourism

- Year-round sustainable tourism and visitor management
- Linking tourism to local culture and community benefits
- Tourism supporting education and engagement on sustainability
- Cross-border cooperation



Culture and inclusive economic development

- Promoting local culture and creative industries
- Cultural exchanges and international partnerships
- Supporting local businesses, and job creation
- Social sustainability
- Indigenous Reconciliation



Resilience and emergency preparedness

- Climate adaptation and energy-saving initiatives
- Wildfire and disaster preparedness plans
- Training and capacity building
- Integrating resilience into urban planning and public services



"AURC has provided a valuable platform for Luleå to collaborate with other Arctic cities, helping us turn shared challenges into concrete actions. We gain practical knowledge, test new approaches, and develop initiatives that strengthen our work. This makes us better equipped to support local employers, engage our young people, and strengthen Luleå's long-term competitiveness and sustainable growth."

Carina Sammeli
Mayor of Luleå



WHAT IS AURC?

The European Union-funded AURC network is the first of its kind, bringing together local authorities for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration on sustainable urban and regional development.

Running from 2024 to 2026, AURC includes Arctic towns and cities in Canada, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

Despite their diverse sizes and backgrounds, these communities face similar challenges. Through AURC, they work together in a structured action planning process to transfer knowledge, share good practices and develop solutions to the issues most important to them.

Featuring activities such as study visits, focused workshops, and advanced exchanges, AURC promotes cooperation among Arctic local and regional authorities, communities, universities and other organisations, working closely with the Arctic Mayors' Forum.

A key aspect of the programme is that it enables towns and cities to meet and identify the Arctic challenges most important in their own communities, then work together on finding practical solutions. This work has taken them to Luleå and Umeå (Sweden), Oulu (Finland), Whitehorse and Yellowknife (Canada), and Fairbanks NSB (USA) – as well as Arctic and EU-wide events.



Oulu, Finland



Fairbanks, USA



Kittilä, Finland

Cooperation for a sustainable Arctic future



Whitehorse, Canada



Kittilä, Finland



Luleå, Sweden



“AURC collaboration has deepened our understanding and broadened perspectives on issues related to the vitality of Arctic cities. Joint work and study visits have provided valuable insights into how different operating environments influence solutions and their applicability elsewhere. The effectiveness of the work has been strongly supported by the expert input included in the AURC project, which has enabled systematic and structured collaboration.”

Ari Alatossava
Mayor of Oulu





OULU
Finland

Culture strengthening the city's long-term vitality and attractiveness

Population	 214 000
Introduction	European Capital of Culture 2026, Oulu is a leading centre for business, culture and education in northern Europe. Home to a dynamic tech community, in a region known for its innovative technological solutions, Oulu is well placed to link the digital and green transitions, and aims to be carbon-neutral by 2035.
Challenges and motivation	■ Main sustainable development challenges centre on economic diversification, reducing unemployment, attracting investment and skilled workers, and climate action including energy efficiency and sustainable urban infrastructure.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Working with community groups <i>“Being part of AURC has broadened our thinking, particularly on how to engage with different groups in our communities,”</i> says Anne Rännäli-Kontturi, International Affairs Manager, Oulu. The Yellowknife study visit showed administrations working closely with citizens, including Indigenous People. Examples of community involvement in decision-making and other areas inspired Oulu to consider applying similar solutions. European Capital of Culture legacy Umeå showed Oulu how Capital of Culture status can bring lasting benefits. An AURC study visit explored Umeå’s 2014 European Capital of Culture legacy, including continued investment in cultural spaces, and eXpression Umeå, now a leading incubator for cultural and creative industries.

Main changes thanks to AURC

Peer learning with Umeå

Sharing several strategic, geographic and cultural characteristics, exchanges with Umeå were “highly valuable and interesting”. Oulu was inspired by Umeå’s collaborative approaches to Research, Development and Innovation, strengthened networks and entrepreneurship in creative fields, and citizen engagement in urban planning and equality.

An Arctic inspiration

AURC’s largest city, Oulu has shared its experience in areas such as youth participation, international promotion, cultural development and cross-sectoral collaboration. Several AURC peers have made positive changes as a direct result. Yellowknife improved cross-sectoral cooperation, city branding and investment attraction. They also gained insights into winter cycling, along with Whitehorse. Fairbanks and Kópavogur were inspired by Oulu’s youth council and other work with children and young people. Many, including Gällivare and Luleå, launched support for international talent. Harstad took up Oulu’s promotion of festivals, events and participatory initiatives. Overall, these exchanges reinforce Oulu’s role as a valuable international partner.



The visit to Umeå came at a very good time from the perspective of Oulu2026 legacy work and reinforced our own thinking around long-term impact. It was inspiring to see how Umeå has continued to invest in culture, creative industries and community wellbeing after its European Capital of Culture year. The visit showed concretely how culture can strengthen a city’s vitality and attractiveness long after the title year itself.

Anne Laurila,
Special Advisor,
International Marketing
and Communications,
City of Oulu



ROVANIEMI
Finland

Practical solutions to implement a dynamic, inclusive City Strategy

Population	 65 000
Introduction	Rovaniemi is the administrative and educational heart of Finnish Lapland and a vital logistics hub supporting regional competitiveness and sustainable growth. Its economy draws on diverse services, tourism, manufacturing and mining-related industries. The city combines a lively centre with surrounding rural villages and rich Arctic nature.
Challenges and motivation	■ Main sustainable development challenges relate to climate change adaptation, sustainable tourism, affordable housing and preparedness.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Cold climate, warm welcome Discovering Luleå’s ambitious talent attraction programme, Rovaniemi also saw ways to help retain international talent. They decided to adopt Luleå’s successful ‘meet-ups’ concept in their own city. After initial online exchanges, Rovaniemi’s International House team decided to visit a Luleå Meet-up, before holding its own welcome event for international talent in Autumn 2026. Cross-sectoral approach to community building A conclusion of the AURC Yellowknife study visit was that sense of community is a key factor in retention, and cities have a role to play. So Rovaniemi formed a cross-sectoral group to look into what makes newcomers, residents and local businesses want to stay. The new group has identified challenges and opportunities, and proposed a first set of small actions to the city council.

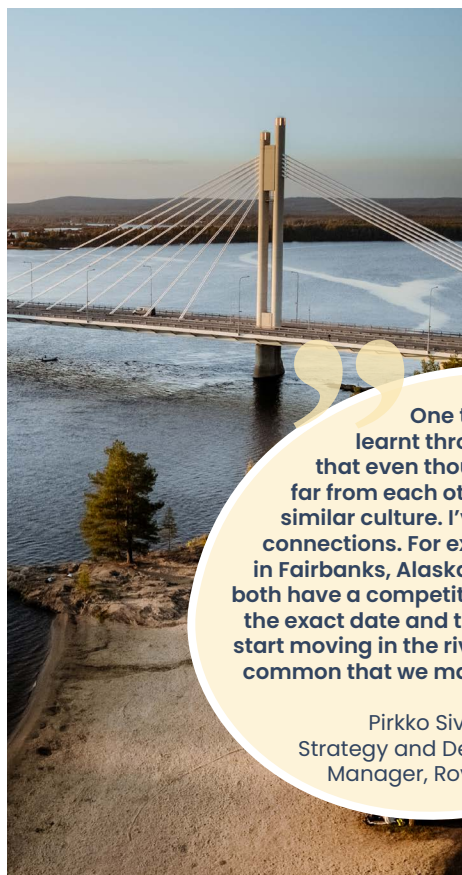
Main changes thanks to AURC

Youth and entrepreneur-friendly culture

As well as promoting youth participation in local development decisions, Rovaniemi's City Strategy 2025–2029 aims for a more entrepreneur-friendly working culture. Discovering through AURC that Gällivare aimed to respond to businesses as positively as possible, Rovaniemi decided to adopt the same principle.

Locally run cultural events

Among the diverse AURC study visit takeaways shared with colleagues in Rovaniemi was the way cultural events can attract people to visit, and stay, in a city. Particularly inspiring were Oulu's simple processes for citizens to apply for pop-up venues for events.



“One thing I've learnt through AURC is that even though we are very far from each other, we have very similar culture. I've discovered new connections. For example, I learnt that in Fairbanks, Alaska, and Rovaniemi we both have a competition in spring to guess the exact date and time that the ice will start moving in the river! We have a lot in common that we maybe didn't realise.”

Pirkko Sivonen,
Strategy and Development
Manager, Rovaniemi



SALLA
Finland

Participatory budgeting bringing new
community-led improvements

Population	 3 300
Introduction	Salla, in Lapland, describes itself as being ‘in the middle of nowhere’. Main economic sectors are tourism, forestry, services and agriculture, including reindeer herding.
Challenges and motivation	■ Key sustainable development challenges include an ageing population, low birth rate and a need to attract workers. Climate change is a threat to its principal livelihoods.
Main changes thanks to AURC	New participatory budget Salla launched a new tool for citizen engagement thanks to AURC’s Luleå and Oulu study visit, and cases shared by Tallinn, Estonia, and Valongo, Portugal. In their first participatory budget, Salla’s residents submitted about 150 ideas, and the winning proposal – a new community gym – was created as a result. The initial municipal budget was EUR 10 000, following Valongo’s example. The 2026 participatory budget will fund more activities for young people, indoor market events, and a National Park information board. Cross-border cooperation AURC led Salla to further opportunities. New project development with East Lapland municipalities sparked a EUR 1 million+ cross-border project with East Finnmark, Norway, on training and local authority collaboration. Salla also applied for New European Bauhaus 2026 Boost for Small Municipalities, based on their transformation of an unused supermarket into a meeting place for residents, associations and tourists, with a second-hand shop staffed by young people.



GÄLLIVARE
Sweden

A new Welcome House helping attract and retain international talent

Population	 17 500
Introduction	Gällivare, in Norrbotten County, northern Sweden, is a mining town and important railway junction.
Challenges and motivation	Having undergone an urban transformation, the town faces new challenges as the green transition increases demand for mining and metallurgy. With one of the lowest unemployment rates in Sweden, Gällivare aims to attract new talent, increasing the population to 20 000 by 2030.
Main changes thanks to AURC	A new international house Inspired by Oulu’s International House, Gällivare created a similar centre, supporting the town’s strengthened efforts to attract and retain talent, including nurses, teachers and social workers. Gällivare brought a tourist bureau and urban transformation centre together under one roof in the central mall, naming it ‘Welcome House’. People can apply there for local jobs, in Swedish and English. It opened in March 2025 with a ribbon-cutting event led by local mayors. <i>“There needs to be a sustainable, attractive society, and not just houses, but life between the houses,” said Alexander Kult, Special Coordinator. “Oulu had a webinar, and there we got the idea: ‘Hey wait a minute, we’re doing those two, put them together, why not rename it as a Welcome House.”</i> Culture and business fund Gällivare was inspired to follow Luleå’s example, and start encouraging business sponsors to actively support culture as well as sports events.



LULEÅ
Sweden

Strengthening long-term competitiveness and sustainable growth

Population	 80 500
Introduction	Luleå is a coastal city in Swedish Lapland and the capital of Norrbotten County. Public administration and steelworks are key employers. The city is also attracting significant investments in green industry, and becoming a growing destination for tourism and meetings.
Challenges and motivation	A key challenge is the shortage of people and skills. Aiming to reach 100 000 inhabitants by 2040, Luleå is keen to focus on recruiting talent, improving relocation processes and retaining students, young people and new citizens.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Support for youth work and participation AURC towns and cities have brought Luleå valuable new insights and perspectives on working with young people. Through AURC, youth workers from Luleå took part in the Northern Cities Youth Work Expert Meeting in Tromsø, to develop solutions, share knowledge, and establish a permanent structure for cooperation. Luleå is running a two-year pilot project for a Youth Municipal Council, and especially values exchanges with AURC peers on youth engagement and participation, as well as organisational structures supporting youth involvement in local governance. Cross-border cultural cooperation AURC was a catalyst for Luleå, Oulu and Tromsø to start developing new exchanges between their schools of culture. Welcome Hub Luleå <i>“Learning about Oulu’s Welcome House through AURC made me think ‘we have to do something similar to this!’”</i> said Luleå Municipality’s Julia Hanson.

Main changes thanks to AURC

She had started 'Luleå Meet-ups' to connect with international talent – a step towards setting up a Welcome House. In an Arctic city where the cold can be a hurdle to going out and finding social networks, *"Oulu showed it's possible!"*

Preparations are in place to establish a more permanent organisation, Welcome Hub Luleå. The aim is to work closely with stakeholders – including local businesses and organisations, education providers and national bodies – and encourage them to help provide joint activities for new inhabitants and international talent.

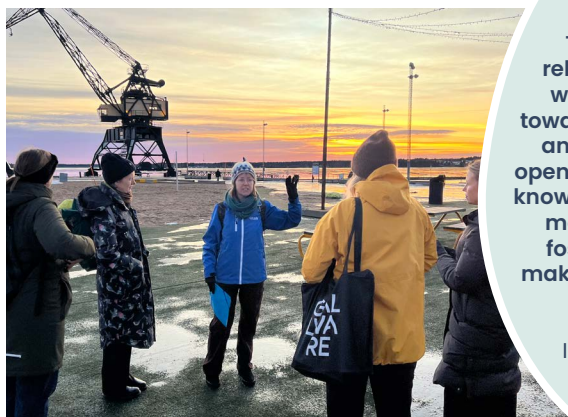
Participatory governance and urban regeneration

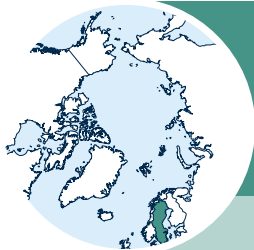
Through AURC, Luleå Municipality representatives visited Kópavogur, finding they faced similar challenges. This was an opportunity to learn about Kópavogur's work on place-based regeneration, community identity, and citizen participation across diverse policy areas, as well as urban densification in the Kársnes district while preserving local identity and waterfront assets.



For us in Luleå, one of AURC's most significant contributions has been the creation of strong, lasting connections across Arctic cities. These networks and cross-border relationships are valuable assets that will continue to strengthen our work toward sustainable development in Luleå and throughout the region. AURC has opened up a dynamic Arctic arena where knowledge, experience and perspectives move seamlessly across borders – fostering closer collaboration and making our Arctic cities more resilient.

Nataliia Hammarberg,
International Relations Officer,
Luleå Municipality





UMEÅ
Sweden

An improved strategic focus for Umeå as a prominent Arctic city

Population	 135 300
Introduction	Umeå is one of the fastest growing cities in Europe, in an otherwise sparsely populated region. It is home to two universities and a diverse, growing business sector. Umeå is a vibrant cultural hub and was European Capital of Culture in 2014.
Challenges and motivation	Gender equality is a core priority to achieve sustainable development and create conditions for women and men to have equal power to shape society. Umeå also seeks to strengthen relations with Indigenous populations, particularly on social, ecological and cultural sustainable development.
Main changes thanks to AURC	New city-wide focus on Arctic issues Thanks to AURC, Arctic issues have gained increased prominence on Umeå’s municipal agenda, leading to a broader, shared ownership of the topic across several departments. For the first time, the municipality brought diverse teams together for valuable talks on Umeå as an Arctic city. Interdisciplinary groups have been developing a coherent Arctic position paper for Umeå on issues such as climate change, democracy, mobility, innovation, social sustainability and culture. Indigenous reconciliation is one such topic, where Umeå was able to learn from Yellowknife and the pact it developed. Academic collaboration with Umeå’s Arctic Centre AURC has led to a new joint focus on Arctic issues with Umeå University, in particular with its Arctic Centre, after decades of broader collaboration. This includes exchanges on topics such as urban development and support for innovation, contributing to Umeå’s Arctic positions and strategies.

Main changes thanks to AURC

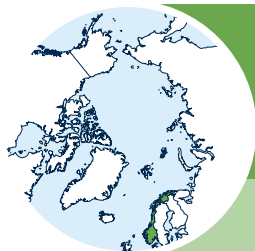
Arctic Six universities and cities working together

Umeå university is part of the Arctic Six alliance with universities in Sweden, Norway and Finland. AURC brought these universities together with their respective cities. Exploring opportunities to cooperate, they developed TALENT NORTH: Attracting and Anchoring Global Talent in the Arctic, a joint Interreg Aurora project approved in January 2026. This would not have come about without AURC.



In the Arctic, climate, culture and community meet. Through AURC, we collaborate across borders to strengthen democracy and create sustainable and vibrant societies in the North.

Marie-Louise Rönmark,
Mayor of Umeå



BODØ
Norway

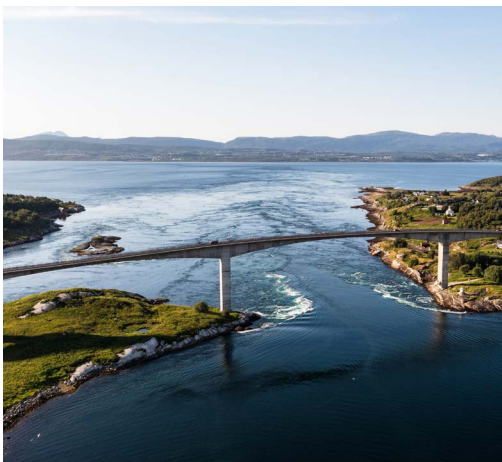
Emergency preparedness and lasting connections

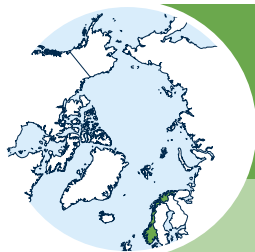
Population	 53 500
Introduction	European Capital of Culture 2024, Bodø is a port town just north of the Arctic Circle, and the largest urban area in Nordland County. Bodø is undergoing huge transformation, building a new city district and airport.
Challenges and motivation	■ Key challenges relating to climate change include civil preparedness, safety, and cooperation with surrounding municipalities.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Emergency preparedness Bodø's participation in the AURC study visit to Whitehorse sparked exchanges and recommendations for community resilience, emergency preparedness and communication. Highlighting the value of regional and local cooperation, involving local businesses, and an Emergency Preparedness Cluster – the city shared its own crisis management system, with examples of large fires provoking evacuations and polluted water supplies. Crisis communication and resource management were particular challenges. AURC peers shared practical insights into managing: ■ public expectations and responsibilities, with the municipality handling initial evacuee responses and building owners managing long-term rehousing; ■ security concerns, with local security protocols adjusting to evolving threats of terrorism and sabotage; ■ and cooperation between municipal and state agencies.

Main changes
thanks to AURC

New Arctic cooperation

AURC has brought Bodø new opportunities. One example is the new EU-funded TALENT NORTH project on Attracting and Anchoring Global Talent in the Arctic, co-developed with a group of city administrations and universities in Oulu, Tromsø, Luleå and Umeå.





HARSTAD
Norway

Valuing and promoting local assets for a healthy, active and attractive city

Population	 25 000
Introduction	Harstad, situated in the middle of Northern Norway between two larger cities, boasts strong cultural and maritime clusters with significant expertise.
Challenges and motivation	Unemployment is low and the population is ageing. One of the key challenges is attracting skilled labour, while improving the quality of life for older residents.
Main changes thanks to AURC	A first international strategy For the first time, Harstad is building an international strategy, learning from other AURC towns and cities and reading their international plans. Luleå’s work attracting people was particularly inspiring – for example holding receptions for newcomers, and going to other countries (e.g. the Netherlands) to attract talent. Harstad is now looking into doing the same. Culture as a boost for attractiveness Oulu uses festivals and events in a strategic way. Inspired by their approach, rather than simply reporting participant numbers, Harstad now also promotes its events regularly and more broadly, raising awareness of the city’s attractiveness. Year-round celebrations of cycling Harstad wants to increase winter cycling and has opened its first bike superhighway, a year-round trail. Oulu’s bike trail was particularly inspiring in the way the city markets it, and develops activities around it, sparking changes in Harstad’s approach.

Main changes
thanks to AURC

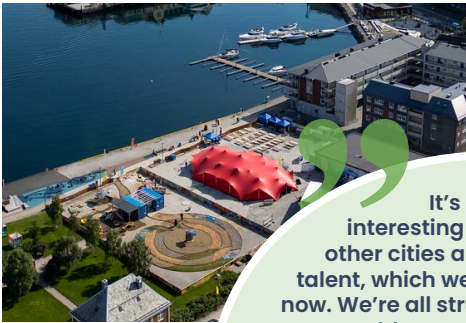
Participative budgeting for positive citizen engagement

Inspired once again by Oulu, Harstad is bringing value and awareness to existing participative projects and funding decisions, promoting them as citizen-led budgeting. This is a new concept for the city, and an opportunity to encourage more residents to take part in local decisions.

Healthy, active and meaningful senior support

Inspired by a model used in Umeå, Harstad is exploring the possibility of establishing a Senior Centre, or Seniortorg, close to the town centre. The aim is to provide guidance, knowledge and inspiration that enriches everyday life for seniors. Here, people can find activities and events that promote health and encourage an active and meaningful life.

These new activities support a desired shift from institutional services to preventive and health-promoting measures at the lowest level of the service-delivery model. The proposed financial model is to use existing resources as far as possible, with additional support for rent and operating costs.



It's very interesting to see how other cities are attracting talent, which we're working on now. We're all struggling with the same problems. The good thing is that we get to see how other cities are working, but now we also know who we can connect with.



Øivind Arvola,
Communications Manager,
Harstad



TROMSØ
Norway

Mobilising cross-sectoral cooperation on attracting talent – and more

Population	 80 000
Introduction	Tromsø is a major cultural hub above the Arctic Circle, and European Youth Capital 2026. Its diverse economy includes the seafood industry, tourism, research and education, construction, service industry and public services.
Challenges and motivation	■ Tromsø faces challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals. Attracting a skilled workforce is key, alongside involving Indigenous Peoples in the just transition.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Making tourism more sustainable, responsible and connected AURC discussions on sustainable tourism in Luleå came just as Tromsø was building its own sustainable tourism strategy. Conclusions were shared with municipal staff, informing Tromsø's new strategy and setting off a series of new connections and joint opportunities. Tourism professionals from Tromsø and Luleå started cooperating on common challenges like data collection, certification, sustainability, and taxing the tourist industry. Learning from 'Care for the Arctic Manifesto', and developing guidelines for Arctic tour operators, responsibility in tourism is another key topic where Tromsø's work is boosted by its AURC network. Together, relevant cities are exploring Arctic tourism carrying capacity and balanced growth, through an AURC Advanced Cooperation Exchange. International Welcome House Taking on a newly created role, Tromsø's International House Coordinator gained extensive inspiration and best practices from AURC peers. The concept will be developed further with support from AURC and UiT, the Arctic University of Norway.

Main changes thanks to AURC

Raising young people's voices

Tromsø's title of European Youth Capital reflects local efforts to include youth in decision-making. These were strengthened further by the Arctic Youth Dialogue at the EU Arctic Forum. AURC also enabled youth workers from Tromsø and peer cities to meet at the Nordic Arctic Youth Summit in Tromsø in May 2026.

Wider use of participatory budgeting

An AURC session on participatory budgeting shed new light on a tool not widely used in Tromsø. The city is now engaging more citizens in funding decisions on European Youth Capital projects, and urban development.

New cross-border cultural exchanges

Luleå, Oulu and Tromsø are developing new cultural connections. Cultural workers jointly designed a new exchange programme for children, which they plan to develop into a fully funded youth music and culture exchange project.

Attracting and retaining workers

Tromsø Municipality has received funding to attract workers, thanks to a proposal drawing on practical AURC insights. This knowledge will also be vital for Tromsø in the new EU-funded Interreg Aurora project TALENT NORTH: Attracting and Anchoring Global Talent in the Arctic – another direct result of AURC.



Reaching out and cooperating with other cities, identifying common questions, engaging colleagues, would take much more time and energy to do alone. AURC is a driving force, mobilising various people in the municipality to focus together on key issues – such as talent attraction and retention.

Julia Borisovna Seljeseth,
International Advisor,
Department Democracy
and Society, Tromsø



KÓPAVOGUR
Iceland

New Arctic connections bringing energy and ideas to the municipality

Population	 40 000
Introduction	Kópavogur is Iceland's second largest municipality. The main economic sector is the service industry, and unemployment is low, at around 2.5%.
Challenges and motivation	A growing population and increased migration is putting pressure on social services such as affordable and accessible housing and schools. Key development challenges relate to social inclusion, mental health, education, and digitalising public services.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Young people leading the way With an active youth council, and a UNICEF child-friendly city label, Kópavogur aims to further increase young people's participation in decision-making, and give children the chance to make an impact. Kópavogur has been inspired by solutions for children's participation in many AURC cities including Oulu, Harstad and Tromsø. During a study visit to Fairbanks NSB, they were particularly interested to see young people leading discussions with visiting AURC representatives, an idea Kópavogur aims to replicate. Public participation Encouraging residents to take part in policymaking, and projects such as participatory budgeting, is on the Kópavogur Town agenda, with the aim of reaching as many residents as possible. AURC peers shared helpful insights on how to improve the inclusion of marginalised groups in municipal projects, for example Umeå defining teenage girls as a specific target group.

Main changes thanks to AURC

Urban planning cooperation

Kópavogur was inspired by proactive approaches in Umeå's Planning Department, such as staff cycling around the town and meeting residents, and involving teenage girls in co-developing an outdoor meeting place. Umeå's methodology and results will be shared with Kópavogur's Planning Department to investigate potential solutions. AURC also sparked further urban planning exchanges with Luleå, focusing on stakeholder engagement, participatory processes and the role of cultural and public spaces in fostering community ownership and sustainable urban development.

Inspiration for tourism and culture

With Kópavogur growing as a destination, the municipality is developing a tourism policy, incentivised by the AURC study visit to Luleå, and European Capital of Culture, Oulu. Connections with Oulu are particularly useful as Kópavogur considers applying to become European Capital of Culture.



Before we started participating in AURC, we had not cultivated any connections with other Arctic towns, but after participating in the project, we now have colleagues and friends in many countries, and that is extremely valuable.

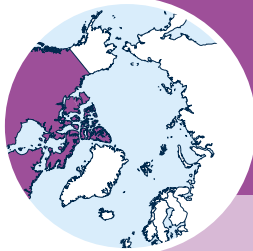
Pálmi Þór Másson,
CEO, Kópavogur



SERMERSOOQ
Greenland

New confidence to think bigger in tackling local Arctic challenges

Population	 20 000
Introduction	Sermersooq Municipality formed in 2009 merging five municipalities, including Greenland’s capital, Nuuk. Main industries are administration, construction, services and fishing.
Challenges and motivation	■ Key sustainable development challenges are social inclusion, mental health, sustainable tourism and education.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Daring to think bigger AURC gave Sermersooq’s isolated communities new confidence to exchange challenges and solutions with Arctic peers – and see their experiences benefit others. This prompted them to think bigger, and act accordingly. A direct result is the launch of a new, internationally connected, Mountain Leader programme, educating local mountaineers who go on to work in tourism. Reaching out to citizens Inspired by Umeå’s social workers cycling out to citizens, the goal now is to improve outreach – with a solution adapted to local weather and terrain. Opening safe public spaces Another AURC inspiration isto encourage openness, transparency and trust in urban development, for example citizens collectively caring for a multi-purpose public library. This is feeding into East Greenland’s work on community safety. “ Today we are sharing our experiences and knowledge much more confidently, and are sure we have valuable things to bring to the table. This has shown us the way from thinking we were too small to be significant, to now dare to think bigger in our solutions to challenges. ” Hjørdis Viberg, Head of Region, East Greenland

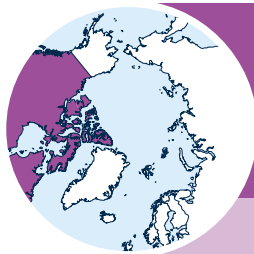


WHITEHORSE Canada

Building community resilience through climate adaptation and sustainable tourism

Population	 31 400
Introduction	Whitehorse is the Yukon’s capital, with one of the fastest growing populations in Canada. Public administration is the largest employer, and there is a vibrant business sector with mining and tourism.
Challenges and motivation	■ Key sustainable development challenges include climate adaptation across a vast municipal region and dependence on fossil fuels. Community resilience, food security and sustainable mobility are all important focus areas.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Whitehorse hosted AURC’s first study visit in 2024, sparking changes in Arctic cities, from new emergency plans to year-round sports access. Common challenges include flooding, erosion and intensifying wildfires. Whitehorse explored resilience solutions with AURC peers, including sustainable tourism, community engagement, and Indigenous People’s central decision-making role. They explored Oulu’s Tourism Master Plan 2030, as well as the promotion of Tromsø’s Northern Lights and Midnight Sun, and Kópavogur’s natural and cultural heritage. They learned about rehousing evacuees in Bodø, mutual care in Sermersooq, Luleå’s design thinking, and Rovaniemi’s citizen councils supporting climate adaptation. Whitehorse connected with Yellowknife and Fairbanks mayors for further talks on firebreaks.





YELLOWKNIFE
Canada

New focused, cross-cutting actions for investment and community building

Population	 20 300
Introduction	Yellowknife is the largest community in the Northwest Territories. The main economic drivers are mining, public sector and tourism, with growing industries in agriculture and the film sector.
Challenges and motivation	■ Among the key sustainable development challenges are economic transition and ensuring the supply of adequate and affordable housing.
Main changes thanks to AURC	City branding to attract investment <i>“Oulu was phenomenal from an investment perspective,”</i> recalls Yellowknife’s Stacia Kean, hosting an AURC study visit on inclusive economic development. Oulu’s place-branding approach directly inspired Yellowknife to secure funding and create investment attraction information for a fresh new city website. The visit also helped Yellowknife identify 25 ready-to-share investment opportunities. Bringing city departments together Following Oulu’s example, Yellowknife increased cross-sectoral collaboration, bringing city departments together around business development in a more structured way, and breaking down silos. Monthly coffees are just one of many simple solutions. Adding value to staff recruitment Yellowknife was inspired to adopt Umeå’s approach of using recruitment campaigns to promote staff’s positive local impacts, using wording such as “become a firefighter to keep your neighbours safe” or “become a lifeguard to help our elders stay active”.

Main changes thanks to AURC

Building community

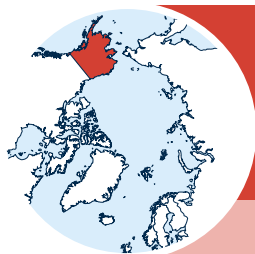
Fairbanks NSB showed how communities can be strengthened by collaborating with non-profit organisations. Yellowknife looked into adopting new approaches, including partnership agreements, based on Fairbanks’ Birch Hill Recreation Area as a case study.



With supports provided through the European Union and the AURC, we are building relationships with likeminded neighbours across the Arctic. We are from far and wide, but the challenges we face are so similar. We can and are all learning a lot from one another.

Ben Hendriksen,
Mayor of Yellowknife





FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH
Alaska, USA

A more connected, forward-looking community

Population	 94 000
Introduction	In Fairbanks North Star Borough, a regional and circumpolar hub, major economic drivers are the military, resource development, tourism, government and Indigenous organisations.
Challenges and motivation	■ Attracting and retaining residents is a major focus. Sustainable development challenges also include food production, housing, cost of living and the seasonality of many industries.
Main changes thanks to AURC	New Youth Commission AURC study visits in Iceland, Luleå, Tromsø and elsewhere, showed municipalities engaging with young people authentically and consistently. In Oulu, for example, a student described how his local youth council gave him a network of friends and authority figures that he did not want to leave behind. Fairbanks NSB Mayor Grier Hopkins is now launching a Mayor’s Youth Commission to engage young residents on issues such as transport planning, voter turnout, and youth leadership. Focus groups have been held, and organisers aim for the commission to be established by the end of 2026. <i>“We are creating this with youth, for youth, so that the commission is more than advisory: it will have real authority,”</i> says Amy Galloway, Deputy Chief of Staff, Fairbanks NSB. Links with schools AURC sparked new questions: “How can we celebrate youth?”, “How can we build stronger connections between the government and youth in our community?”

Main changes thanks to AURC

Inspired by municipalities in Sweden and Finland, the mayor started visiting schools more regularly – and the borough launched Student of the Month and Educator of the Month awards.

From attracting tourists to attracting talent

AURC examples of Welcome Houses sparked Fairbanks to expand support for newcomers. They will now work on talent attraction with local tribal organisations and the tourism body Explore Fairbanks.

Citizens' Academy kicks off

Fairbanks discovered strong public trust in government among AURC peers. In response, the Mayor's Office launched its first North Star Borough Citizens' Academy, in September 2025. Free for residents aged 16 and up, courses run for eight weekly two-hour sessions, with borough staff showing how they work to create a liveable, vibrant community. Key aims are to increase voter turnout, participation on boards and commissions, and even running for public office.

Academic support for emergency preparedness

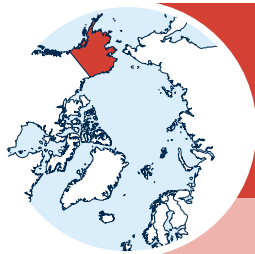
While the AURC Whitehorse study visit was exploring how academic research can support municipal needs, Fairbanks' mayor stayed at home as wildfires threatened the city, forcing evacuations.

This led to work with George Washington University to develop Fairbanks' first evacuation plan, drawing on Yellowknife's wildfire experiences, and funded through a jointly developed research grant.



“What I learned here is the art of what's possible, and what I bring back to my community are the actual skills and connections to make it happen. We don't have to build it from scratch – we're getting the information and the processes from people who do it. It makes it so much easier.”

Amy Galloway,
Deputy Chief of Staff,
Fairbanks NSB



UTQIAGVIK
Alaska, USA

A new roadmap for growth as part of a strong Arctic community

Population	 4 300
Introduction	Utqiagvik, located north of the Arctic Circle in Alaska, is one of the northernmost cities in the world. The predominant land type is tundra, and roads are unpaved due to permafrost. Food and transport are expensive, so there is a strong reliance on subsistence food sources. The region's main source of income is oil and gas.
Challenges and motivation	■ Developing affordable housing, sustainable tourism and attracting talent to the city are key challenges.
Main changes thanks to AURC	Cross-border problem solving A unique logistical challenge in the high Arctic is maintaining municipal recreation facilities. AURC connections in Whitehorse helped Utqiagvik navigate procurement and maintenance hurdles for their local ice rink, enabling them to secure a Zamboni ice resurfacer – providing the town's young people with consistent access to winter sports. Investing in the next generation Inspired by youth engagement models seen throughout the AURC cohort, Utqiagvik City Council passed a formal Resolution and secured funding to hire a dedicated Youth Coordinator. This role is a direct result of Utqiagvik's commitment to Arctic social sustainability, focusing on creating structured opportunities for young people to lead and thrive in the community. Strategic place-branding and tourism Shortly after their first visit to Tromsø, Utqiagvik representatives recognised the need for a central hub to manage community identity and visitor engagement. This led to the creation of a new Visitor Centre showcasing the vibrancy of life in Utqiagvik, supporting both tourism and the recruitment and retention of community members.

Main changes thanks to AURC

Cultural and Indigenous exchange

Utqiagvik's participation in AURC has opened vital doors for cultural connections with the Sámi people. These exchanges have allowed Utqiagvik to share and adapt cultural preservation ideas across borders, reinforcing the shared resilience of Indigenous Arctic Peoples.

Resilience and preparedness

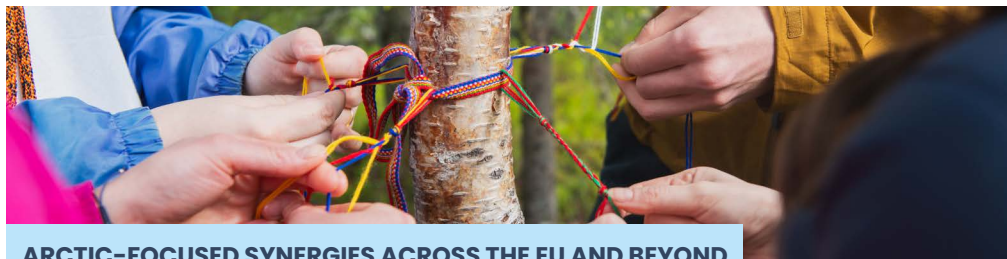
Engaging with other Arctic nations has fundamentally changed how Utqiagvik approaches emergency preparedness. By sharing strategies on permafrost stability and climate adaptation with their circumpolar neighbours, Utqiagvik is now better integrated into a global network of Arctic resilience.



AURC helped us realise that while our borders are different, our hurdles are often identical. Whether it was learning from Tromsø's approach to community hubs or troubleshooting heavy equipment with our Canadian neighbours, this network has provided us with a roadmap for growth. We aren't just a remote town in Alaska; we are a key player in a global Arctic community.

Asisaun Toovak,
Mayor of Utqiagvik





ARCTIC-FOCUSED SYNERGIES ACROSS THE EU AND BEYOND

AURC has built strong connections with international and EU-level initiatives beyond its own network – broadening cooperation on Arctic matters to enable knowledge exchange, amplify Arctic urban voices, and create new opportunities for cities and regions to work together. Here are some of the key synergies fostered by AURC, and set to continue with EU support.



Arctic Mayors' Forum

Since its inception, AURC has closely collaborated with the Arctic Mayors' Forum (AMF), drawing on the natural complementarity in their aims and objectives. The AMF has actively and meaningfully engaged across the full AURC project lifecycle – from launch events to study visits, Deep Dive sessions, EU Arctic Forums, Indigenous Peoples Dialogues, and Arctic Youth Dialogues.



Youth Together For Arctic Futures

Launched in parallel at Arctic Frontiers in Tromsø in January 2023, AURC has collaborated with the EU-co-funded YT4AF project to foster collaboration and mutual learning between Arctic youth and Arctic policymakers. At the EU Arctic Forum and Dialogues in Brussels in 2024 and Kittilä, Finland, in 2025, the projects held joint networking activities with AURC Mayors, senior city-level staff, EU representatives, and Arctic Youth Leaders.



Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic

The AURC network participated in the Interreg NPA 25th Anniversary Conference 'Connecting the Dots', in Bodø, Norway, in October 2025. The conference highlighted how the NPA has evolved over 25 years and how transnational cooperation has contributed to regional development, resilience and sustainability in Northern Periphery and Arctic communities. AURC led a session focusing on Advancing Sustainable Development at the Local Level through International Cooperation, including speakers representing Luleå and Salla.



New European Bauhaus

The City of Salla submitted an application to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) as a direct result of AURC providing information and guidance on the initiative. Building on the strong interest among Arctic cities, AURC then organised a dedicated webinar in May 2026 to explore NEB principles, tools and practical examples, helping cities integrate these concepts into their local development strategies.



European Urban Initiative

Through AURC, a Municipality of Oulu representative was invited to the 2025 EU Cities Forum in Kraków, and a European Urban Initiative (EUI) Peer Review in Prague in 2026. Oulu's representative became an EUI Peer Reviewer, bringing a valuable Arctic perspective to a programme that helps EU cities refine their strategies, learn from peers, and strengthen sustainable urban development.



This cooperation is a very good opportunity for me to talk to different departments in my municipality about real issues and real questions that I want their feedback on and their ideas. It shows the relevance of international cooperation. It helps immensely in my job.

Julia Borisovna Seljeseth,
International Advisor, Department
Democracy and Society, Tromsø





LOOKING AHEAD: ARCTIC COOPERATION CONTINUES

As communities around the Arctic start seeing the benefits of AURC-inspired change, local authorities continue to learn from, and with, each other. The network has developed new connections, knowledge and confidence for lasting Arctic cooperation on local priorities such as inclusive economic development, talent attraction and retention, and youth engagement.

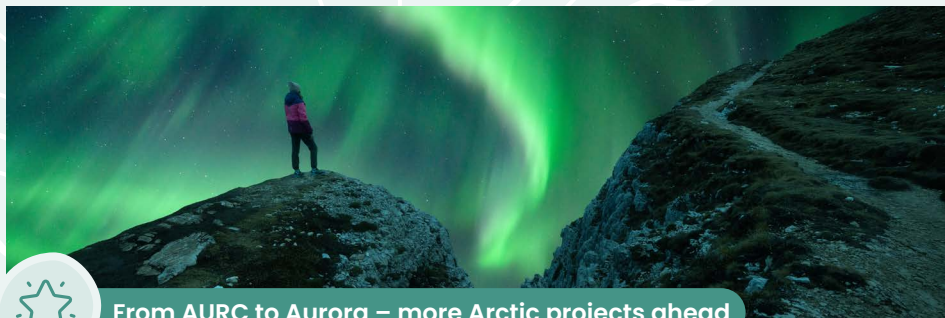
Building on the foundation of AURC, the European Union will continue to support Arctic cooperation through a new initiative led by the Arctic Mayors' Forum (AMF): BRIDGE – Building Resilient International Dialogue and Governance for Arctic Engagement.

BRIDGE integrates AURC's approaches and methods into AMF's permanent structure, ensuring that collaboration between Arctic towns and cities continues to grow.

Central to the initiative are Working Groups bringing municipal leaders, Indigenous representatives and youth together around shared priorities. These groups provide structured spaces for cooperation on topics such as inclusive policymaking, youth engagement, community resilience, climate adaptation and gender equality. They facilitate peer learning, policy exchange, study visits, fellowships and collaborative problem-solving, while supporting innovation through hackathons, challenges and pilot initiatives. BRIDGE will create opportunities to test and

scale solutions and support the development of new initiatives rooted in local needs and knowledge.

The initiative is also designed to strengthen the AMF secretariat to provide enhanced support to members, expand membership, and facilitate engagement with EU institutions and Arctic governance bodies. Emphasis will be placed on increasing the participation and leadership of women, youth and Indigenous Peoples in Arctic and EU policy processes through targeted training, advocacy support, and opportunities to engage in policymaking.



From AURC to Aurora – more Arctic projects ahead

Many joint projects are growing from AURC, as bridges of trust develop between mayors and other city representatives, as well as between various departments, agencies and stakeholders in towns and cities around the Arctic. They turn to each other to exchange solutions and support on topics ranging from year-round tourism to emergency preparedness – and spontaneous bi-lateral and multi-lateral partnerships continue to form, based on shared needs.

One significant AURC outcome is an exciting project that no one predicted at the outset. **TALENT NORTH: Attracting and Anchoring Global Talent in the Arctic** is an EU-funded Interreg Aurora project co-developed by the Arctic Six universities alliance and the Arctic Mayors' Forum, along with city administrations and universities in Oulu, Bodø, Tromsø, Luleå and Umeå, and the Finnish cities of Rovaniemi and Joensuu as associate partners.

With a budget of EUR 1.45 million, the project tackles a pressing Arctic challenge: attracting and retaining skilled people in communities that need them. It was launched in March 2026, and runs until December 2028.

TALENT NORTH grew directly from AURC bringing key partners together. Ideas for a joint Interreg application started forming at the EU Arctic Forum in Brussels, and took shape during a study visit to Luleå, where cities and universities began to develop the proposal together.

Led by Luleå University of Technology, TALENT NORTH will pilot cross-border internships, innovation hackathons and newcomer welcome services. Overall, the partners are taking steps towards a unified Arctic offer for global talent.

"For Oulu, an opportunity to use AURC to build the consortium between Arctic Six universities and cities, resulting in a successful project application for TALENT NORTH, has been an important result."

Anne Rännäli-Kontturi,
Municipality of Oulu

**The cooperation
in this project would not
have come about without AURC
collaboration and connections.**

Annika Dalén,
Municipality of Umeå



A catalyst for growing
pan-Arctic cooperation

The EU continues to support connections between Arctic municipalities, research institutions, civil society organisations, businesses and regional networks. BRIDGE aims to embed the relationships, ideas and momentum generated by AURC within the Arctic Mayors’ Forum, creating a lasting framework for cooperation, knowledge exchange, capacity building, and policy engagement to help Arctic communities remain connected, influential, and equipped to address shared challenges.

Whatever themes Arctic cities decide to explore together next – from AI-supported participatory tools to open-source digital twin models for climate-resilient planning, from urban living labs to strategic public-private industrial symbioses, AURC has planted the seeds for future cooperation. This is just the beginning.



“AURC has been a genuinely valuable partnership for AMF, demonstrating the concrete benefits of structured peer learning between Arctic local authorities. As this work moves into AMF’s permanent structure through BRIDGE, we are committed to sustaining and expanding what the network has started, ensuring that collaboration continues to grow well beyond any single project.”

Patti Bruns
Secretary General
of the Arctic Mayors’ Forum,
Tromsø, Norway

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH!

Find out about the EU's wide range of activities in and for the Arctic



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