

KIRKKONUMMI: STUDENT INSIGHTS

Communities, Municipal
Development, Quality of Life,
Housing, and Economy in
Kirkkonummi



Eds. Mari Vaattovaara, Jussi Jännes and Mikko Posti

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Introduction

Urban and regional research has in recent years highlighted a set of interrelated transformations shaping where and how people live. Increasing flexibility in work, the rise of multilocal living, and growing emphasis on quality of life and everyday environments are reshaping residential preferences across Europe and beyond. These shifts are particularly visible in municipalities located within metropolitan regions, where accessibility, housing choices, and proximity to nature intersect in new ways. Rather than a uniform narrative of decline, small towns are increasingly understood through a more differentiated lens: as places where questions of community, quality of life, housing, and economic adaptation converge, and where broader societal transformations become visible in concrete and often contrasting ways.

In the course *Urban Geography – Renaissance of Small Towns*, these developments were approached through four interrelated themes: **communities and municipal development, quality of life, housing, and economy**. These were not treated as separate sectors, but as overlapping analytical perspectives through which to examine changing settlement patterns, everyday environments, and local development trajectories. Students explored how belonging, participation, and perceptions of safety shape communities; how quality of life is produced through cultural, built, and ecological environments; how remote work, multilocal living, and second homes are reshaping housing demand and use; and how municipalities adapt economically through diversification, tourism, and new forms of investment. Rather than treating theory as a historical background, the course positioned key ideas—such as neighbourhood structure, social cores, accessibility, and the relationship between built form and everyday life—as practical tools for understanding and rethinking these dynamics. The aim was to “think otherwise” through theory, and to translate these perspectives into concrete spatial proposals.

This publication emerges from that course. Students were tasked with applying these theoretical tools to a real-world case: Kirkkonummi. The work builds on a strategic collaboration between the University of Helsinki and the municipality, which enabled direct engagement with local actors, including municipal leadership. While this publication is the outcome of a course, the collaboration made it possible to approach Kirkkonummi in a more focused and in-depth way than would otherwise have been feasible.

Kirkkonummi provides a particularly relevant case in the Finnish context. Rather than representing a peripheral municipality, it is firmly embedded within the Helsinki metropolitan region, characterized by strong accessibility, functional integration with the capital, and ongoing growth pressures. At the

same time, it retains distinctive features: proximity to nature, strong village identities, and a spatial structure that combines urbanizing centres with dispersed settlement patterns. In this sense, Kirkkonummi exemplifies a broader category of municipalities that operate at the intersection of metropolitan dynamics and small-town or semi-rural qualities.

Across the student works included in this publication, several recurring themes emerge that extend beyond individual projects and speak directly to broader discussions in urban and regional research.

First, the importance of shared spaces and “in-between places” was consistently emphasized.

Students identified a clear need for environments that foster everyday encounters and a sense of belonging. These ranged from formal institutions such as schools, libraries, and community centres to more informal and dispersed elements—benches, playgrounds, pedestrian routes, and small-scale meeting points embedded in daily movement. Such spaces were understood not merely as amenities but as critical infrastructure for social cohesion, local identity, and perceived quality of life.

Second, mobility – particularly the role of walking, cycling, and reduced car dependency – emerged as a central structuring principle. Kirkkonummi is often implicitly framed as a municipality where everyday life is dependent on private cars. However, both the field visits and the student analyses challenge this assumption. They suggest that, under the right spatial and service conditions, daily life in Kirkkonummi can be organized in ways that significantly reduce the need for car use—both for residents and, potentially, for visitors.

Many proposals explored what it would mean to design environments where everyday life can function without reliance on private cars. This was not framed only as a climate or transport issue, but as a broader question of liveability, safety, and local vitality. Walkable and cyclable networks, especially when combined with accessible services, small businesses, and places to stop and stay, were seen to strengthen both social interaction and economic activity. Importantly, the student work also points to a shift in perspective: rather than accepting car dependency as a given condition of metropolitan-edge municipalities, planning can actively reshape mobility patterns by structuring everyday environments around proximity, accessibility, and human-scale movement.

Third, the role of nature and its integration into the built environment was a unifying theme across all works. Rather than treating nature as a backdrop, students approached it as a defining asset and structuring element of development. Easy access to forests, coastlines, and recreational environments was seen as central to both resident well-being and the municipality’s attractiveness. Proposals emphasized not only preservation but also active integration: green corridors, community gardens, and local food production were discussed as ways to strengthen both ecological sustainability and

local engagement. In several cases, nature was also linked to potential economic opportunities, such as recreation-based tourism and place branding.

In addition to these cross-cutting themes, the student reports engage with emerging forms of living that are particularly relevant for municipalities in the Helsinki region. Remote work and multilocal living are reshaping residential preferences, loosening the traditional link between workplace and residence, and increasing the importance of housing quality, environment, and everyday functionality. In Kirkkonummi, this is not expressed as a shift away from the metropolitan region, but rather as a reconfiguration within it: the municipality offers a context where accessibility to Helsinki can be combined with more space, proximity to nature, and alternative lifestyles.

At the same time, these developments raise new questions for planning practice. How should municipalities respond to residents who are present only part-time but still use services and infrastructure? What kinds of housing typologies and spatial solutions support hybrid living patterns? And how can planning balance long-term structural coherence with increasingly flexible and individualized ways of living? The student work does not provide definitive answers, but it brings these tensions into focus in a concrete and locally grounded way.

A further recurring observation concerns identity. Students repeatedly questioned the tendency to define Kirkkonummi primarily in relation to Helsinki or Espoo. Instead, they highlighted the municipality's own internal diversity and the strength of its village structure as a potential foundation for development. This perspective resonates with the municipality's own strategic emphasis on local identity, while also suggesting that future attractiveness may depend less on imitation of metropolitan centres and more on the articulation of distinct, place-based qualities.

Taken together, the projects presented in this publication demonstrate how theoretical concepts can be translated into concrete planning proposals in a real-world context. They also illustrate the value of combining teaching, research, and collaboration with municipalities. By working with a concrete case and engaging with local stakeholders, students were able to develop analyses that are both conceptually grounded and directly relevant to ongoing development discussions.

For Kirkkonummi, the insights offered here do not constitute a single vision, but rather a set of perspectives that highlight key questions for future development: how to strengthen community and identity, how to organize mobility and everyday life in more sustainable ways, and how to build on the municipality's unique relationship with nature. These are not only local questions, but part of a broader shift in how living, mobility, and development are currently being rethought.

Communities and Municipal Development in Kirkkonummi

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1. Introduction

Kirkkonummi is a municipality of over 40 000 residents in Southern Finland, and it seeks to grow with new urban development and investment. In their city strategy for 2024-2030, one of their main goals is to be the most desirable place to live in the whole Helsinki metropolitan area (Kirkkonummen kunta, n.d.). But small communities, especially peripheral areas in Nordic countries, are facing challenges like declining populations. Now, the municipality is at a crossroads, needing to decide what kind of future it deems worthy of pursuing. In this report on Kirkkonummi, we examine the municipality from the standpoint of communities and municipal development. We explore this topic through three themes: 1) new residents, 2) participation and civic engagement, and 3) safety and security. Based on academic literature, policy documents, and our own data collection and analysis, we propose recommendations of policies to the municipality of Kirkkonummi.

According to a cross-country study of migration in the Nordics from 2025 migration among people under 40 in Finland is mostly in the direction away from rural and semi-urban areas towards urban areas. Especially when compared to other Nordic countries, the number of people preferring urban areas in Finland is very high. (Nordregio et al., 2025) However, recent research shows that the best quality of life is not found in big cities but in smaller cities and rural towns, which Kirkkonummi profiles as (Hannell & Mattila, 2024). Some of the most important factors influencing the movement decision in general are housing, work and education among younger people, as well as family friendliness and closeness to nature in later moves (Nordregio et al., 2025). One of the biggest groups willing to move to rural areas are people who have strong personal connections to the place. (Mulder et al., 2020; Nordregio et al., 2025) Additionally, a paper by Fertner et al. (2015) finds that in Denmark a safe childhood and an active old age are the number one reason for families and people to settle in small towns. A Swedish paper by Sandow and Lundholm (2020) studied that in terms of socioeconomic background, higher income earners are more mobile and likely to move to small towns out of choice, but low-income earners may move due to displacement from big cities as costs of living and housing become too high.

In addition to internal domestic migration, immigration from abroad is predicted to grow in the Helsinki region (HSY, 2025). Kirkkonummi should not ignore this demographic trend. In 2020 a study was published which detailed that most semi-urban and rural municipalities in Finland did not have any concrete planning regarding the international immigration and were therefore losing the chance to take control of future development in this area (Heino & Jauhiainen, 2020). Kirkkonummi has a legal framework for the integration of immigrants, since January 2025, but it is unclear how local immigrants have found this in practice. With one of the community's stated aims being to create a "communal and lively Kirkkonummi", as mentioned in its integration program (Municipality of Kirkkonummi, 2024), the subgroup for new residents decided to investigate the aspects of why people move to Kirkkonummi, how they were able to integrate and how they were supported during the process. The aim is to investigate what would need to be done to achieve a better framework regarding future immigration of both Finnish as well as non-Finnish residents.

With population growth through new residents, the importance of community building through participation and civic engagement is growing. When it comes to specific groups such as minority groups (immigrants, children, elderly etc.), it is important to note the sense of belonging is shaped by personal experiences, local expectations and public policies. Belonging is negotiated through daily social participation, such as interactions, reciprocity, and adherence to local norms, but remains largely conditional on language skills, employment, and social behavior. Civic engagement is also influenced by structural barriers like limited access to language courses, restrictive legal statuses, distrust in government, inconvenient meeting times, lack of childcare or translation, and digital divide issues (limited access to technology). Cities should adopt a mixed approach, combining digital participation with in-person community events to create inclusive, equitable, and diverse participation in planning processes. (Schneider, 2025; Kashem & Gallo, 2023)

That brings a challenge of development in these areas, but new solutions are also increasing like community development. Some could be described as social innovations (SIs). Social innovations are related to activities where social interactions go beyond the geographical area of the rural community and have a sense of belonging to the place and work towards a common goal to develop the place. It can involve the whole community such as NGOs, teachers, public sector, businesses, and involve people from other communities for a transformative change (Nordberg, 2023; Ljungsberg, et al. 2020). Another tool that can be used together with the SIs is public participation geographic information systems (PPGIS) methods; those can produce multifaceted information, especially in the early phases of the urban planning process. PPGIS can bridge the gap between citizens and planners, leading to more responsive, place-based urban planning — but it requires institutional commitment and proper methodological design (Kahila-Tani, 2015).

In terms of safety and security, smaller towns face different challenges than big cities with large populations. Crime has been considered mostly an urban problem whereas small towns are able to mitigate it partly through strong community disincentives (Glaeser & Sacerdote, 1999). Currently, major safety concerns lie with traffic and promoting safe environments for children, while crime or drug-related safety concerns are not seen as big issues (Municipality of, Kirkkonummi, 2024). As Kirkkonummi pursues new, more urban development, it may face new safety concerns as new residents move in and the village-like sense of community in the municipality is challenged (Rakauskas et al., 2009). Therefore, we can see that the sense of safety is connected to local participation and civic engagement. Although safety perceptions form in complex ways, the neighborhood environment is one factor which contributes to a resident's perceptions of safety and security. In the context of Kirkkonummi we sought to find out which characteristics of the Kirkkonummi neighborhoods affect the perception of neighborhood safety and how do they compare. Based on our findings and previous literature, we propose how safety perceptions could be improved in Kirkkonummi through impact on the environment.

Based on our initial background research, these are our research questions pertaining to each sub-theme:

1. Why do people move to Kirkkonummi, how do new residents integrate and are they supported during the process?
2. How could Kirkkonummi be more attentive to its community needs and foster local democracy to its population in innovative and inclusive ways?
3. Which characteristics of the Kirkkonummi neighborhoods affect the perception of neighborhood safety?

2. Data

To answer the above research questions, we split into sub-groups to address each of our three sub-topics. We conducted fieldwork in Kirkkonummi on 17th November to gather data on the ground. In this section, we detail the process behind our data collection.

2.1 New Residents

Our objective was to collect a diverse range of perspectives about life in Kirkkonummi and integration into Kirkkonummi as a new resident. We did fieldwork mainly in the Masala neighborhood and the city center of Kirkkonummi. As our primary method we used semi-structured interviews, which we also supported by collecting observations. Interviews were the fastest way to gather data while allowing unexpected discoveries to emerge. In the end we collected the following datasets:

1. Ten street interviews with residents of Kirkkonummi
2. An in-depth interview with a local return migrant
3. An in-depth interview with an immigration specialist working at the municipality
4. Observations

Our findings are presented below.

2.1.1 Street interviews

The aim of the street interviews was to collect short form responses to why people have chosen to move to and live in Kirkkonummi. They were conducted on a Monday in the Masala neighborhood between 9:00-10:00 in the morning and in the city center of Kirkkonummi between 14:00 and 15:00. The locations for the interviews were chosen strategically, in the hopes of catching newer residents in the new area of Masala and locals in the city center. The questions and answers are presented in the tables below.

Table 1. Street Interview Questions for New Residents

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6
When did you move to Kirkkonummi?	Where did you move from?	Why did you move to Kirkkonummi?	Did you face any challenges? Could the municipality have helped you?	How would you describe life in Kirkkonummi in 3 words?	What is your age?

Table 2. Responses to Street Interviews

Masala						
Description	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Woman sitting at the train station, working on her laptop	2019	Helsinki	First child on the way, cheaper housing, good train connection to work in Helsinki	No	Calm, village like, daughters' friends are close	34
2 Woman walking near the train station	Nov 2025	Helsinki	Moved here just because they could	No	Calm, nice people, warm	18
3 Woman near S-Market	Sept 2025	Slovenia	To au pair	No big challenges, maybe just that the prices are more expensive than in Slovenia	Beautiful, nature is close, lots of nature paths	19
4 Man walking near the Liinaharja day care	2024	East Uusimaa	Kids live in Lohja so Kirkkonummi is closer to them	No	Cool place	43
5 Woman near the Liinaharja day care	2021	Espoo	For the children, cheaper place to buy a home	Not much; public transport works well enough, but there could be better connections in the periphery areas as she uses public transport daily	Close to nature, appealing to kids, energetic	30
6 Man walking near Masala day care	Recently	Tikkurila	Spend retirement here, they lived here for one year as a child	No	More pleasant than Helsinki, calm, no commotion	66

City Centre							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
7	Man in a hurry by the library	1975	Helsinki	We got an apartment from here	No	Pleasant, nature, expensive prices	83
8	Man by the church	1979	Jyväskylä	Got a job and an apartment	No	Close to the capital, peaceful enough, cozy	77
9	Woman by the library	2013	Philippines	Moved with Finnish husband	No	Peaceful, forest, mushrooms	45
10	Woman by the train station	2010	Espoo	Desired more countryside-like place to spend retirement in	No	It's been nice here	73

2.1.2 Interview with the return resident

To better understand the position of returning residents in Kirkkonummi the researchers chose to interview a return resident that moved back to Kirkkonummi 4 months ago after finishing his studies in Turku but lived almost 20 years of his life in Kirkkonummi. The reason for coming back to Kirkkonummi was both due to the work of his fiancé in Kirkkonummi and the closeness of the place to his own workplace in Espoo. Despite one of them commuting to a different municipality for work, they did not own a car and were happy to rely on public transport for commuting. One interesting point was that he mentioned that without the personal connection to Kirkkonummi they would have most probably would not have considered it a place to move to.

When asked about re-integration into the community, the interviewee mentioned that he had no problems going back into the community and that most of his previous social contacts were still intact. He mentioned playing football and getting many social interactions through that. He also mentioned that some of his friends either never left or returned after studying. As for the question of whether the municipality could have helped more, the only thing mentioned was support for the move since that was challenging over a long distance.

When talking about the different areas of Kirkkonummi he mentioned that the different areas of Kirkkonummi - Masala, Veikkola and Kirkkonummi center - are perceived as far away from and very unrelated to each other. At the same time, he mentioned that he sees the city trying to attract young people and those with lower incomes with the production of new housing and the creation of new jobs like the new cable factory. When the interview focused on the status of immigrants in Kirkkonummi he said that immigrants are accepted in Kirkkonummi. With those that put effort into integrating being able to do so quicker with work or hobbies helping in that regard. Mentioning a person from Afghanistan that joins the football teams practice even though he does not really speak Finnish or English. He did also mention that it is probably hardest for those who live in Kirkkonummi but work elsewhere since they have few opportunities to make local connections.

Regarding future planning, he said that he was seeing himself and his fiancé move to Espoo or Turku within the next 5 to 10 years. Saying that he saw Kirkkonummi more like a stop in between. With the closeness to his parents being mentioned for one reason, he wanted to move somewhere a bit further away. He made it especially clear that he wanted to move somewhere that was not Helsinki but offered the amenities of a bigger city. Specifically, looking for a bigger city with a rural feel.

2.1.3 Interview with immigration specialist:

As we also wanted the perspective of the municipality on the topic of new residents in Kirkkonummi, we contacted an immigration specialist from the municipality. As this was a longer-form interview that lasted over 20 minutes, we will simply summarize the interview briefly in this section and go into further details in our analysis section.

We began the interview by asking about the demographics of new residents in Kirkkonummi. Having established that most new residents are from other parts of Finland or return migrants, we further explored why people move to Kirkkonummi or move back here after having moved to surrounding areas like Helsinki or Espoo. We then asked about challenges faced by the municipality when it comes to the integration of new residents. In this part of the interview, he discussed the issue of outreach to new residents who are outside of the labor market. We also asked about the municipality’s approach to integration, specifically their 2025-2026 integration program (Municipality of Kirkkonummi, 2024). He explained the importance for the municipality to help residents integrate on a municipality-level instead of just giving general information about Finland.

2.1.4 New Resident Observations

As for our street observations, we noted what stood out to us or surprised us as we walked around and talked to people in the municipality. Our main observations are summarized in the table below:

Table 3. Observations in Kirkkonummi Municipality.

	Environment	People	Other Observations
Overall	Language of signage in public areas - some include English, while some do not	Very quiet streets throughout the day	Municipality sees nature as key contributor to attractiveness of Kirkkonummi General sense of competition with Espoo

Masala	Distinct divide between new apartments and older, 'lived-in' houses Lack of distinct central hub or street	We encountered mostly new residents in Masala	Residential and sprawled Dominated by Joo real estate firm
City Center	Prevalence of carparks and cars throughout the streets Lack of a distinct central hub or street	Surprisingly many children seen in the library	

2.2 Participation and Civic Engagement

Semi-structured interviews with locals were conducted in Kirkkonummi with the aim of getting their perspective of their participation and civic engagement towards the community. In total, seven interviews were conducted, outlined below:

Table 4. Responses in the interviews

Person/Question	How long have you lived in Kirkkonummi	Have you ever participated in a community driven project	Are you aware of the ways you can participate in municipal decision making in Kirkkonummi	Do you feel that you can participate in municipal decision making in a meaningful way in Kirkkonummi	Age
1	Since 1984	No	Don't know	No	86
2	45 years	No, except voluntary work for the housing associations community areas	Voting	Not really, but would like to know who makes the decisions	Pensioners

3	4 years	No	There are announcements online, Local newspaper (Kirkkonummen Sanomat)	Not for anything meaningful, mostly livability	36
4	19 + 1 years	Municipal festival day (Kirkkonummi päivät, with local firms, clubs etc.). Local football club	Voting	In an equal way as everybody else, democracy	25
5	Since 1985 (moved here to establish a kiosk, because there was none)	No	Going into politics yourself	Yes	62
6	1 year	No	Doesn't know and doesn't care, is moving away	If they were interested in participating, maybe	22
7	Since 1992, moved for work	Voluntary work for the housing associations community areas	Voting	No	65

2.2.1 Participation and Civic Engagement observations

In general, the encountered resident's residency ranged from 1 year to over 40 years. Although most lived there for more than two decades. Interviewees are mostly young adults (22-25) to older (62-86). When it comes to community engagement, most respondents do not take involvement in community projects. When there is involvement, it's in projects related to voluntary work with housing associations, local clubs, or participation in municipal events. The awareness of participatory options is limited. Especially, since most of the respondents are only aware that they can participate by

voting. Tied to this, several respondents indicated that they perceive a lack of influence in decision-making. Young people show low interest.

2.3 Safety and Security

2.3.1 Methods

Our methods for researching safety concerns were conducting a literature review, becoming acquainted with policy reports of Kirkkonummi, and conducting a field survey of neighborhoods in the municipality. Based on literature (such as Nofziger & Williams, 2005 and Airaksinen et al., 2021), we concluded that although crime is not prevalent in the community it does not mean that the community is inherently safe and that the residents do not have any concerns. According to data retrieved from Statistic Finland (2025), Kirkkonummi is a municipality with a low crime rate, and the most common offences are traffic violations and property crimes. Despite these statistics, media coverage can greatly influence which safety and security threats are considered most pressing.

To investigate the feel of the everyday life that takes place in Kirkkonummi, we conducted a field survey on 17th of November, where we surveyed three pre-selected neighborhoods and examined everyday processes such as traffic flow, residential mobility, greenery, public-space usage and the general feel and look of the areas. We made observations in three distinct Kirkkonummi neighborhoods: the uniformly residential Sundsberg, the mix of old and new around the Masala train station, and the municipal center with new finished and proposed development. Neighborhoods were selected to represent different residential areas in Kirkkonummi but mainly because of their easy accessibility with the limited time we had.

Altogether we spent approximately six hours in the field and most of that time was used to examine the city center and the neighborhood of Sundsberg. In the field, we walked partially planned routes but focused on letting our observations guide us to make us acquainted with the area naturally. During our walks, we exchanged our feelings about the area, made descriptive notes about the landscapes, and took photographs of different observations such as environmental conditions and the general streetscape. In addition, we tried to assess signs of community organization or disorganization and to analyze how they influence the perception of safety. To avoid ethical concerns, we did not trespass on any private property or take pictures that included people where they could be identified. Data collection relied on our presence in the public space and how we as students and outsiders to the municipality perceived previously unknown environments. Observations were chosen as an accessible method to provide a clear overview of the characteristics of these neighborhoods from the point of view of outsiders coming to Kirkkonummi by public transport and accessing the different parts of the municipality on foot. Although we attempt to mitigate any biases and base our analysis on research literature, we are limited by the preselected time and date for the observations as well as by the fact that much of the municipality is not accessible without a car.

2.3.2 Findings

Sundsberg, according to our observations, reflected an idyllic family-oriented lifestyle. The whole area apart from a couple of exceptions, seen in Figure 1, consisted of detached and terraced houses which made the area feel uniform and visually uninteresting (Figure 2). The general atmosphere in Sundsberg was relaxed and quiet but also a bit unwelcoming. As a purely residential area with few to no spaces attracting outsiders, like plazas or commercial fronts, from our outsider point of view, the neighborhood was not meant to be traveled through.



Figure 1. Left: One of the only high-rises in Sundsberg. Figure 2. Right: Streetview in Sundsberg (Vapaaherrankaari). Photos by authors.

The lack of mixed housing was evident from the streetscape: apart from a few daycares, a school and a grocery store at the edge of the neighborhood, there were no commercial buildings, hence daily activities such as working and shopping most likely happen outside of Sundsberg. Even so, we did not witness any heavy traffic flow in the area although residents' reliance on private cars was evident in the dominance of driveways, garages, and parking spaces integrated into the housing design. To us, it was clear that Sundsberg was developed for family-focused living. The neighborhood is detached from the main roads, it did not seem to have heavy traffic flow or frequent public transportation, and the area does not offer any attractions designed for non-residents. Overall, Sundsberg can be characterized as a modern suburb, where privacy and security are emphasized. With limited opportunities for social mixing, it is unclear if this area can truly generate engagement among its residents, let alone with the wider municipality area.

Our visit to Masala was quite short, so observations from there are somewhat cursory. We walked a short distance from the Masala train station, which did offer a stark contrast to Sundsberg but was not otherwise particularly interesting or conspicuous in any way. In Masala we saw things that were non-existent in Sundsberg, like petty vandalism, dated buildings, potholes in roads, and wear and tear (Figures 3–5). These, according to Nofziger and Williams (2005), can be signs of social disorganization. In Masala we also saw some security cameras in public spaces: for example, an alleyway leading to a bar was under surveillance.



Figure 3. Top: Bus stop in Masala. Figure 4. Middle: Masala train station. Figure 5. Bottom: vandalism in Masala. Photos by authors.

The last portion of the day we spent in Kirkkonummi city center which did feel traditionally more urban than the other two neighborhoods. The lack of a clear center or places for spending time was strongly noted, although some of the area was relatively lively despite it being daytime when many people are at work. We visited multiple locations like the new public library Fyyri, the train station, the city hall, the square in front of the church, and both a high school and a vocational school campus. In the municipal center, there were multiple construction sites (Figure 6) that, in addition to being an eyesore, obstructed us with detours and closed roads which were sometimes difficult to navigate. The contrasts between different architectural styles in the city center were palpable: some buildings like the Fyyri library and the church have quite a distinct presence in the town center. The future development of the central areas could make use of these existing elements when incorporating new ones. When it comes to the traffic environment, cars dominate the neighborhood (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Left: Kirkkonummi center awaiting construction. Figure 7. Right: busy roads near the municipality center. Photos by authors.

Table 5. Main observation findings.

Factors impacting on perceived safety in Kirkkonummi neighborhoods based on observations				
	Building types	Walking environment	Services	Promotion of community
Sundsberg	Nearly uniformly residential, detached and terraced houses	Dedicated sidewalks with safety measures, long distances, repetitive scenery, speed bumps	Limited, small grocery store, daycares, school	Shared spaces for play and being outside, neighboring houses form small communities

Masala	Mix of old and new apartment blocks, some services	Potholes, industrial scenery, limited sidewalks	Bigger grocery stores, restaurants, bars	No clear area for residents to gather and interact
Kirkkonummi center	Businesses and public services, not many apartments in the very center, new and ongoing development	No clear center or meetup points, multiple construction sites, train station apart from center	Storefronts, big and small businesses	market square, new library/ community center

3. Analysis

3.1 New Residents

3.1.1 Street interviews

As we had hoped, we only met people who were very new residents to Kirkkonummi. The average age of Masala sample was 35, so quite young. Having children appeared to be the top reason for moving to Kirkkonummi, whether it was because of lower costs of family housing or the child-friendly environment that nature and tranquility bring. In the center on the other hand, we met much older people, who were on average almost 70 years old. It was surprising that in this group no one was born and raised in Kirkkonummi, but everyone had moved from somewhere else, usually before retirement for a job or an apartment. Only Interviewee 6 in Masala mentioned he returned because he had lived in Kirkkonummi for a year as a child. Based on these interviews, Kirkkonummi appears to be an attractive place for families with young children and pensioners, similar to what we found in the literature (Fertner et al., 2015). Perhaps the synergies between these groups could be explored. It's also noteworthy that most participants noted their appreciation for the calmness of life in Kirkkonummi. This seemed to be one of the pull factors to the place.

One thing that was not framed as a pull factor, but which is interesting to draw attention to, is the use of public transport. Interviewee 5 specifically mentioned that she uses public transport, even with children. It is also quite likely that at the age of 18 and 19, interviewees 2 and 3 primarily use active and public transport to move around, as car ownership is uncommon at such a young age. In general, less and less young people are obtaining a driver's license at all, especially in big cities (Kalluinen, 2025; Traficom, 2024). Planning the municipality so that it is easy to get around by walking, biking and public transport would not only support the mobility of children, youth and pensioners who cannot drive anymore, but potentially current urban dwellers who are looking to live somewhere peaceful without a car.

3.1.2 Interview with returning resident

As an addition to our street interviews the semi structured interview with the returning resident gave us the perspective of a very recently returned local. While he indicated that the move was also connected to family, the main reasons for the move back to Kirkkonummi seems to be the relative distance to his and his fiancés work. This connects to a Swedish study from 2020 that found that young adults were more likely to move back to their hometown after studying if their parents or siblings still lived there (Mulder et al., 2020). However, the study could not conclusively determine if there are no other important factors. Our case points to it playing a role, but there are bigger factors at play. Nonetheless, the personal connection to Kirkkonummi did play a role during the decision making, meaning young people moving out of Kirkkonummi could be a target demographic for trying to get them to move back into the municipality; especially in the context of some of his friends following a similar path of moving back to Kirkkonummi. Regarding integration, this interview backed up the street interviews with next to no big struggles being reported. Even more so, with the social circle of the interviewee being very much intact after having left for a while.

The distance discussed between the different areas indicates that the Municipality is not really seen as a collective whole but more like a collection of multiple smaller cities that just happen to be in the same municipality. With the municipalities' efforts to grow, coming mostly from housing production and job creation. In his perception, those being targeted at young people and low-income earners. When it came to immigrants within the community his view indicated that immigrants were accepted from the community but unfortunately could not say to which level this goes. In general, the integration seems to be very personal and dependent on your own efforts in Kirkkonummi. With the caveat that people who do not have work or hobbies they pursue in Kirkkonummi might have a more challenging time than others.

In regard to his future planning, his willingness to leave Kirkkonummi and clearly stated goal of moving to a bigger city, although with a rural feel, means that Kirkkonummi might need to think about how to keep people there after attracting them. This is somewhat alleviated by the fact that many of the residents interviewed in the city center moved to Kirkkonummi and decided to stay there for a longer time. It could also mean that creating or encouraging more services and a more urban city center might attract people that are looking for this exact niche of an urban rural area.

3.1.3 Interview with immigration specialist:

As can be seen from the above, we have gathered a variety of perspectives from our street interviews with Kirkkonummi residents. Our interview with the immigration specialist provides a useful top-down perspective on the topic of new residents to complete our data collection process.

Our first insight from the interview is about the connectivity between Kirkkonummi and the surrounding regions of Helsinki and Espoo. During the interview, he explained how some residents of Kirkkonummi initially move to Helsinki and Espoo for career or employment reasons but end up

returning as they realize that it is actually feasible to simply commute to these areas via public transport. So, the connectivity of Kirkkonummi to the surrounding metropolitan areas is a contributing factor for return migrants. From our perspective, this connectivity can also be leveraged to make Kirkkonummi more attractive as a destination for new residents in general. Living in Kirkkonummi means not only enjoying the services offered within the municipality but also gaining access to opportunities within the surrounding metropolitan services. This connectivity forms the basis of one of our policy recommendations explained later.

Our next key insight is on the topic of integration. In our background research, we found that current literature on integration of new residents in small towns is largely focused on the labor market. For instance, a paper studying immigration in Turku (Heikkilä et al., 2022) examined the challenges of "immigratization" (p. 11) and how language barriers can pose challenges for foreign migrants, especially in the labor market. Our interview complemented the literature review by providing perspective on the integration of new residents who are outside of the labor market. In the interview, he highlighted how outreach is a huge challenge regarding those outside the labor market such as elderly people or stay-home parents. While the integration services are present, the challenge is finding and reaching out to these people outside of the labor market to get them to apply for these services in the first place. In contrast, new residents who need help with seeking jobs have to first register as unemployed, making it comparatively easier to reach out to them and offer integration services.

Finally, the interview provided a helpful, wider perspective on integration in Kirkkonummi. When asked about what the municipality can do to better integrate new residents, he described the present issue where residents are only familiar with their neighborhood in Kirkkonummi, but are not aware of the services within the municipality as a whole and its surrounding areas. Combining this insight with our observations of the city center and streets in Kirkkonummi, it seems that a revitalization of the city center may help new residents foster a stronger sense of belonging to Kirkkonummi on the municipality scale.

3.2 Participation and Civic Engagement

The theoretical perspectives about social innovations, PPGIS (Nordberg, 2023; Ljungsberg, et al. 2020; Kahila-Tani, 2015) and civic engagement, highlight many of the dynamics observed in Kirkkonummi. Although rural and small municipalities of Nordic countries are searching for new ways of developing its communities and democratic participation, the data from the interviews revealed a low level of community engagement in Kirkkonummi. When it occurs, participation happens to concentrate in informal and volunteer contexts, like associations or local clubs, instead of organized initiatives that could bring transformative changes.

The same way, although PPGIS and other participative tools have a potential to generate knowledge and improve democratic engagement, the knowledge about the communication channels of participation between the residents varies. Some residents mentioned digital announcements or local

newspapers as a resource of information, but others did not know about the process of decision-making. That is aligned with the theoretical background that argues about the institutional compromise and accessible methods of participation to guarantee inclusion, and eliminating barriers, such as lack of time, difficulties with technology or challenges with language (Schneider, 2025; Kashem & Gallo, 2023).

The interviews also reveal the perception of participation, where many do not feel that they can influence municipal decision-making, reinforcing the idea that belonging and civic engagement are shaped by personal experiences and expectations. Together, these findings suggest that Kirkkonummi is a municipality with a strong potential for participation and civic engagement: it has a mix of long-term residents, voluntary work, and existing communication channels. But it is important to mention that they currently face challenges related to the knowledge of those channels within the community.

3.3 Safety and Security

Based on our data, previous literature, and Kirkkonummi municipal policies we first surmise that Kirkkonummi is currently a safe place to live with notable differences in environmental factors affecting safety perceptions between the three neighborhoods of Kirkkonummi center, Masala, and Sundsberg. However, as the municipal leaders hope to preserve safety in the city strategy (Kirkkonummi, 2024), they need to uphold certain standards with future development. Here, safety and security are not seen as only preventing crime, but rather they are considered as deriving from the residents' social cohesion and well-being in different neighborhoods. In addition, different kinds of built environments can impact on perceptions of safety: for instance, traffic environments can harm safety perceptions (Ceccato et al., 2025). Secondly, we see that while new construction signals growth and modernity, it should be noted that development can promote community cohesion but risks contributing to community fragmentation. As familiarity with a neighborhood is conducive to a perception of safety (Abraham et al., 2025), providing a reason to visit different neighborhoods can lead to more positive perceptions and foster place-attachment. For instance, Masala currently offers few reasons for any outsider to visit it.

Thirdly, we note that the municipality may risk fostering segregation patterns with current neighborhood differences. Segregation is a persistent problem in urban communities, and right now, the vast municipality of Kirkkonummi is already geographically fragmented into different village-like units. The differences in these communities, based on our own field day, are starkly visible in types of housing and service availability as well as in regard to amenities supporting community-building. For this reason, it may be questioned if developing such different residential areas can be justified considering evidence that the strength of the local community is tied to the prevalence of social controls and the perception of safety (Ceccato, 2015; Glaeser & Sacerdote, 1999). Safety issues related to segregation should be anticipated if Kirkkonummi wishes to develop into a more urban municipality. Additionally, exclusionary neighborhoods like Sundsberg may promote internal cohesion but negatively impact other areas. Exclusion does not have to be physical barriers, it can also mean

inadequate communication, accessibility issues, a lack of understanding, language barriers and sometimes outright discrimination.

Finally, promoting safety and security concerns communities as a whole but also engages individuals. Based on the literature and our time spent in Kirkkonummi we believe that safety in different neighborhoods is tied to the local communities. Residents should experience an attachment to their neighborhoods to feel collective responsibility, motivating them to make their surroundings feel safe by upholding the socially accepted norms of their area. Therefore, to build attachment and ownership and therein enhance security, Kirkkonummi should also promote inclusive decision-making processes. Here, as Kirkkonummi is particularly attractive to families, the perspective of children should not be neglected.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the village-like feel of the main neighborhoods is a strength the municipality can play into. This characteristic clearly makes current residents remain, and it has attracted new residents and makes Kirkkonummi feel like a safe place. However, neighborhoods like Sundsberg may not foster the inclusive feel of a village center, and future development should avoid creating exclusionary spaces. A positive takeaway from Sundsberg is its places of social action, such as park space for children to play in. An attractive and inclusive center in each area would create the potential for lively social interaction that invites participation in the local community while simultaneously mitigating segregation patterns seen in bigger cities.

In terms of municipal development, we see that Kirkkonummi should prioritize providing good communities for families as well as older adult residents, as our analysis showed these are the main groups it is attractive to. Instead of aspiring to imitate it, Kirkkonummi can offer an alternative to Espoo with a peaceful urban village feel in its centers—walkability, daily services nearby, public transport connections and quality-built environments combined with access to nature. These amenities would also be a way to attract visitors. Instead of being a competitor for new residents, Espoo could be a collaborative partner.

Currently, the residents may not feel like they can influence the municipality's decision-making, which challenges good community development. This implies developing innovative ways for the community to participate, including minorities. As Kirkkonummi anticipates future development, the municipality should pay attention to the risks associated with segregation and a high turnover of residents, if it seeks to unlock the benefits of a more urban town center. Especially for families with children and older residents, the pedestrian environment, safety and appeal should be a future focus.

5. Policy recommendations for Kirkkonummi

5.1 Vibrant Village Centers

Our first policy proposal is to adopt selective urbanization strategies to invigorate the municipality through the development of urban village centers in each neighborhood. This policy proposal draws upon the work of expert urban designer Peter Neal in his 2003 edited volume, *Urban Villages and the Making of Communities*. In the volume, he identifies the urban village model as an “important and viable approach to creating successful and long-lasting neighborhoods” (p. 3). He highlights how the neighborhood is increasingly “playing a central role in both Britain’s urban renaissance and New Urbanism in the United States” (p. 13), creating more sustainable and livable urban environments. This research corroborates one of the key findings from our fieldwork, which identified the village-like feel in each of Kirkkonummi’s neighborhoods as a potential advantage that the municipality can tap into.

In his chapter on neighborhood design in practice, Neal (2003) highlights the best principles for the development of urban village neighborhoods. One of the key insights from the chapter is the importance of establishing a “clear urban structure” (p. 127). For Neal, central public spaces are vital for the urban structure of individual neighborhoods. We, therefore, propose central areas in each neighborhood providing amenities, communal activities, shops, and walkable streets to the population. Figures 8 and 9 describe how this could look on an idea level. These central areas will provide much-needed spaces for social activity and civic engagement. The provision of these spaces in both the city center and individual neighborhoods allows for the invigoration of the city center without neglecting the other neighborhoods, rather enabling these individual neighborhoods like Masala to express their individual identities. From a spatial perspective, these urban city centers are a necessary first step for the implementation of our other policy proposals detailed in the following sections.



Figure 8. Left: City center of Kirkkonummi (Photo: Aurora Luukkanen). Figure 9. Right: Reimagined central street (Design: Aurora Luukkanen).

5.2 Providing Spaces for Community Gatherings

Our recommendation for Kirkkonummi is to enable community action and integration by offering spaces such as schools and libraries for gatherings, events, associations, clubs, and other activities. One such idea could be to offer spaces on the ground floor level of apartment buildings, such as depicted in Figure 11. The municipality could also partner with other municipalities or companies to meet budgets for events encouraging community cohesion.

This would involve the residents, including migrant groups, coming together as official and unofficial groups to promote a feeling of belonging. Notably, participation and civic engagement are a key point in helping with the integration of migrant populations, elderly, and other minorities to their new home municipalities and in tackling key issues like a lack of belonging and demands for space and recognition as well as participation in decision-making (Ong'ayo, 2019).

The idea comes from the diasporic organizations, such as the “African Community – Dialogue and Cooperation with the Municipality” project from The Hague. In a joint effort with the Municipality of The Hague they made a common voice for policies affecting all – in this instance – African diasporas across nationalities, citizenship status and migration experiences (Ong'ayo, 2019).

5.3 Enabling Car-Lite Lifestyles

In the last century, the car has pretty much dominated mobility across the globe, especially in the western world. This is also true in Finland. Even though cars have increased mobility and convenience (Nieuwenhuijsen & Khreis, 2016), the downsides of car-centric planning and living have been acknowledged from local to global scale problems.

Although there is a huge difference in mobility needs in a rural municipality compared to a dense city, it would be worthwhile to increase independence from cars in municipalities like Kirkkonummi. The return migrant we interviewed told us how he and his fiancé live and work in Kirkkonummi and do not own a car and this is according to them no problem at all. We would suggest making this a selling point for Kirkkonummi. Of course, this would take some time and investments, because lowering car ridership does not work with only restricting car use, but it also needs encouragement for alternatives (e.g. with infrastructure and policies) (Kuss & Nicholas, 2022). This could in the long run highlight Kirkkonummi as a dynamic municipality that takes contemporary problems seriously and where a resident and their family could safely and easily live free from the confinement and dangers of car usage.

In the context of Kirkkonummi, the implementation of this recommendation could be in the form of car-free and identifiable central squares and main streets, with smaller streets and areas accompanying them, giving space for recreation, social activity and small businesses. The denser areas could benefit from a comprehensive and high-quality network of active mobility paths; the goal is to

give the ability to people to commute to work within 1 hour and access basic services within 20 minutes without having to drive. Car-free places leave more space for walking, cycling and recreation, improving livability (Mouratidis, 2025). This can additionally promote Kirkkonummi as a destination for leisure time and sports where people can, for example, enjoy the high-quality bike paths with the addition of the scenic nature in Kirkkonummi.



Figure 10. Left: Masala S-Market (Photo: Aurora Luukkanen). Figure 11. Right: Reimagined atmosphere of Masala center (Design: Aurora Luukkanen)

5.4 Becoming an Attractive Day Trip Destination

Right now, Kirkkonummi is a desirable place for many families with young children as well as pensioners. But what about people outside these groups? In our interview with the return resident who is a young adult without children, it was very revealing that he and his fiancé only considered Kirkkonummi as a real option to move to because he had grown up there. Additionally, all the pensioners we interviewed had some connections to Kirkkonummi before retirement. These findings show that some kind of familiarity with a place is an important first step to wanting to move there.

Therefore, to attract more new residents, we propose that Kirkkonummi makes it its goal to become an attractive day trip destination for visitors from the surrounding municipalities and beyond. By strengthening Kirkkonummi's image and appeal as a place to visit, more people may start to think of it as a real option for a place to live. Our recommendation is that Kirkkonummi turns its gaze toward Porvoo: everyone in Helsinki knows that Porvoo is a bucket list place to visit, for Finns and international visitors alike, and despite being physically further away from Helsinki than Kirkkonummi, it seems to be mentally closer because of its widely recognized reputation.

While Porvoo's "it factor" is its aesthetic of old architecture, the old church, and instagrammable streets, Kirkkonummi should develop its own attraction points around the unique local identity. The surrounding nature that most interviewees loved is a good place to start, but it should be

acknowledged that, right now, nature is not something that differentiates Kirkkonummi from other places in Finland; after all, every place in Finland can and does boast with its nature. Perhaps for Kirkkonummi, the distinguishing attraction could be the most exciting children’s playground, built into the trees and over rocks, where local and nonlocal families come to spend the day—similar to Laune Family Park in Lahti. Or the pull-factor is achieved by tapping into the experiences provided by the trails in the forests, around which cyclists and skiers plan whole vacations to complete the well-known and photogenic trails connecting Kirkkonummi to Porkkala—much like the Turku archipelago bike trail. A lucrative way to promote the local life and attract visitors to Kirkkonummi is to work with young local social media content creators to reach potential new residents.

Kirkkonummi already has an advantage over Porvoo with the easy, reliable commuter train access from Helsinki and Espoo, and perhaps in the future, improved access from Turku. The planned city center renewal is surely to be a decisive attraction point, as it is the first place visitors coming by train see. Is there a natural flow of social activity (for example shops, restaurants, bars, art galleries etc.) for pedestrians to follow that makes them stay in the city center? How does the city center incorporate nature into its architecture, spatial design and beauty? After visiting once and being impressed, it won’t take people long to realize that Kirkkonummi is much closer to the metropolitan area than they first thought, and that life in Kirkkonummi is filled with potential.

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The Makings of a Good Life in Kirkkonummi

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Introduction

Quality of life is a multidimensional and ambiguous term that can refer to many measured aspects of well-being, including financial, physical and mental health, social connectedness, and other subjective experiences. Although various more precise indicators of quality of life —such as morbidity, social activity and work ability —have been developed, this report will focus on examining quality of life through a broader context of small-town renaissance but focusing particularly on the municipality of Kirkkonummi. As Mulder & Tammaru (2021) reveal, smaller municipalities can be grounded in the pursuit of a better everyday life, greater security, ecological quality, and a meaningful sense of community belonging. Kirkkonummi has stated well-being of its residents and workers being one of its cross-cutting themes in its strategy (Kirkkonummen kuntastrategia, 2024), aiming to support and advance this through all of their future plans and policies. This report can provide new ways of thinking about planning from the perspective of residents' quality of life while supporting the well-being aspect of the municipal strategy.

In literature, quality of life is widely understood to be shaped by a range of interrelated social, economic, and environmental factors. The OECD's wellbeing framework identifies key dimensions of contemporary wellbeing such as health, personal safety, housing quality, social trust, and work life balance that together describe conditions that enable individuals and communities to a good quality of life (OECD, n.d.). These dimensions provide a useful conceptual basis for understanding how different aspects of daily life contribute to overall life quality. Hanell and Mattila (2024) discuss how perceived quality of life is often measured based on varying conceptual tools, which arise from different schools of thought to establish the framing through which quality of life is understood (Hannell & Mattila, 2024). These frames include, but are not limited to, measuring quality of life through happiness (hedonism), monetary/market value (utilitarianism), self-actualization/meaning in life (eudaimonia), the balance between positive and negative feelings (psychology), the extent to which a person's basic needs are met (needs-based), and the true capabilities that an individual has to carry out the actual use of resources that are available to them (capability approach). Hanell and Mattila then highlight the most commonly used framings in measuring quality of life as happiness, life satisfaction, and meaning in life. Mouratidis (2021) introduces the term subjective well-being to consider quality of life, which he argues as being comprised of the same three framings (life-satisfaction, happiness, and meaning in life) as Hanell and Mattila. Accordingly, we can understand subjective well-being and perceived quality of life as conceptually synonymous for the purpose of this report. With a wide variety of factors influencing these quality of life measures, as established by the OECD's well-being framework, our report will examine how the existing cultural identity, built environment, and role/significance of nature influence and impact upon Kirkkonummi's residents

perceived quality of life. The following sections will introduce the main findings from existing literature on these subdimensions and their interactions with quality of life.

Cultural identity and heritage environment

Situated in the immediate nearby area of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, Kirkkonummi represents a middle-sized municipality with approximately 40,000 population, facing a strategic challenge common to peri-urban regions. In the shadow of major hubs like Espoo and Helsinki, the municipality must formulate strategies not only to attract new inhabitants but, crucially, to foster a deep sense of belonging among current residents. This issue reflects broader European trends, with small to medium-sized towns facing depopulation and the shortening of local identity.

The literature suggests that addressing these challenges requires a rethink of the role of local culture. Siivonen (2011) critiques the tendency of regional development to view culture as a static entity. She argues that, in order for local identity to flourish within a context of global change, culture must be conceptualized as an interactive, dynamic process embedded within everyday life. Csurgó and Megyesi (2016) support this perspective, indicating through their research on six Hungarian rural micro-regions that local identities are highly variable. They found that a town's innovative capacity was significantly determined by how it reinterpreted and promoted its specific cultural heritage. Furthermore, they demonstrate a clear link between cultural environment and resident well-being.

Community sense and participation can contribute to improving people's quality of life, thereby reducing migration from small municipalities to larger cities. Salaripour et al. (2023) argue that small towns must pay attention to people's quality of life and sense of attachment. Residents' perceptions vary based on gender, age, level of education, length of residence, and level of income. The research shows that urban planning must take into account the needs and wishes of each group of people in order to provide everyone with spaces, services and opportunities that improve people's quality of life and sense of community (Salaripour et al., 2023.) The stronger people feel they belong to their residence, the more likely they are to participate in local affairs. According to von Reichert et al. (2014), when asked to return migrants about their motives for returning, many respondents mentioned the sense of community and belonging, as well as the desire to contribute. Many wanted to use their education and work experience to improve their old hometown and work for the community.

In the context of cultural tourism, Sábliková (2023) uses the example of Choceň in the Czech Republic to argue that official cultural events primarily serve to meet the social needs of residents rather than

merely to attract visitors. This highlights the importance of cooperation between local stakeholders in creating a cultural environment that first enhances the quality of life for the local community.

Built environment, scale, and quality of life

The impacts of varying individual and collective socio-economic factors on quality of life indicators have been often and extensively studied, and emerging literature has been focused on the role that the built environment, such as urban form, has on influencing the constituent parts of perceived quality of life. Mouratidis (2021) conceptualizes land use, transport systems, urban design and housing as constitutive of the built environment. He argues that these elements and infrastructures then affect subjective well-being through seven pathways: travel, leisure, work, social relationships, residential well-being, emotional responses and health. In other words, the structures and form of the built environment dictate behaviours and experiences in these seven domains of life, which resultingly influence the ways in which individuals perceive their quality of life. For example, Hanell and Mattila (2024) argue that city-like urban environments are often associated with lower levels of quality of life.

This approach of studying quality of life through subjective well-being and how that is fabricated through different pathways fits well with our aim of coming up with new ways to think about urban design supporting the quality of life. Additionally, within a broader framework, the built environment has been recognized as an important factor of well-being. According to the OECD's (2023) report on the built environment and well-being, physical settings create conditions that influence quality of life at both individual and community level. Elements such as urban design, buildings, infrastructure, transportation systems, land use patterns, and the availability of green spaces all shape the experience of the everyday; how the built environment is designed and arranged has a profound impact on residents' physical and mental health. Walkable neighbourhoods foster social interactions and trust; walkability can even increase civic participation and reduce crime. Green areas impact health through reduction of noise- and air pollution. In these ways the built environment has direct implications on residents' wellbeing (OECD, 2023). These components of the built environment affect not only functional aspects of living like mobility, safety, and access to services but also social interaction, health, and liveability (OECD, 2023).

In studying streetscape livability, Harvey and Aultman-Hall (2016) discuss how recognizing the spatial scale that streetscapes occupy can allow for understanding the built environment elements that can improve experiential quality in urban and residential settings. They argue that streetscapes, which are created by the size and arrangement of larger physical elements in our environments, occupy a midlevel spatial scale known as the mesoscale. More importantly, these need to be understood as separate from urban form (which describes the macroscale of urban environments, including issues such as density and spatial connectivity) and microscale urban design (which includes the individual

elements such as landmarks or building materials). According to Harvey and Aultman-Hall, evaluating urban and residential environments through the mesoscale strengthens our understandings on how the built environment affects human perceptions, which directly relates to perceived quality of life, as discussed above. In our study, we will examine how these perceptions relate to the subjective well-being and perceived quality of life of residents in Kirkkonummi.

Ecological environment: proximity to nature, air pollution

As part of this report, we examined the following question: How does proximity to natural surroundings and people's housing preferences affect quality of life?

The connection between proximity to natural surroundings and living habits and quality of life can be understood as a phenomenon in which people's everyday life and environment are intertwined. A living environment that includes natural surroundings shapes, for example, the types of routes people take, where they spend their free time, and what types of places are considered pleasant or calming. Living habits, in turn, guide people to seek out different environments, some of which emphasize proximity to nature and some more urban elements. The interaction of these factors creates a whole in which environmental features, residents' wishes, and everyday practices shape their perception of their own quality of life.

Based on Markku Karjalainen's and his colleagues' research article (Karjalainen et al. 2021) regarding Finnish suburban residents' living preferences, people rate the use of proximity to nature as an important feature of a home. Being close to a park or a forest or having a green street/yard environment is high on the list of what they want from a home. Also, according to a Danish survey, when people were asked what they wanted most from their neighborhood, proximity to green spaces was the most important factor (Andersen, 2011). Thus, in the big picture, there is a clear connection between proximity of natural surroundings, people's housing preferences, and quality of life.

In the so-called Western countries, as living standards have risen, the long-term megatrend in population development has been downward. This is also especially true in Finland as population ages and fertility rates fall. This phenomenon affects urban city development in the long term, and some city regions might be shrinking in the future due to demographic changes. In fact, according to the European Commission report (2022), shrinking may well become the new normal for many cities and the populations that inhabit them. Even cities that are currently stable or experiencing growth - like Kirkkonummi municipality - should anticipate and plan for possible shrinkage in the future. Such shrinkage can present an opportunity to reshape urban spaces to be more sustainable and inclusive

(European Commission, 2022). At the same time, however, municipalities and cities are struggling to keep the vitality of the area alive, and the construction of new housing has been seen as a way to help achieve this.

Research Questions

Based on the literature reviews carried out in the previous section, each group formed their own research questions to inform their study of the different dimensions of quality of life. These questions are as follows:

1. How do local traditions and cultural environments foster place attachment in Kirkkonummi?
 - a. How is the quality of life of people in Kirkkonummi maintained through local traditions and culture?
2. How do residents perceive the built environment in their daily lives?
 - a. What are possible solutions, considering streetscape design on the mesoscale, that can improve livability and quality of life in Kirkkonummi?
3. In which ways do environmental qualities - such as clean air and natural surroundings - influence the well-being of residents and attract newcomers in Kirkkonummi?

Using these questions to guide the research collection and analysis, the report will begin with a section on data, that is divided into subsections based on the three different dimensions. This is followed by the analysis section in which the results of the data collection are discussed, and which follows the same format as that of the previous section on data. Finally, a section on general conclusions brings together the findings from all subgroups, which is followed by our policy recommendations that have been formed based on the results from the analyses and backed by literature.

Data

Cultural identity and heritage

We collected data from Kirkkonummi by interviewing local residents, observing the environment, and taking photographs of various locations. Through interviews, we were able to hear the opinions of locals on the impact of Kirkkonummi's culture and local traditions on community spirit and perceived quality of life. In total, we interviewed eight people: six women and two men. Most of the interviewees were middle-aged or pensioners.

The data collection took place during the daytime on Monday, 17.11.2025. First, we conducted an interview in Sundsberg, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Kirkkonummi. From there we walked to Masala and got a couple more interviews. Finally, we moved to Kirkkonummi centre, in which we conducted the rest of the interviews in the afternoon. Due to time constraints during the field survey and the outdoor weather conditions on the day, the range of respondents reached, and the responses obtained may be affected and limited. We did not get many interviews with working people, and young people were also most likely at school.

In between the interviews, we observed different neighborhoods and areas and took pictures of things and places related to culture heritages and local environments. By walking around and observing different locations in Kirkkonummi, we gained a better understanding of the municipality's cultural services.

The interview questions are structured based on our research questions related to how local traditions and cultural environments foster place attachment, what cultural service they engaged in, and how the quality of life is maintained through local cultures. To explore these topics further, the main ideas of our interview questions were structured to bridge the gap between daily activities and emotional well-being. We began by examining the residents' practical engagement with cultural services in Kirkkonummi, such as libraries, museums and workshops, focusing on their usage habits and motivations. The dialogue moved beyond participation to consider the psychological impact of these services, investigating specifically whether they contribute to a sense of community and belonging. The questions primarily aimed at understanding how residents define local culture as well as analyzing the specific role that place attachment plays in maintaining and improving their overall quality of life.

Built environment

After considering various ways to approach the topics of our work in Kirkkonummi, we concluded that incorporating the voices of residents would be essential. We predicted that the local communities would perceive and interpret their everyday environments in ways that differ significantly from the perceptions we would acquire in our brief visit to the neighbourhoods. Incorporating these perspectives required carrying out semi-structured interviews of residents that we encountered on the streets during our field visit to Kirkkonummi. With a semi-structured interview format, we had two questions that we asked from each respondent, which were as follows: (1) How does this space/area feel to you? [Miltä tämä tila tuntuu sinulle?] (2) What would you require more of/what would you change to improve your quality of life? [Mitä kaipaisit lisää/ mitä muuttaisit, jotta se voisi parantaa sinun elämänlaatuasi?]. The first question aimed at hearing how the respondent feels in and around their residential area, and what elements in the built environment enhance these feelings (the

questions were prefaced with an explanation of our project and our focus on the built environment and quality of life, which helped direct respondents to focusing on the affective physical environment). With the second question, we hoped to hear what the residents perceive as needed to improve their quality of life, which would shed light on what they believe is important in the built environment of their residential area. Follow-up questions were then presented based on what the responses revealed and brought up, and if the respondents were eager to speak with us more about their experiences. The aim was to let the residents speak freely through what came to their mind without steering the path towards our own assumptions.

The interviews were supplemented with location data and pictures collected with Epicollect5 application. The notes were also written there which provided us with a systematic collection of each of the responses and allowed us to compare how different themes would come up in different locations. The pictures allowed us to combine the responses to the physical built environment. The combination of the tools (Epicollect5, field notes, pictures) used to document the unfolding of the interviews and the sites helped us capture the themes that emerged in each neighbourhood.



Figure 4. Map of interview locations based on Epicollect5 data

The interviews were conducted during the workday between 9 am and 3 pm. This most likely affected the demographic that was reached through the interviews. We did not classify the people interviewed based on socio-demographic indicators but tried to get interviewees that represented a variety of ages and sexes. Something that we suspect also affected the outcome of the interviews was our own background. Initially, we informed participants that we were from the University of Helsinki. This may have affected their responses, leading them to emphasize the positive aspects of their own neighbourhood. The interviews were done in three different areas of Kirkkonummi: Sundsberg, Kirkkonummi Centrum and Tolsa. We got five interviews from Sundsberg, four from the Centrum, and four from Tolsa.

Ecological environment

To collect data about Kirkkonummi's environmental qualities and their relationship with the local inhabitants, we decided to adopt walking research methods (WRMs). WRMs belong to the group of mobile research methods that enable researchers to move with research subjects, observing and collecting data linked to spatial locations (Kowalewski & Bartłomiejski, 2020). More specifically, we conducted ethnographic walks and walk-along interviews.

Ethnographic walks around Sundsberg and Kirkkonummi city center allowed us to perform slow observation, with a multisensory experience of the space which involved different types of bodily perceptions. In this approach, walking is a mindful and conscious practice, which requires the researchers to be sensitive to the subtle signals of the surrounding environment and to the relation between body and space and encounters with Others (Kowalewski & Bartłomiejski, 2020).

Walk-along interviews (also called walking interviews) center on the dynamic relationship between people and the places they inhabit, moving away from a traditional seated setting in favor of a more active and conversational environment. By harnessing the inherently socio-spatial character of human knowledge, this method allows researchers to learn not only from what participants say but also from how they move through and interact with their surroundings. Having conversations on site while slowly walking can deepen and enrich social-science inquiry, adding layers of insight that might remain hidden in more conventional settings. In fact, as participants move through their environment, they become more attuned to what surrounds them, often noticing details or events that prompt reflections and links between the research topic and their everyday experiences (Bibi & Ehgartner, 2021).

We chose WRMs because they give voice to the opinions of people who live in and regularly visit a place, revealing the habits, expectations, and needs of the inhabitants of Kirkkonummi and

Sundsberg. Furthermore, since our research focused on the influence of environmental qualities on citizens' well-being and the attractiveness of the place, we thought that walking through the places would give us a better qualitative understanding of the relationship of the village with nature. Specifically, ethnographic observations were made through dialogue between the two researchers, which were recorded, and transcribed and enriched with details that same evening. Several photos were also taken to support the observations.

We conducted five semi-structured walking interviews in Finnish, three in Sundsberg and two in Kirkkonummi. We chose to interview people who were walking in the selected areas and live nearby. The interviews lasted between 6 and 10 minutes. In Sundsberg, they were all conducted on the path that runs through a park between the forest and the houses and leads to the schools. There, we interviewed two young mothers with their children and a twelve-year-old boy. In Kirkkonummi, we stood in the parking lot in front of the shops in the town center and interviewed a middle-aged woman and an elderly couple. All interviews were recorded after obtaining the consent of the participants.

Below are the guiding questions we used for the interviews divided into two main sections:

Wellbeing in natural surroundings:

- How do you like the place where you live? Why?
- What do you like the most about the area where you live? Why?
- Do you think the quality of life here is better than in larger cities? Why?
- Do you spend time outdoors in nature?
- Do you think there are more people moving to this area in the last years? Do you think the natural environment and air quality influence their arrival?
- Is there something that you don't like much about this area?

Migration path:

- Why did you move here? Did the natural surroundings and better air quality play a role in your decision to move here?
- What do you like the most about the area where you live? Why?
- Do you think air quality is better here than where you lived before?
- Do you spend time outdoors in nature?

Analysis

Cultural identity and heritage

Kirkkonummi's municipal strategy 2024-2030 is a plan that guides the municipality's activities and decision-making. The future direction of the municipality and its most important long-term goals are formulated in the strategy. Three visions are set in the strategy: (1) Kirkkonummi, close to people and nature, from Porkkala to Nuuksio; (2) Kirkkonummi, the most wanted and vibrant municipality in the metropolitan area; and (3) Kirkkonummi, a sustainable, bilingual and international well-educated municipality for 700 years. (Municipality of Kirkkonummi, 2024.) Behind each of these visions is a desire to make Kirkkonummi a municipality where all people enjoy living and feel part of the community.

Under the three visions, 19 strategic targets have been set and additionally, there are cross-cutting themes and strategy indicators. One of the cross-cutting themes is the promotion of well-being: "we promote the well-being, health, and perceived quality of life of municipal residents and employees". Indicators measuring well-being maintained by cultural environments and local traditions include, among other things, resident survey, customer survey, number of participants in bigger events and their accessibility, and number of adult education center students aged 65 and older each year. (Municipality of Kirkkonummi, 2024.)

Municipality of Kirkkonummi (2024) emphasizes the community spirit and liveliness of the 700-year-old Kirkkonummi. In particular, the strategy describes the municipal center as a vibrant meeting place for people of all ages. Residents are encouraged to engage with culture, for example through joint events. In Kirkkonummi, rural livelihoods are thriving, and local food production is being promoted. The culture of lifelong learning is fostered, which inspires residents to develop themselves and become part of the local community. (Municipality of Kirkkonummi, 2024.) One important feature of Kirkkonummi is its bilingualism: approximately 16 % of inhabitants are Swedish speakers (Municipality of Kirkkonummi, n.d.).

Based on 8 interviews we conducted in different parts of Kirkkonummi, the interviewees span different age groups, lengths of residence, and identities. The following analysis will be undertaken according to the comprehensive interview content.

First, Fyyri (see picture 1.), the library, is mentioned by almost all interviewees regardless of age and gender, indicating that this location has evolved from a mere lending library into a central social hub.

As an elderly woman, who has lived in Kirkkonummi for 15 years, referred that she feels ‘part of the community even without talking to anyone when visiting the library’. And another woman, who has resided in the municipality for 25 years noted that it ‘creates a sense of community when bumping into acquaintances in the library’.

Secondly, cultural services have an existence value as well as a use value. They provide psychological support, especially for those who rarely use them. It was said by a middle-aged man who has lived there for 7 years and rarely visits cultural services that it’s ‘nice to know the library and theater are nearby and there’s no need to travel to Espoo’. Similarly, a middle-aged woman who has lived here her whole life considers the cultural services ‘enough’ for her. This shows that cultural services are not only set up for physical use but also provide a sense of stability, security, and local independence for Kirkkonummi as a self-sufficient municipality rather than a dormitory town that serves the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.



Figure 1. The Fyyri library.



Figure 2. The new House of Education, Lyyra, will be opened in 2027.



Figure 3. Announcements and advertisements in a notice board in the shopping centre Kirsikka, in the Kirkkonummi centre.

Built environment

The following analysis section will focus on the key points raised from each of the three neighborhoods in Kirkkonummi. We will first discuss these separately as the structure of the built environment varied greatly between these areas, and we believe it is important to highlight how these differences brought up varying themes.

Sundsberg

We visited the Kartanonranta residential area in Sundsberg, which was built in the early 2000s. The area itself consists of semi-detached and row houses that are built quite densely and close to each other (see Figure 5). When walking around, we noticed that the streets were designed on a human scale, with pedestrian and cycling lanes taking up as much physical space as the road designed for cars. This showed an element of what Harvey and Aultman-Hall (2016) refer to as mesoscale planning, as spaces for movement and interaction were not minimized to provide space for vehicles. However, a few respondents mentioned that it is almost a necessity to have a personal vehicle when living there as the distances to public transport are quite far (with no service within the actual residential area), and commuting times to places of employment, for example, can be almost tripled when relying on public transport. This revealed what appeared to be a contradiction between the idealised vision of the neighbourhood as one that is not centred around car usage, and the lived reality of needing to own a car to venture further than a few kilometres away from the residential area (such as to places of employment). Mouratidis (2021) also highlights the importance of the transport system on subjective well-being, with spillover effects on other domains, such as leisure or travel. For example, low travel satisfaction in a residential area can impact a resident's overall satisfaction with their area of residence, which is connected to one's perceived quality of life.



Figure 5. Layout of the Sundsberg neighbourhood

One of the topics that was emphasized by all respondents was the importance of being near nature, and the recreational opportunities that this provides, such as nature trails. Many of the people spoken to said it was a primary reason for them moving to the area. Arguably, the residents of Sundsberg did not view the nearby forested areas and seaside as separate from the built-up residential area, but as an extension and integral part of their neighbourhood. The closeness of nature as a central value for the residents of Sundsberg is reinforced on the website of the residents' association, which states that their role is to foster the natural environment as part of the area's important values (Sundsbergin Kartanonrannan asukasyhdistys ry, 2022). The residents stressed that they wished the nature to remain close by and untouched. They feared that the building of new residential houses would extend to the forest areas and the seashore. Something we found interesting was the focus on leaving the nature as it is and not making more trails or recreational opportunities through building.

The residents also raised concerns about the expected increases in noise level, and the already increased noise levels because of the building of the Microsoft data centre. One of the residents said they disapproved children running to the store K-market in Kartanonranta. It seemed like the distance from the outside areas and compactness made the residents, of which many are families with children, feel safe. A few also questioned the density of the semi-detached houses built. We tried to ask them if there were anything they would like to be built in their surroundings. All residents stressed that they were really happy with the services and built environment otherwise. And accordingly, the only thing they wished for was the neighbourhood to stay the same.

Kirkkonummi Center

Kirkkonummi's town center is the municipality's largest urban area. Residential buildings in the center are primarily apartment blocks. Interviews were conducted with individuals in the town center, from the railway station to behind the Fyyri- library. All interviewees were local residents engaged in their everyday routines. Re-occurring topics in the interviews in the town center was the ongoing facelift and construction going on. The residents viewed the construction as necessary for the "run down" town centre to get back some appeal. Improvement of the physical appearance of ones residential area and its effect on quality of life is supported by the report by OECD (2023). Besides the aesthetics of the area the residents articulated that they valued their surroundings highly. Some of the interviewees had moved back to Kirkkonummi and some had lived their whole lives in the area. Walkability of the town centre, walking paths, and sense of community was something emphasized repeatedly. People living in walkable areas are usually more active, feel more attachment to their neighbourhood (OECD, 2023). By our own perception of the area and based on the interviews we conducted, the public transport from the town centre was well organized and accessible. These

elements of walkability, public transport and a highway/busy road that does not cut through the center — which prevents the traffic noises from disturbing the town core — are all in line with urban planning strategies that Mouratidis (2021) and OECD (2023) assert as successfully promoting subjective well-being and perceived quality of life of urban residents.

Other positive characteristics in the built environment pointed out by multiple residents were the village-like atmosphere and feeling of community. The Fyyri library and other public services in the area close by made up a space where they could walk between their daily activities regardless of age. Something concrete that was brought up by two elderly ladies was the lack of benches. They said that resting in those mundane spaces would improve the streetscape for them. They also mentioned that they see young people that would have use of the benches too. Some of the residents communicated that they believe the close by shopping centres and supermarkets have affected the local businesses in a way that many of the small stores had disappeared. When asked what they would wish for to improve their services they did not really think they needed anything more.

Tolsa

Tolsa is a residential area close to Kirkkonummi Centrum, dominated by detached and semi-detached houses, with the area around the railway consisting of denser development with apartment buildings. The consensus of our respondents was that they found the area to be very peaceful, without any disturbances from noise. Because of the proximity to Kirkkonummi Centrum and the ease of getting there by train or car, the residents were also satisfied with the availability of services and accessibility.

The initial attitudes by the interviewees towards their own neighborhood were once again very positive. The peacefulness and quietness of the area north of Tolsa station was valued. A few of our respondents raised the issue of the lack of places for gathering, and the need for more of these. In particular, it was mentioned that there are not enough infrastructures to encourage children to play and hang out with other youth their age. According to them, the existing public playground was very “anemic” and did not encourage this. In proposing strategies for improving the quality of life of residents through urban planning, Mouratidis (2021) discusses the importance of creating communal spaces to increase social interaction and sense of community, which can increase overall life satisfaction. Although our respondents in Tolsa mentioned the presence of a strong community in the area, creating more communal spaces could help to support and maintain these ties and to increase residents’ overall satisfaction and, resultingly, their quality of life.

Like in Sundsberg and Kirkkonummi Centrum, residents in Tolsa spoke about their appreciation for the proximity to nature. This increases the possibilities for recreation and spending time outdoors in pleasing environments. The positive benefits of being close to nature and having access to various and

diverse green spaces have been often linked to better subjective well-being and quality of life (Wood et al., 2017). It was also stated that despite new construction and development they hope that the abundance and proximity of nature will remain a central aspect of the structure of the area, with two respondents also discussing how they hope that these new developments would be slow, so as not to burden the area with too much change at once, and to remain considerate of the current residents, nature, and structure of the neighborhood.

Overall Themes

Overall, the majority of the respondents revealed positive feelings and perceptions of their surrounding physical environments, revealing overall contentment in regard to their physical environment. However, the attitudes towards building new were quite often negative. Some things that were wanted were the overhauling of the city center, place for kids and youth to Tolsa and more benches to the city center. The residents are thus not opposed to change and new developments, but rather worried about the impact that growth in residential areas will have on the values that positively influence their quality of life. For example, the residents of Sundsberg are worried about the decrease in local nature and nature trails if these must be cleared to make space for new residential development. For many of the residents there, the closeness and quality of the nature is one of the reasons they chose to move to the area, and which they perceive as impacting their life in a positive manner (i.e., improving their quality of life). Additionally, the residents are appreciative of the peacefulness of the area, as they were in Tolsa, and if trees are to be cut down for new development, the noise of traffic may increase as the natural sound barrier is weakened.

The interviews we conducted also revealed that even though we focused our questions on the affective environment, respondents in Kirkkonummi were quick to consider and discuss the availability of services, such as public transport and amenities, as part of their experience of the built environment. This reflects Mouratidis' (2021) conceptualization of the constitutive parts of the built environment, particularly land use and transport systems, and reveals that they are integral to how residents of an area perceive their surroundings and understand how their surroundings influence their daily life. Furthermore, most respondents from all three areas brought up how they are satisfied with the availability and accessibility of services, such as grocery stores.

Ecological environment

In this section, based on our observations in Kirkkonummi, interviews with residents, and the literature consulted, we examine how Kirkkonummi - as a ringside-municipality (kehyskunta) of Helsinki metropolitan area - could position itself as a residential area that aims to promote a quality of life that is driven by proximity to natural surroundings. Our goal is to understand the role of the

natural environment and green areas in affecting the well-being of Kirkkonummi residents and their influence in attracting newcomers.

In the analysis of the ethnographic walks' observations, first we should reveal the positionality of the two researchers, in this case a Finnish young man who has already been multiple times to Kirkkonummi and an Italian young woman who for the first time visited the municipality.

(Aleksi) I have lived in Helsinki and the Helsinki metropolitan area almost my entire life, which gives me a strong frame of reference for urban environments. Due to my own background, I may particularly pay attention to the differences and similarities between Helsinki and Kirkkonummi, such as the accessibility of green areas, building density and traffic arrangements. My background in the Helsinki metropolitan area may also shape my observations in such a way that I value certain environmental elements, such as parks and light traffic routes, as part of the quality of life and the attractiveness of living.

(Giulia) I come from Nembro, a town located in a valley that connects the city of Bergamo to the Prealps. My town is part of a conurbation of villages that have developed significantly due to the textile, paper, and cement industries. Therefore, I have always witnessed the exploitation of environmental resources and pollution in the valley. Although nature is very close and part of the landscape in which I grew up, it is in fact a political and divisive element. My background living in Italian cities (Nembro and Padua, where I study) may influence the way I perceive the presence of green spaces in the city and how I question political decisions in this regard.

When I saw the town of Kirkkonummi and the Sundsberg neighborhood, I was immediately struck by their proximity to forests and the fact that the layout of the streets often left room for paths through the grass. Talking with Aleksi and thinking about the area of Helsinki where I live, I realized that this is actually quite common in the planning of Finnish cities and towns.

Next, we present the key findings of the ethnographic walks.

Observations from Sundsberg and the center of Kirkkonummi highlight three broader themes that structure the environment. The first theme is related to proximity to nature and the role of the green environment. In Sundsberg, nature is closely present within the residential area: forests, parks and outdoor paths overlap with living, and movement is mostly done on foot and by bike (see picture 1). Extensive green areas, versatile outdoor exercise areas and an environment dominated by small houses create the experience of a peaceful, close-to-nature residential area. In the center of Kirkkonummi, nature is also close by, but its presence remains in the background of the heavy

construction and construction sites in the center, which makes it momentarily difficult to visualize (see picture 2).

Another emerging theme is mobility and accessibility. Sundsberg appears as a small-scale and slow-moving area built on even light traffic, where narrow streets and little car traffic support peaceful and safe everyday movement (see picture 3). The walkability of the area and the nearby train connection emphasize accessibility. The center of Kirkkonummi, on the other hand, is clearly built for car traffic, which can be seen in the abundance of parking areas and the busy nature of the center. The cityscape appears in a transitional phase, which is also reflected in the experience of movement (see picture 4).

The third theme can be identified as the tension between the change and permanence of the urban environment. Sundsberg is already an established area dominated by small houses, whose identity is built around the natural environment and uniform residential construction (see picture 5).

Kirkkonummi, on the other hand, is in the middle of a strong renewal of the urban structure, which creates temporary fragmentation and makes it difficult to interpret the urban space. The sounds, smells and visual incompleteness of construction emphasize the stage of change and affect how the place is perceived (see picture 6).

Next, we present the key findings of the walk-along interviews.

Interviews with residents of the Kirkkonummi area reveal a strong appreciation for the local environment, but also significant concerns and development wishes. The main themes are related to nature, reasons for migration and urban planning. Based on our street interviews, residents in Sundsberg describe the area as very peaceful and they especially appreciate the forest because of its proximity. Nature, parks and comfortable walking trails by the sea are seen as the best aspects of the area. For many, the air quality feels fresh and better than in their previous place of residence in Espoo. The area's safety and child-friendliness were also mentioned as important factors. However, there are two serious concerns with being close to nature. First of all, wolf sightings in nearby forests have created fear and reduced movement outside in nature. Secondly, residents are worried about deforestation and too dense construction of new buildings and the data center, as they are believed to take space from nature and reduce the value of the area.

Decisions to move to Kirkkonummi have often been pragmatic and/or social. For many movers, the price-quality ratio of the apartment was better here than in Espoo, and for others, moving to an apartment building was necessary due to the challenges caused by the old way of living (e.g. snow work). The area's good reputation and social recommendations have also influenced the decision to move. Those living in the downtown area value the proximity of services. Moreover, there are high

hopes for the development of the area: the residents hope that the center of Kirkkonummi would be developed and there will be more shopping opportunities. One inhabitant of the city center brought up the concern about Kirkkonummi's identity as a "sleeping neighborhood" and hoped for the municipality to act on this matter. The new construction in the center was also accompanied by the wish that family apartments would be built in the area in addition to small apartments. The themes that emerge from the residents' interviews reflect the central values and wishes of the municipality's residents, which are often in line with the municipality's strategic goals.

The vision of the Kirkkonummi strategy 2024 – 2030 emphasizes aspects such as: “close to people and nature”, “the most desirable and vibrant municipality in the metropolitan area”, and “diverse and high-quality housing for all ages, close to nature, the sea and lakes.” (Kirkkonummen kuntastrategia, 2024). We think that this vision resonates well at an ideal level with the small-town renaissance-perspective: a small/medium-sized municipality that combines proximity to nature, quality of living, vitality and the benefits of belonging to a metropolitan area. When the municipality's strategy itself prioritizes proximity to nature and green areas as an appealing factor for life and community, it means that housing and living conditions - and therefore also quality of life - are valued as an integral part of overall well-being. In the small-town renaissance way of thinking, Kirkkonummi could attract residents who appreciate a calmer living environment, spaciousness, nature and community.



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

Conclusions

The analyses based on the three subdimensions of quality of life — cultural identity and heritage environment, built environment, and ecological environment — revealed many important values, elements, and structures that impact Kirkkonummi’s residents’ perceived quality of life. The combined environmental observations and resident interviews provide a clear picture of the factors that shape the perceived living environment of the Kirkkonummi area and its future development potential. From the individual findings, we found several overarching themes that residents attributed to their quality of life, regardless of which perspective we approached them with.

Our first main finding was that the residents of Kirkkonummi were overall satisfied with the elements related to the cultural, built, and ecological environments. Our findings revealed positive reactions to the proximity of nature, good air quality, feelings of safety, peacefulness and quietness of residential areas, community and place attachment, adequate services, and the presence of cultural services. The multi-dimensionality of these elements reveals that many residents in Kirkkonummi perceive their quality of life to be high. Additionally, we identified the proximity and importance of nature as the most important theme, based on the constant reference to it. Proximity to natural surroundings, forests, parks, fresh air and easy access to outdoor trails forms an important part of everyday well-being and strengthens the area's identity.

At the same time, residents are concerned about the fragmentation of natural areas and the effects of construction. What this revealed was a negative attitude towards change, specifically building new residential areas or denser housing/developments in low-density neighbourhoods. Because the proximity and quality of nature was raised as one of the elements that Kirkkonummi residents value the most, the concerns and opposition that they expressed towards the impacts of the construction of new residential areas and dense development were unsurprising. These attitudes emphasize the need to protect the green environment and preserve ecological connections in future land use planning if decisionmakers want to protect and enhance the quality of life of people in Kirkkonummi, as the municipal strategy states.

On the contrary, the attitude towards the increase in social hubs, including the existing library Fyyri and the upcoming educational center Lyyra, and renewal projects like that of the city-center are generally positive. This reveals that the residents of Kirkkonummi are not wholly opposed to change and new developments, but rather that they do not want to lose the elements and structures that they value in their everyday lives as the municipality looks to advance their growth objectives. In other words, they are supportive of creating lively, welcoming neighborhoods and spaces through changes to current structures, but not to the loss of the values that they perceive as enhancing their quality of life.

The third finding is that most of the interviewees consider the role of cultural services to be essential, with the services like Fyyri library and theatre being mentioned multiple times. A sense of community is built and strengthened through both active and passive participation in and use of the library, such as using the library as a meeting point or a place where you can meet friends. Even if some people do not use the services as frequently as others, merely being aware of knowing that there are cultural services existing in the neighborhood still provide a sense of mental stability and local identity that Kirkkonummi is considered as a self-sufficient place in terms of cultural services and local cultures, distinguishing here from other surrounding municipalities especially like Espoo or Helsinki, which both have a high degree of population movement.

As a whole, the observations, interviews and data show that Kirkkonummi has many attractive factors related to the small-town renaissance thinking: closeness to nature, small household dominance and the opportunities offered by the capital region. Maintaining these strengths and sustainable

development based on them are central to realizing the municipality's vision and securing the residents' quality of life in the future.

Ideas & policy recommendations for Kirkkonummi

Our analysis and results from all three sub-dimensions related to quality of life, combined with the findings from the literature, allowed us to identify four policy recommendations for the consideration of decisionmakers in Kirkkonummi.

(1) Focusing on the in-between places

Kirkkonummi is home to the Fyyri Library as well as other valued cultural hubs and services. However, residents expressed a strong desire for improvements to the more mundane everyday spaces —i.e., the in-between areas where informal social interaction can take place. Both older adults and young people in particular require accessible, built environments to dwell in in their immediate surroundings in order to support their wellbeing in their neighborhoods in Kirkkonummi. Positive everyday experiences, such as the presence of benches and small-scale places that residents can appropriate and make their own, are essential at multiple spatial scales. This represents a concrete area in which the municipality of Kirkkonummi could intervene by enhancing the quality of life in neighborhoods and the transitional spaces that connect them.

(2) Ensuring environmental protection when developing new urban areas

The municipality of Kirkkonummi must recognize the natural environment as an integral part of quality of life and everyday life. This means ensuring and expanding green connections, systematically protecting nearby forests, parks, and green corridors, and using them as barriers against noise and pollution. Accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists should be developed so that movement through forest paths, parks, and light traffic routes is meaningful and safe. In this view, nature is not only seen as a means of recreation, but as a structural part of everyday life that increases well-being and makes even a small residential area distinctive.

(3) Focusing on place attachment

Kirkkonummi must focus on deepening its residents' sense of community and belonging, in order to deepen their place attachment. This includes creating accessible meeting places and providing wide social and cultural events where all people can spend time together. Highlighting the importance of local traditions and broad cultural heritage promotes Kirkkonummi as a unique place. There are already vibrant communities, residents' and village associations in the many close-knit neighborhoods and villages in the municipality. Their main aim is to promote the sense of community and well-being of residents and provide versatile services. Supporting the activities of these associations is one way to increase the place attachment of the people of Kirkkonummi.

(4) Development focus: Quality of Life over Population Growth

Kirkkonummi's future strategies should prioritize quality of life as the primary objective of municipal development, rather than focusing on continuous population expansion and economic growth. As a municipality, Kirkkonummi already possesses many of the essential characteristics required to sustain areas of exceptionally high living standards. This shift in focus could involve placing greater emphasis on qualitative indicators of wellbeing and environmental conditions such as tranquility, proximity to nature, ease of mobility, air quality, and a sense of community as central parameters in strategic decision-making.

Even during our brief field visit and interviews across several of Kirkkonummi's neighborhoods, it became evident that residents hold clear and valuable perspectives regarding their environment and the factors that would enhance their quality of life. We therefore recommend that municipal decision-makers adopt a more proactive approach in seeking out residents' opinions, rather than assuming that participation will occur spontaneously. Through such inclusive and participatory processes, Kirkkonummi can foster more sustainable and quality of life improving development. In the long term, this focus on genuine wellbeing is also likely to make the municipality more attractive than strategies based solely on short-term growth incentives.

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Housing, Multilocal living and Remote work in Kirkkonummi

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Background

Housing has long been a central factor shaping migration within Finland, especially the well-documented movement from metropolitan areas toward smaller municipalities. Rising urban living costs, limited housing space, and the desire for autonomy have traditionally driven “moving-out” migration (Nordregio Report, 2024:7; Andersson & Wolf, 2022). Yet, the landscape of mobility is undergoing significant change. Remote work, multilocal living, and the growing use of second homes have begun to reshape how households evaluate where and how they want to live (Nordregio Report, 2024:7; Nordregio Report, 2024:5). These developments are central for municipalities on the metropolitan fringe, such as Kirkkonummi, which must navigate a complex interplay between growth aspirations, sustainable land-use planning, and emerging hybrid living patterns.

Changing Housing Preferences: Remote Work and Multilocality

The rise of remote work has loosened the spatial ties that historically bind individuals to urban labor markets. Both the Nordregio Report (2024:7) and Adamiak et al. (2017) demonstrate that as more professionals gain the flexibility to work from home, priorities increasingly shift toward housing quality, spaciousness, environmental amenities, and overall quality of life. These factors tend to favor small towns and rural localities, enabling them to compete for residents in ways not previously possible. Finland is a leading example of this transition: during the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to teleworking was more pervasive than in any other EU country, with 60 percent of workers transitioning to remote work compared to the EU average of 37 percent (Kinnunen, 2020). Remote work has therefore become an important driver of extended stays in second homes, longer periods spent in rural municipalities, and in some cases also permanent relocation (Schmidt-Thomé & Lilius, 2023).

Multilocal living, where households maintain and regularly use more than one dwelling, adds another layer to these transformations. In Finland, secondary residences are exceptionally common in international comparison (Strandell et al., 2020). These homes blur the line between permanent and temporary living arrangements, especially in regions where cottages and lakeside dwellings constitute a major share of the building stock. As Adamiak, Pitkänen, and Lehtonen (2017) emphasize, seasonal mobility has meaningful demographic and economic impacts, even when official statistics fail to capture it. The authors remind that second-home users contribute to local services, infrastructure use, and community life, despite not being registered as permanent residents. For many rural municipalities, multilocality is also increasingly seen as a strategy to counteract population loss and aging (Pitkänen et al., 2020; Schmidt-Thomé & Lilius, 2023).

However, multilocality also introduces planning challenges. Because residents may only register in one municipality, temporary population levels do not align with service responsibilities, infrastructure needs, or tax distribution (Adamiak et al., 2017; Brida et al., 2011). Second homes can support local vitality but may also compete with permanent residents for land, amenities, and ecological resources. These ambivalent effects highlight why authors such as Brida, Osti, and Santifaller (2011) argue that

second homes must be incorporated into local strategic planning if municipalities are to ensure sustainable territorial development.

Kirkkonummi as a Case: Between Urban and Rural Worlds

Kirkkonummi, located on the metropolitan fringe of Helsinki, stands at the intersection of these trends. Its municipal strategy (Kirkkonummen strategia 2024–2030) emphasizes controlled and high-quality growth, with a continued focus on natural environments, diverse housing options, and safe, comfortable residential areas. The municipality aims to develop compact, accessible centers while simultaneously providing attractive low-density housing close to nature; an approach that resonates with shifting household preferences for spaciousness and environmental quality.

The zoning plan of Kirkkonummi for 2025–2028 furthermore reflects these ambitions by emphasizing predominantly single-family housing, strong local centers, and well-connected housing areas. The program highlights that new residential development should concentrate in areas with good public transport and existing infrastructure, supporting both climate goals and functional everyday life. Despite the municipality's ambitious goals about high-quality environments and sustainable planning, the emphasis on predominantly single-family housing raises important sustainability concerns, since low-density, detached housing patterns are usually associated with higher per-capita emissions, greater land consumption, increased car dependency, and the fragmentation of natural ecosystems (see e.g., Peltomaa et al., 2022).

The zoning plan also mentions how second homes form an important part of Kirkkonummi's spatial structure as well: in some localities such as Kylmälä, as much as half of the building stock consists of seasonal dwellings. The local partial master plan identifies challenges related to converting these cottages into permanent homes, including inadequate road networks and infrastructure capacity. These issues echo those raised in the literature: distinguishing second from primary homes is often legally vague, yet conversion decisions have major implications for service needs, environmental impacts, and municipal finances (Brida et al., 2011).

Kirkkonummi's architectural policy (2017) further situates these issues within long-term demographic and economic change. It notes that migration has historically driven continuous construction in the municipality, and at the same time, globalization and digitalization have altered work habits, employment geographies, and thus residential choices. This context makes remote work and multilocality plausible long-term features, not mere temporary anomalies. Further literature about the topic also shows that in Finland, remote work and second home ownership are intertwined, and that was the case even before COVID-19 (Komulainen, 2007; Kupila & Hentilä, 2021).

Quality, Identity and Value Creation in Small-town Development

A recurring theme in both scholarly literature and Kirkkonummi's strategic documents is the importance of prioritizing quality over quantity in local development. Vaattovaara (2025) argues that

municipalities should ask whether new construction creates genuine added value – not just for plot owners, but for the surrounding environment and community as well. This perspective aligns with Kirkkonummi’s architectural policy (2017), which emphasizes beauty, durability, and user-friendly design as components of a thriving, meaningful built environment.

Such emphasis is critical in a mid-sized municipality that is not under pressure to build thousands of new units rapidly. Rather than competing directly with Helsinki’s dense urban fabric, Kirkkonummi can differentiate itself through high-quality, nature-oriented small-town environments and potentially appeal to those who, for example, appreciate the charm of historic Helsinki neighborhoods but require more space for family life. The municipality’s unique coastal areas, village identities, and emerging small-town centers provide a potential foundation for this kind of value-driven development, if that is a desired path for the officials and politicians who are in charge of Kirkkonummi’s future development.

As early as 1901, three famous Finnish architects Herman Gesellius, Armas Lindgren and Eliel Saarinen fell in love with the lake Vitträsk in Kirkkonummi. They bought a lot from its shores and created the villa Hvitträsk in 1903 which still stands as one of the main attractions of Kirkkonummi. The cape of Porkkala has also been acknowledged for long for its beauty and in 1938 was made to be one of the first national parks in the country. Clearly Kirkkonummi has had a draw for second home owners for quite some time now. Have the possibilities from this been properly harnessed?

Towards Understanding Hybrid Living Patterns in Kirkkonummi

The literature and municipal documents together suggest that Kirkkonummi is situated within broader societal shifts in housing preferences, mobility patterns, and rural-urban relations. Remote work encourages more flexible and dispersed living arrangements; second homes blur distinctions between temporary and permanent populations; and municipalities face the dual challenge of managing growth while preparing for uncertainty, including potential stagnation or shrinkage (Schmidt-Thomé & Lilius, 2023).

This paper explores how these emerging housing preferences reshape traditional moving-out motives in Kirkkonummi. We examine how local policies, such as zoning, strategy documents, and architectural guidelines, address hybrid living patterns; how municipal planners perceive the benefits and challenges associated with second homes and remote work; and how the roles and expectations of second-home owners compare with those of permanent residents. Through these questions, the study aims to illuminate how a medium sized municipality can navigate the opportunities and tensions inherent to Finland’s evolving residential landscape.

Despite having previous knowledge about the theme, analyzing remote work from a municipality perspective is a challenge. The perspective of remote work is often thought of from a personal point of view, where self-fulfillment or better quality of life are some of the points that tend to explain the phenomenon. It can also be viewed from the perspective of business owners, who feel as though

remote work might improve productivity and reduce costs for their benefit. This win-win situation from a work perspective can be analyzed via the scope of housing; workers who have recently benefited from remote work arrangements, no matter if it is hybrid work (a combination of office work and remote work in the work week) or full-time remote work, tend to move to municipalities less than 25km away from their previous home (Nordregio, 2024).

Housing Policy and Production

Data and Methodology

When deciding on the methodology for collecting data in Kirkkonummi, we chose two main approaches. First, we conducted in-person, walk-in interviews and wrote down the information we received afterward. Second, we reached out to people by email and asked them questions relevant to our research. In this section of the paper, I will discuss both methods and the responses we gathered.

During our field trip to Kirkkonummi, our goal was to speak with managers at both K-Market and Prisma. These interviews were conducted in Finnish. We asked whether many second-home owners came to these shops to buy groceries before heading to their cabins. The answers from both stores were very similar: both managers said that yes, second-home owners did come to K-Market and Prisma for their pre-cabin shopping. They also mentioned that these customers were easy to recognize because they tended to be wealthier, did not hesitate to spend money, and bought high-quality food. Most of these shoppers were from central Helsinki and the Espoo area.

The manager at K-Market added that she had previously worked in a K-Market in northern Finland, where there were many more second-home customers. Although Kirkkonummi is a communal town, second-home owners often shop in more coastal areas instead. Both managers also pointed out that this was not a peak season for such customers; the busiest time is usually around midsummer. After the interviews, we reviewed what had been said and wrote down the key points. This method was useful because it allowed us to reflect and clearly absorb the information. However, we also realized that Kirkkonummi may not have been the best place to collect this type of data, since the coastal shops likely encounter far more second-home owners and therefore have more detailed insights. Nevertheless, the staff were very cooperative, and we were grateful for their help.

The next step in our project was to contact an architect and ask several questions related to our theme. We were very satisfied with the responses we received. According to the architect, second-home ownership is quite common in Kirkkonummi, and many of these homes are equipped almost like permanent residences. The area has a well-educated population, and because it is close to central Helsinki, there are many remote workers living there. The architect also noted that second-home owners and remote workers do not cause problems for local planning or public participation.

Finland's recent social and healthcare reform ensures that second-home owners no longer create issues for local health services. However, they still rely on other municipal services, which raises questions about how costs should be shared and whether current tax laws reflect their use of parks, recreation areas, and other services.

The architect highlighted both advantages and disadvantages associated with second-home owners and remote workers. On the negative side, Kirkkonummi now has more responsibility for road maintenance, which increases costs, and non-permanent residents add extra pressure to local infrastructure. On the positive side, second-home owners support the local economy by using shops and services. The architect also mentioned that in the future there may be more demand for shared workspaces, although previous attempts to establish such facilities failed due to low interest.

There are ongoing discussions about whether holiday homes should be allowed to become permanent residences. The architect identified several challenges related to this, including increased urban sprawl, greater demand for school transportation, changes to the character of holiday-home areas, and the need for better lighting and pedestrian routes.

We also received an email from a municipal councillor. According to her, multi-local living tends to be more suitable for municipalities located farther from major urban centres. She contrasts this with Kirkkonummi, which, as part of the HSL region, maintains strong transport connections to the Helsinki metropolitan area, including a 30-minute train connection to the city centre. This accessibility allows residents to maintain a primary home in Kirkkonummi while commuting efficiently to Helsinki for work. The councillor's own housing decision reflects this dynamic: during the COVID-19 period, the rise in remote work enabled her to choose a rural residence in Kirkkonummi, supported by the fact that she can reach her office in approximately 1.5 hours when necessary, but does not need to commute daily. This suggests a broader trend in which increased remote-work flexibility may influence residential choices, particularly in municipalities with reliable transport links compared to more remote areas where multi-local living may be more prevalent.

In our analysis, we focused on examining the relevant policy papers and comparing their key themes with the responses we collected. By aligning the policy objectives, assumptions, and proposed measures with the perspectives provided in the interviews, we were able to identify points of convergence, divergence, and practical implications. This comparison allowed us to assess how well the policy frameworks reflect real-world experiences and whether the insights from respondent's support, challenge, or expand upon the policy narratives.

In conclusion, Kirkkonummi is attractive because of its strong public services and natural environment. However, without changes that allow municipalities to share tax revenue from people who live in more than one place, Kirkkonummi may not benefit significantly from the rise in multi-local living.

Analysis

Our conversation with a Kirkkonummi planning representative reveals a glaring conflict between official housing and land-use regulations and the more contemporary practices of remote employment, second residences, and multi-local living. A balanced and sustainable built environment is envisioned in Kirkkonummi's long-term planning plans, which combine more compact urban-style development in key regions with rural-scale homes.

Kirkkonummi has positioned itself as a municipality with a strong connection to the Helsinki region, good public services, and sustainable, reasonably compact development. This is evident in the focus on planned new housing areas and the concern for the municipality's overall structure: dispersed settlement is said to be at odds with the climate goals and to result in higher infrastructure costs for things like street lighting, safe pedestrian routes and school transportation. In our statistics, this is shown most clearly in the conversation about transforming holiday/second homes into year-round housing. While such conversions could appear to boost permanent housing and population, the interviewee views them as a risk which could strain the service network and degrade spatial planning.

The municipality's goal, as stated in the 2017 Kotina Kirkkonummi architecture policy program (2017), is to create a built environment that is place-specific and sustainably renewable, respecting the unique character of each village or neighbourhood while allowing for denser housing and town-like centre areas with a variety of housing types and good accessibility. This dual goal demonstrates that the municipality understands the importance of small-scale, rural environments as well as the requirement for compact, service-efficient residential areas.

The Kirkkonummi architectural policy emphasises that the built structure should evolve sustainably rather than in a dispersed fashion that would stretch labour and construction resources, with a focus on creating a high-quality, sustainable environment. This is in accordance with our interviewees' worries, who often emphasised the dangers of dispersed housing and second home conversion, which includes limitations of public transport, and heavy pressure on public services. The architectural policy stresses that development should be intentional but also appropriate and well-paced/well-handled, which would explain the delay in why second homes are not being given priority in their transition to year-round housing.

The Kirkkonummi kuntastrategia 2024–2030 (2024) maintains the following strategic vision: Kirkkonummi wants to continue being a pleasant, small-house-oriented municipality that is close to nature for people of all ages. At the same time, it wants to expand the municipality centre into a bustling hub with services and an urban style of living. This implies that the municipality values both a modest level of densification in specific centres and the preservation of its rural/natural identity. However, our interview indicates that the conversion of vacation homes into permanent dwellings and multi-local living continues to be marginal in the actual execution of policies.

Simultaneously, the strategy emphasises the significance of transforming the municipal centre into a lively meeting place, proposing a more patient and gradual transition into a more compact and urban style of living. This strategy prioritises balanced spatial development, with strong transport connectivity and service availability. These goals are perfect opposers to the disorganised housing

patterns that can arise from the growth of second homes as well as a potential sudden shift and conversion of these homes into primary housing.

The 2025–2028 Kirkkonummen kaavoitusohjelma 2025–2028 (2024) clearly prioritises modest infill development and new small-house plots over substantial formalisation of second houses or extensive adaptation for accommodation for remote workers. Instead of encouraging flexible housing types or shared workspaces, many of the proposed zonings focus on detached homes or low-density communities. This implies that while Kirkkonummi recognises the municipality's aim in its guiding papers, land-use and housing production choices are still made in a traditional manner. Instead of accommodating current multi-local inhabitants or renovating vacation homes, they rely on constructing new permanent residences in specific regions.

The initiative targets designated areas for new residential construction, including detached-housing neighbourhoods, which alongside apartment style housing construction are the main future methods of construction in the strategy for Kirkkonummi. Along with this, the strategy targets infill sites and plans for previously mentioned urban-type extensions. Although the interviewee did recognise the large population of second homeowners in Kirkkonummi, they did state that the municipality controls housing through long-term as opposed to rushed reactions to lifestyle trends. However, despite this acknowledgment, multi-locality has not yet resulted in significant planning modifications.

According to our interviewee, this strategy makes sense because a large-scale conversion of vacation houses could disrupt the pattern of settlement, raise the need for infrastructure, and reduce the effectiveness of service delivery. These worries are consistent with the strategy's focus on maintaining village identity and small-house character while developing the municipal core, as well as the architectural policy's emphasis on place-specific built environments. The interviews also reveal that a movement in policy towards shared workplaces or office-hotel arrangements has not been prompted by remote workers, despite their large numbers. The reply stated that a concept to create a shared office space was contemplated in the 2010s but was shelved due to insufficient support. This demonstrates once more the municipality's preference for traditional house construction over innovative living-work options.

The results of our findings match in line with the path and goals laid out and stated in Kirkkonummi's key planning documents. The 2017 architectural policy holds a strong focus on a built environment, one that is sustainably controlled and managed. The municipal strategy for 2024-2030 and the zoning program for 2025-2028 share very similar goals of: controlled spatial development, a solid base of service networks, and eco-friendly land use. The responses we received with a worry of scattered settlement, second-home conversion and infrastructure demands, fall in line with these themes and goals from the texts.

In conclusion, the analysis of our data in conjunction with Kirkkonummi's primary planning documents indicates that although the municipality's strategic vision ostensibly promotes a mixed environment of rural and compact living, it has not yet successfully incorporated remote work, second-home conversion, or multi-local living into its zoning or housing production policies. Rather, conventional new home constructions, preserving spatial coherence, and safeguarding the character of villages and natural regions continue to be prioritized.

Second Homes in Kirkkonummi

Multilocal living in Kirkkonummi almost always means a summer cottage. In 2024, there were 2439 summer cottages located in Kirkkonummi (Tilastokeskus). According to sales listings of summer cottages, the areas north of the town center near the Nuuksio national park are the most popular due to its many lakes. Indeed, 58% of summer houses in Finland are located next to a lake or a pond (Mökkibarometri 2025, Tilastokeskus). Especially popular hubs for second homes are the villages of Kylmäla and Lapinkylä next to the smaller town center of Veikkola.

Along with the lakeside properties, summer houses located on the seaside and archipelago of the coast of Kirkkonummi are common. Many of these are in proximity to the cape of Porkkala. The seaside village of Kantvik is also popular. Summer cottages located in the archipelago usually require a boat to access, which creates a need for services tending to them, for example marinas and waste disposals.

The average price for a summer cottage by a body of water in Kirkkonummi is 285 200 € which is the second most expensive average in Finland (“Jättiselvitys” Yle, 24.3. 2024). According to a local real estate agency’s price estimate, a 100m² detached house sold on 2024 would cost on average 309 600 € (Kiinteistömaailma.fi). The average price then, for a permanent home in Kirkkonummi is almost the same as for a second home. Depending on the development of real estate prices, second homes can even exceed permanent homes in prices. This has happened already, for example, in the town of Raasepori (“Jättiselvitys” Yle, 24.3. 2024).

Taken all this, what are the effects of second homes on Kirkkonummi? This subchapter tries to find out the following research questions and the methods used for solving them.

Data and Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used in the multilocal living subtopic for developing policy recommendations. To collect data, we decided to visit Kirkkonummi in person and conduct interviews with various local businesses and the municipal government. We formulated four research questions for our subtopic, some of which also included additional sub-questions.

The first research question was: *Can multilocal living encourage permanent migration to Kirkkonummi?* We directed this question to the municipal government. The aim was to find out whether owning a second home could potentially increase the population of Kirkkonummi. Specifically, we wanted to understand whether people might prefer not to move permanently to a smaller area but rather spend part of their time away from the city while maintaining the possibility to commute to or stay in Helsinki.

The second research question was: *How does infrastructure (transport, broadband) influence the likelihood of long-term relocation? Does the municipality support this?* This question was also addressed to members of the Kirkkonummi municipal government. The goal was to understand

whether the municipality's infrastructure supports the second-home trend in the region and to what extent the municipality facilitates the development of such connections.

The third research question was: *How does multilocal living influence the housing and real estate market in Kirkkonummi?* This question was primarily aimed at city officials and real estate companies. However, due to time constraints, we did not receive an answer—officials could not provide information, and although the question was forwarded, no response was received.

The fourth and most well-answered research question was: *What is the role of multilocal living in supporting the local economy and service network in Kirkkonummi? What kind of services do they use, and is the cottage season reflected in the number of customers?* The aim was to determine whether the number of residents significantly increases during certain periods, such as in summer, due to second homeowners and whether this increase translates into higher service consumption. If so, which services are used the most? Based on this information, future strategies could better account for seasonal growth, infrastructure pressures, and service planning.

The research had its limitations. How can one find information on a group that lives part time in the municipality, largely spread out and in places where access is limited? This we tried to circulate around trying to instead find the people affected by the second home owners. This meant that the research focused on the local businesses and service providers.

We collected data for our subtopic in three different ways. For the first three research questions, we contacted municipal officials via email and requested written responses. We did not receive an answer to the third question because, although it was forwarded, we did not have enough time to wait for a response. For the fourth research question, we gathered data on-site in Kirkkonummi. Our goal was to interview local businesses to find out whether they see any impact of second home ownership on their operations and how this is reflected. To do this, we interviewed managers of major grocery stores in Kirkkonummi. Since our fieldwork day started very early, and most businesses (mainly restaurants) were closed at that time, we decided to collect information from them via phone interviews based on random samples.

Analysis

From the data collection and the written results, it became clear that the outcomes from different data collection methods generally matched. The first method involved conducting interviews on site in the municipality of Kirkkonummi. We visited stores from two major supermarket chains, Prisma and K-Market, and spoke with their managers. Overall, the findings from both locations were similar: it was observed that second home owners mostly just pass through the municipal center, Kirkkonummi, making brief stops mainly to shop. After the stop they continued to other parts of the municipality, or further west to other municipalities, where the prices for second homes usually are more affordable. According to their estimates, most second home owners are residents of Helsinki,

Espoo, or Vantaa, and their cottages are generally located either in the south by the sea or further north by the lakes.

Both interviews noted that second home owners are noticeably more present during the summer period (especially around Midsummer) and on weekends, and that their profile is generally similar – rather affluent people who tend to spend quite a lot of money. This accords to the average in Finland, where the peak season in the usage of second homes tends to be in July (Mökkibarometri 2025, Valtioneuvosto). In terms of products, it was pointed out that second home owners usually buy similar items to those purchased by locals.

As the second method, we contacted businesses located in different settlements of Kirkkonummi municipality by phone. However, the results from those businesses we did manage to reach were generally like the findings from the on-site interviews. Both businesses located in Kirkkonummi town and those in, for example, Kantvik, Lapinkylä, and Veikkola, pointed out that second home owners are much more visible during the summer period, which is also reflected in business activity. One company in Lapinkylä mentioned that during the summer, the number of visitors increases by 50%, specifically due to cottage owners.

According to the interviews, many second home owners become reoccurring customers, returning to the same services, such as coffee shops and grocery stores year after year. It was also mentioned that many customers become friends with the business owners, as they have been coming to the area periodically for holidays for more than 30 years. Especially in the village of Kantvik, the interviews revealed that second home owners boost sales positively. They also pointed out that the people who have cottages in the archipelago buy large amounts of groceries at a time so that they don't have to sail back and forth.

Businesses outside Kirkkonummi town also confirmed, similarly to the on-site survey results, that most second home owners come from the Helsinki metropolitan area and travel either to cottages in the archipelago or, in the case of settlements like Lapinkylä, Kylmäla and Veikkola, stay in the surrounding areas. The companies noted that, in general, cottage owners purchase similar things to locals.

Thirdly, we contacted officials from the municipality of Kirkkonummi by email in order to obtain answers to our initial research questions. In response to the question of whether second home ownership could potentially attract migration to the municipality, we were told that this is a very likely scenario. It was pointed out that by the end of 2024, there were already 2253 second homes in Kirkkonummi, and it is also probable that many buildings currently classified as permanent residences are, in reality, used only part-time.

The municipality's strengths, which could attract people to the area, include its environment – a naturally diverse region located on the edge of a large metropolitan area. This could make it appeal especially to part-time residents, such as remote workers or people working partially on-site. We also asked whether the municipality is actively doing anything to attract new residents, for example, by

developing digital infrastructure to support remote work. Broadband infrastructure is not part of the municipality's responsibilities, but fiber-optic network companies are trying to build infrastructure even in more sparsely populated areas. The EU provides financial support for creating better digital infrastructure in rural areas, for which local village communities can apply. Perhaps the second home owners could be encouraged to apply for that along with local rural residents.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints and the lack of available businesses to contact, we were unable to gather enough information about the impact of second homes on the local real estate market to include it in this report. We received only a rough estimate regarding economic impacts, as it is difficult to assess how second homes influence the municipality's finances. The main impact mentioned was that second home owners use local services, such as grocery stores, cafes, and marinas within the municipality, and that cottages are subject to a different property tax rate compared to permanent residences.

Conclusions

Although the second homes do not bring the same kind of revenue to the municipality as permanent residents, they are still a strong power within Kirkkonummi which could be used more effectively. Second homes bring customers to the local businesses and in particular the rural areas of the municipality which often depend on the business that they bring. Like a marina needs boats to be profitable, so do need summer cafes customers.

In fact, while the number of 2439 summer cottages in Kirkkonummi is commendable in its own right, it pales in comparison to its neighbors. For example, in Lohja there are 8068 summer cottages, Raasepori has 6636 respectively (Tilastokeskus). These are exactly the municipalities which get the second home owners, who only pass through Kirkkonummi. But what can be done, that they would not only go through Kirkkonummi, but that it would their destination?

Remote Work

As a municipality within the greater Helsinki area, one of our assumptions before looking any further into the subject was that Kirkkonummi could be a place of relocation for remote workers coming from the denser core area. We thought so because of Kirkkonummi's remoteness and the tendency of working households with children to live in detached houses. That means the municipality should consider its housing capacities when considering remote work. From this perspective, we also think that the municipality could aim to attract remote workers. We wanted to initially find out how many people in Kirkkonummi work remotely, where they do it, and why. We were also interested in examining possible existing coworking spaces within Kirkkonummi, but concentrated on the town center. Other areas are also important, but it is the most densely populated area and time was limited.

We believe the Helsinki area has potential for more workers to be put in remote working conditions, as remote working/hybrid working have been shown to have positive effects on worker wellbeing and efficiency (Modabberian & Puolakka 2025; Bloom et. Al. 2024). Also, from a study in 2021 conducted in France, it was shown that the largest metropolitan areas also had the best share of jobs compatible with remote work (Talandier, 2021). They can often be tech, higher education, finance and municipal jobs - basically any that can be performed with a computer. The current share of people working remotely at least one day a week is 40% in Finland (Nordregio, 2024). Nonetheless, along with potential benefits, remote work does not come without challenges (McPhail et. Al. 2024).

Data and Methodology

Identifying remote working spaces in the municipality was one of our tasks in preparation for our fieldwork, so we were on the lookout for cafés and other potential coworking spaces, like the library. We visited the main library Fyyri, as it was the best option for our aim. Our plan was to ask qualitative questions to any person that we could interview: how many people come every day on average? What is the primary purpose of this building? Are there any regulars that come to work here? We also counted the number of people working on either their laptops or library desktop computers as a quantitative measure. However, the people we asked were students, and people working on the library computers were mainly elderly, so they were not in our target group.

We did not come across any remote workers in the main library. Going through neighborhoods door-to-door to conduct a field survey would be inefficient, so we created an online questionnaire with Google Forms. This way, we could gather more data about the remote workers of Kirkkonummi within a smaller period of time. Perhaps this is the first study on remote work in Kirkkonummi. Still, acknowledging the flaws and shortcomings of our work will be valuable. We chose Google Forms for its familiarity and expected 50 responses at most. We were interested in some personal details, but we found many of them unnecessary in this specific context. We asked respondents their age, level of education and role at work. Regarding other background information, we asked for their office locations, job roles, how many days a week they work remotely and how long they had lived in Kirkkonummi for.

As our research is rather novel, we wanted to find out more questions that should be asked in the future. We were especially interested in qualitative data, such as personal motivations for living in Kirkkonummi, reasons for choosing either coworking spaces or working from home when working remotely, and if they had worked remotely in Fyyri, the main library. These questions were asked to know more about the needs of this population, since policymaking can be targeted towards this demographic as well. Our target group was remote workers in Kirkkonummi, and as such we published our survey in a Facebook group themed around the municipality (“KIRKKONUMMI”). The questionnaire was conducted in Finnish, which may have deterred people of other languages from participating.

Finally, one of our main goals out of the field trip was getting information from the mayor and municipal officials: since our theme is centered around a new modern phenomenon, we needed to make sure that it was something they accounted for when elaborating municipal policies. This is also because the data available to us regarding this trend is unavailable or too broad to account for the municipality specifically. Studying remote work can be challenging, because while some remote workers from Kirkkonummi work for companies outside of the municipality, there could also be the case for remote jobs allocated to companies with offices in Kirkkonummi, i.e Microsoft. The question that we asked the mayor ended up being: "Does remote work come into consideration when thinking about housing in Kirkkonummi, and what are the current trends regarding this phenomenon?"

Analysis

We received 27 responses. After closing the questionnaire, we analyzed responses mainly by summarizing quantitative data and categorizing qualitative answers. Google Forms automatically creates quantitative graphs to visualize the data but we concentrated on the numbers and percentages to understand the types of respondents (R1-R27) we had. Coding the qualitative data was fairly simple, as we did it based on each question and the neutrality of answers: reasons to work at home were based off either positive impacts from home or neutral/negative aspects that the municipality may lack in. The main results of our remote work questionnaire are that all respondents generally work at home due to multiple positive reasons spanning from practicality and wellbeing to [cyber] security reasons. Additionally, the multiple freely written answers we received regarding different aspects of working remotely provided us with suggestions and insight into how they work remotely.

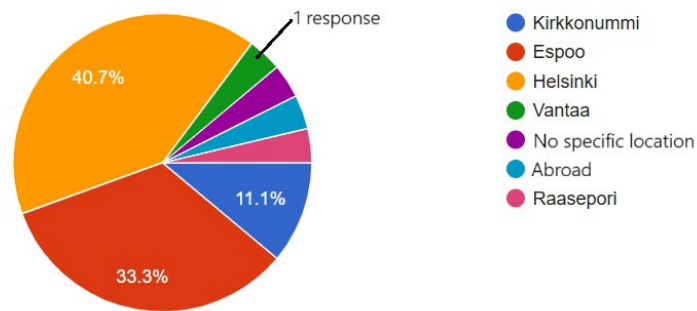
We can conclude that most respondents have an established life in Kirkkonummi, with 75% having lived locally for at least eight years, 60% for over fifteen years. A large majority are between 35 and 64 years of age, which may indicate most are in an established position professionally as well. We may, therefore, assume this will generally continue as such. There were a few respondents that had recently relocated to Kirkkonummi and around 15% were between the ages of 26 and 34. Our respondents were highly educated on average. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ have at least an undergraduate/Bachelor's degree and 50% reported having a Master's degree – these statistics support education data Kirkkonummi officials showed us. We also received responses from six individuals (22% of total) whose highest level of education is the secondary level (upper secondary/vocational), one of which recently moved to Kirkkonummi for its nature (R17).

The data we gathered can help officials and ourselves determine questions remote workers may be interested in and additionally provide us with answers we did not realize to ask. These could be, for example, "what aspects would encourage you to utilize a coworking space?" or "do you think the municipality should take remote working more seriously in its strategy". Nonetheless, we succeeded in emphasizing the freely written answers and were satisfied with the voluntary participation of the respondents. All questions were not mandatory, as we wanted to get as many responses overall without certain questions possibly deterring some away due to, for example, overly personal aspects. Figures 1, 2 and 3 have been translated from Finnish. Our main concern outside of our study was the

question of who we had not reached and how we could reach those of whom would like to work remotely but do not because of the lack of sufficient working spaces. We would assume having a small living space, for example, does not attract working from home despite having the opportunity to work remotely.

Where is your workplace located?

27 responses



FIGURE

1. PIE CHART OF RESPONDENTS' WORKPLACE LOCATIONS.

We found some surprising results, such as the high number of people working from Helsinki (Fig. 1) and the frequency of days worked remotely (Fig. 2). Based on the Espoo-centric discourse with and by Kirkkonummi officials during our visit, we thought there would be a higher percentage of workplaces based in Espoo, and perhaps a higher variability of municipalities nearby, such as Lohja or Vihti. The officials explained their data suggests a large portion of their working population commute to Espoo and Helsinki, which indicates a possible market or demand for remote working or a coworking space. Responses also provided us with other local opinions of Kirkkonummi nonrelated to remote working: bilingualism and good early childhood education (R26), less nature than before (R23) and “When Kirkkonummi used to have the Rosta restaurant, I like occasionally working there” (R1).

Where do you prefer to work remotely?

27 responses

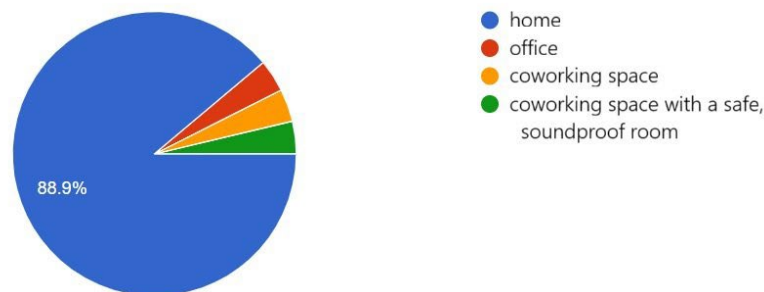


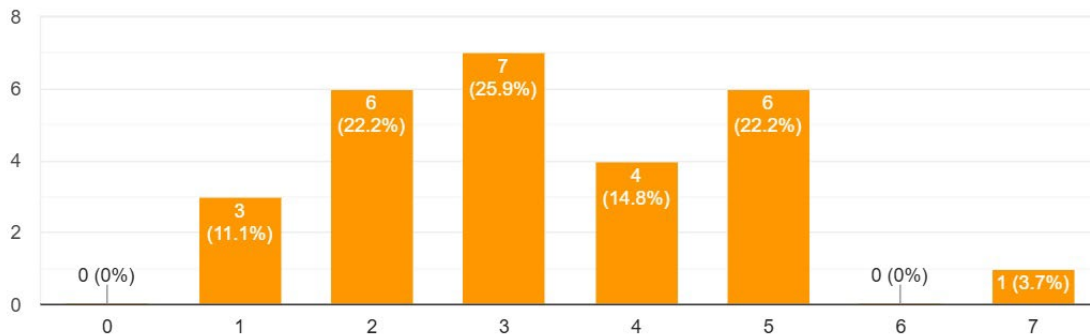
FIGURE 2. PIE CHART OF WHERE RESPONDENTS PREFER TO CARRY OUT THEIR REMOTE WORK.

Linked to the question, whose answers are allocated in Figure 2, we asked “If you answered ‘at home,’ why?”. We received answers from every respondent concerned. Many responses were confident, descriptive and provided us with solid information: a functional coworking space needs privacy protection, the location and accessibility is important, and comfort is perhaps the leading motive. We also acknowledge that working at home is, in many cases, the best possible solution for remote working. The fact that there may be many people we did not receive responses from must be highlighted as well. The amount of remote work days (Fig 3) is also significant, as it shows remote working to be an integral part of the respondents’ lives instead of a rare occasion. More days (and lunches) spent in Kirkkonummi means more potential revenue for local businesses, especially grocery stores and restaurants.

Possibly one of the most valuable answers we received (mind you, it has been freely translated by us) was from R27, a middle-aged company executive with a doctoral: “There has been no free space in the library several times when I would have needed it, as I often can’t be bothered to reserve a room in advance. I would like a new café in Kirkkonummi in a good location, at the station shopping centre for example, and a co-working space connected to it. Could the new Inno gym (relocating in autumn 2026) have a remote work space or be connected to Prisma or Citymarket? The train station? The swimming pool?”. This response is, in our opinion, a sign of the importance of our questionnaire, even though Mayor Sailas explained they have discussed conducting a survey of their own.

How many days a week do you work remotely on average?

27 responses



FIGURE

3. COLUMN CHART DISPLAYING THE DAYS PER WEEK EACH RESPONDENT WORKS REMOTELY.

Conclusion

Regarding future research, we would like to know about the social aspect of remote working and coworking spaces, and if a coworking space would motivate more people to shift towards remote work in Kirkkonummi. As respondent 18 implied, we could have asked where specifically each respondent resides within Kirkkonummi, to understand the spatiality of their answers. There is more to be discovered even from our data, and perhaps it will still be utilized in the future. Remote working

is not inherently good or bad. There are many possible benefits to it, and some aspects we cover may not work for Kirkkonummi, but this paper may help develop Kirkkonummi's own remote work strategy. The existing data we have does not prove remote work to be significant in Kirkkonummi, but it also does not prove the contrary. It has generally been shown that remote work has positive effects on wellbeing and even work efficiency. We predict, as remote work is studied more in Finland, and better work management systems are developed within companies, remote work will become even more popular – making it more relevant for municipalities to consider in their policymaking as well.

Conclusion

The landscape of mobility is undergoing a significant change. Remote work offers new possibilities for a new type of flexibility in work and living arrangements. Multilocal living is a reality in many places already, and Finland with its great number of second homes and good digital infrastructure could be in its forefront. As of today, Kirkkonummi focuses on conventional housing solutions which bet on the continuous growth and urbanization of the municipality. With the expected population decline of Finland in future, one can ask, if it is realistic. Should the municipality's population growth not continue, could there, however, be a solution in a more flexible, multilocal living and remote work-oriented future, that Kirkkonummi could pursue in its housing policy?

The main advantage that Kirkkonummi could be the quality of living and housing. As we have pointed out, the consensus in the municipality from citizens to city officials is that the best quality of the municipality is the many small village-like communities. This is reflected in the zoning plan of the municipality, which promotes a mixed environment of rural and compact living. However, one can ask if the ambitious plan of rebuilding the city centre and the future developing the village centre of Veikkola is in line with the ideas of quality. Could the urban environment of the centre really be the selling point of the middle-sized town next to the Helsinki metropolitan area?

As Kirkkonummi plans to further develop its center, services for remote workers should be considered. From our questionnaire results, we can highlight the demand for a space, whether it be a café, a space within an office building, private rooms in the library or its own enclave within a building mainly built for another use. Discussions should include the possibility, even if a separate space was not established. A café or restaurant can host a low volume of workers but would not especially support remote workers explicitly. We think there will be opportunities for a separate space if the demand rises in the future, and further research on the topic may provide answers for it.

Kirkkonummi has not, as we have shown, successfully incorporated remote work, second-home conversion, or multi-local living into its zoning or housing production policies. Instead of accommodating current multi-local inhabitants or renovating vacation homes, they rely on constructing new permanent residences in specific regions. Second homes, although not a direct source for taxes, can support many areas of the municipality, especially in the more rural areas. There is untapped potential for multilocal living in Kirkkonummi, keeping in mind its various landscapes and

proximity to the Helsinki metropolitan area. Combining multilocal living and remote work could bring opportunities to the municipality, even if its permanent population should drop.

Policy Suggestions

Housing Policy and Production

The first policy suggestion our subgroup has is to shift Kirkkonummi's housing focus to quality of housing and an increase in public services around the main production area. When it comes to detached housing, the focus should shift from quantity to quality, prioritize good design and efficient transport and services in the area near the housing. This policy would strengthen the village identity in Kirkkonummi which would be a benefit to Kirkkonummi. It would also protect the environment of the area and would give the residents more choice in their living arrangements. In the center, integrate residential buildings with local businesses to avoid excessive urban sprawl, while ensuring different-sized domiciles to cater to many different types of people. As other groups have said, remember the 'in-between spaces' by installing benches, garbage cans and high-quality lamp posts along light transport routes and pedestrian areas. These in-between spaces are an integral part of a comfortable living area in our opinion.

We suggest changing policy to make it easier to encourage limited and well-controlled conversions of second homes into permanent housing, while maintaining a positive relationship between homeowners and the municipal offices. Allow second homes to become permanent housing in areas where roads, water systems, and services can sustain it. This helps meet housing needs without spreading construction and accelerating urban sprawl. It also helps to reduce the problem of not getting tax funds for infrastructural services.

Remote Working

Cafés are one of the specific businesses that can accommodate remote work: others may include restaurants, community houses, or shopping centers. A study conducted in the UK found that one in four remote workers spend at least one day a week working in a café (Brand, 2023). Kirkkonummi-based remote workers spend 3+ days remotely on average, and many of them could be potential customers. Therefore, we would highly recommend a café, possibly discussing the question of remote work with the business owner. As a café or two would fit the objective of the new city center as an economic and social hub, we do believe they will appear without our recommendation in any case.

There could also be a focus on the social aspect of new housing units, which supports our view on 'quality over quantity'. We see potential in the clubhouses (kerhotila) of central residential buildings: during the day, these could be utilized as co-working spaces, then switched back to their primary function later in the afternoon, when residents return home. This innovative hybrid workspace could entice remote workers to either move to the area or visit as a local. This could bring a sense of

community to fresh new neighborhoods, which can create a collective identity as well. If successful, it could potentially help curb living costs, and it does not seem like a risky investment, as 'the kerhotila' already has a primary use. This idea can also work in any communal neighbourhood. Additionally, we strongly recommend gathering more data on the demand for remote working spaces and the aspects of remote working in Kirkkonummi. Remote working is increasingly popular, and second home owners may also be potential taxpayers and customers for local businesses. Moreover, different minds meeting in coworking spaces can fuel collaboration and innovation.

Multilocal Living

Firstly, Kirkkonummi should focus on its identity and with that, market its strengths as a place for second homes. *If the world-famous architect Eliel Saarinen chose the place for his second home, why then shouldn't you as well?* Kirkkonummi should not be only the "original Espoo" or even "west-Espoo" but its own entity. A telling example is that the cape of Porkkala appears first on the Visit Espoo webpage, although it is in Kirkkonummi! The local identity can be forged from the 700-year written history of the municipality, the various beautiful localities, and the variety of geographic elements within its boundaries.

Secondly, the Visit Kirkkonummi -channel could be utilized with a stronger hand. Social media presence is vital in marketing and together with Visit Kirkkonummi the municipality could be made a top day destination, after which people would be easier to attract to buy properties as well. *Why go all the way to Hanko, when HSL can bring you to Porkkala?*

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Report on Kirkkonummi's Economic Approach and its Future Possibilities

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Alexander Quin

1. Introduction and Background

The Nordic countries typically feature long distances and extensive rural areas, posing challenges for the municipal and regional sectors. Infrastructure systems become oversized to current and future population size and its distribution, while management and reinvestments remain necessary to maintain statutory societal services (Grundel & Magnusson, 2022). As the population collectively ages, the demand for elderly care and healthcare intensifies (Heleniak & Sánchez Gassen, 2020).

Kirkkonummi is a growing municipality in the Helsinki metropolitan region that has experienced steady population growth and is now increasing pressure to strengthen its economic profile. This report will aim to show and suggest how a municipality of that size could develop its economic profile through three subgroups.

Although Kirkkonummi is currently growing, large demographic trends generally fall outside municipal control. The population in Finland has been declining, and economic indicators alone cannot be relied upon to deliver long-term sustainability. Therefore, local governance should also focus on strategies that acknowledge and adapt to these national realities. Smart adaptation offers a way to rethink resource allocation, adjust service delivery, and foster innovative solutions. Whatever the reason for the original establishment and growth of small towns, their future development trajectories cannot be assured, with many declining or stagnating, due to exogenous and/or endogenous processes. Drawing from cases in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA and the UK, it is apparent that many towns have experienced a degree of revival and reorientation. This usually results from tapping into amenity-based strategies linked to quality-of-life and building on local landscape/heritage/culture.

The first subgroup looks into how the municipality can adapt its economy to become more resilient with the aid of semi-structured interviews. The second subgroup will focus on how to develop the municipality's tourism and how the locals see the municipality's state through semi-structured interviews and literature review. The third subgroup examines the municipality's business and investment landscape through semi-structured interviews and literature review, including the ongoing data center development as an example of how large-scale investments may relate to Kirkkonummi's approach to economic adaptation.

Our aim is to get a clear vision of what the municipality of Kirkkonummi could do to gain more sustainable economic growth in the future, and in the 5th point we will provide concrete examples of ideas and policy suggestions for the municipal officials of Kirkkonummi on what we would suggest based on this research we have conducted.

Research questions:

1. What is the resident perspective on well-being and quality of services in Kirkkonummi?

2. How can Kirkkonummi attract investments and businesses to ensure long-term economic stability?
3. What role can tourism play in diversifying the economy of Kirkkonummi and how could it be developed in the future?

2. Data

The empirical data for this study were collected during a course field trip to Kirkkonummi on Monday 17.11.2025. Qualitative fieldwork was conducted using semi-structured interviews, focusing on residents', visitors', and local stakeholders' perspectives on economic adaptation, tourism, and business and investment dynamics.

2.1 Economic adaptation and resilience

Based on our research questions, we decided to conduct field work among the residents of Kirkkonummi. This qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, field work consisted of semi-structured interviews with nine questions about (1) perceived overall change in the municipality, (2) economic stability and population growth, (3) distinct features of the municipality, (4) job opportunities, (5) social fabric, (6) balance between attracting new inhabitants and companies and improving the well-being of current resident, (7) digitalization initiatives in Kirkkonummi, (8) ecological sustainability, and (9) general livability (survey interview, 2025). We managed to hold two group interviews with 2 and 5 people respectively and reached 1 other individual resident in the Kirkkonummi center and 3 in Masala.

The interview questions were formulated based on our understanding of relevant literature about economic adaptation and themes from Kirkkonummi's own municipal strategy (Kirkkonummi, 2024). On top of looking into the residents' aspirations and needs for Kirkkonummi to offer them a sustainable living place, our goal with the field work was to assist in conceptualizing how the municipality's strategy fits into a wider "smart adaptation" and resilience network. This was done by researching projects in other cities through literature. This literature will be combined with our survey interview (2025) results in our analysis section (3.1) that we draw upon when recommending policies for Kirkkonummi (section 5.1).

2.2 Tourism and Visitors

The tourism subgroup went to Kirkkonummi on our fieldtrip to conduct semi-structured interviews for people in Kirkkonummi. Our aim was to get both locals and tourists to get diverse responses on Kirkkonummi's current state. We thought that semi-structured interviews were the best option for

gathering our data, since tourism in the municipality is not one of the city's main attractions. Interview targets were narrowed to people in Kirkkonummi area and two of the city's tourism operators, Visit Kirkkonummi and Peuramaa Ski Oy.

Unfortunately, our E-mail interviews were not being answered to so we did not receive answers for the questions that we asked. Our street interviews were scheduled for Monday morning and early afternoon. We conducted the first interviews in Masala, Kirkkonummi around nine. The questions asked were the following:

- How would you describe everyday life in Kirkkonummi?
- Are you satisfied with the area's services?
- Are you from Kirkkonummi originally and do you live here now?
- Has Kirkkonummi developed a lot in the past 5 years from your perspective?
- Have you seen tourists in Kirkkonummi?
- Where would you recommend that the possible tourists would go to?

In Masala we got five interviews and the demographic we reached was assumed women aged between 25-65. In Masala, the respondents described space as neutral and peaceful and that their lives there are pretty good. Only one negative comment was about how a person who had immigrated from another country felt like there was a lack of community in the place. She added, that since she doesn't speak Finnish, it might be harder to integrate to the community if there is one.

People in Masala thought that the services were sufficient, and the only things mentioned were that public transport could be better and some place to gather and meet friends. Most interviewees were from outside of Kirkkonummi but all of them live there now. Respondents also said that they think that Kirkkonummi as a region has developed quite well in the past 5 years and they are looking forward on seeing its development in the future as well. Approximately half of the respondents were mentioned that they wish that the municipality would visually stay rural-like and they would like to see the area including green spaces in future development too. One respondent had a wish that not all would be turned into stone apartments but that they would include wooden apartments as well for a more traditional look.

In Kirkkonummi the respondents also found the overall quality of life to be good, and they mentioned that it is quite peaceful there. One problem area was mentioned by some of the respondents and that was described as the corner of R-kioski. Near that area apparently are people who cause problems with alcohol and/or drug use. One respondent says that she wouldn't come to the center after 6pm because she doesn't feel safe.

The respondents mostly said that they are satisfied with the area's services, and one mentioned that the K-Citymarket is a great addition. For future development, the respondents in Kirkkonummi said that they would like maybe some stores, better public transportation, and a meeting place. And one mentioned that they would like the walkability to be better in the future, so that they could use their car less. People also thought that if the center of Kirkkonummi would become more lively, there would be more tourists in the future. They also had an idea about keeping nature close in the city planning and it could be a solution to make the space more tempting for both the tourists and for the locals.

From the interviews we didn't get too many sightings of tourists, but few did say that they have seen some in the past. Places where tourism was noticed were Vitträsk and the museum there, and the new library building. Our interviewees had similar views on where they would take the possible tourists too. Places that were repeated by almost all were Porkkalanniemi, Vitträsk, Meikon luonnonsuojelualue, Church, and the seaside alongside with other nature spots.

2.3 Business and Investment

As part of the business and investment subgroup's fieldwork, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews in Kirkkonummi . The purpose of this field visit was to gain insight into how local residents perceive the current economic situation in Kirkkonummi, with particular attention to employment prospects and the emerging data center project. To achieve this, we selected the Sundsberg residential area, located in proximity to the planned data center, as our primary interview site. Our subgroup travelled to Masala station and conducted interviews in the parking lot of K-Market Kartanonranta (Figure 1). We also walked around the residential area more broadly, but we were only able to conduct interviews in front of the K-Market.



Figure 1. K-Market Kartanonranta where interviews were conducted

The interview protocol consisted of three core questions: (1) whether the participant was currently employed in Kirkkonummi, (2) how they perceived the future of employment and the local economy, and (3) their views on the data center project in the area. The target group was primarily working-age

adults. Although younger residents could also have been included, the morning timing of the fieldwork and the chosen location outside a K-Market naturally resulted in encounters with commuters, workers and caretakers. Based on our observations, the sample included approximately equal numbers of those presenting as women and men. While age was not systematically recorded, most interviewees appeared to be between 30 and 50 years old.

The interview setting significantly shaped the data. Conducted during morning hours outside a grocery store, the location was frequented by individuals on their way to work, construction workers visiting the store before lunch, as well as parents with strollers and dog walkers. A neighboring daycare center contributed to the presence of caregivers. Due to participants' limited time, interviews were intentionally kept very brief, which proved effective in securing responses. Within roughly one hour, we collected answers from about ten individuals, with a few conversations extending slightly longer when participants were willing to elaborate.

Employment-related responses varied according to the working sector. A majority of respondents reported working in Kirkkonummi, while others commuted to Espoo or Helsinki. Construction workers indicated that employment opportunities in their field were plentiful locally. In contrast, a respondent working in the communications sector expressed the view that finding employment in Kirkkonummi would be unlikely. Similarly, an interviewee with experience as an entrepreneur anticipated a decline in local economic and employment conditions.

Perceptions of the data center project were mixed. Some participants held either neutral or uncertain views, particularly in cases where the intended function or broader implications of the project were unclear. The uncertainty expressed by residents mirrors dynamics typical of large-scale infrastructure developments. According to Flyvbjerg (2014), large-scale projects often face public skepticisms because their risks, costs and societal impacts are difficult for communities to assess. Among those who viewed the project positively, the most common justification was the expectation of new job opportunities. Negative views centered on concerns about environmental impacts, especially forest clearing as well as fears of rising electricity prices and uncertainty about how the data center would benefit Kirkkonummi as a whole. Concerns voiced by Kirkkonummi residents about energy use and environmental impacts resonate with broader evidence: in the U.S., data centers contribute significantly to electricity demand, carbon emissions, and water use, although the cooler climate in Finland can reduce cooling requirements and thereby lower associated water consumption (Siddik, Shehabi & Marston, 2021).

Overall, the interviews revealed a diverse range of expectations and uncertainties regarding both the future economic trajectory of Kirkkonummi and the anticipated consequences of the data center project. While the limited number and short duration of the interviews constrain the depth of analysis, the findings nonetheless highlight important themes for further examination: sector-specific employment conditions, differing levels of knowledge about large-scale infrastructure projects, and the coexistence of optimism and apprehension in local economic perceptions.

To complement our resident interviews, we conducted one expert interview via email. We also attempted to reach the entrepreneur's association of Kirkkonummi and a residents' association close to our street interview location, but unfortunately didn't get a reply from either. The Head of business development of Kirkkonummi Katja Harri answered questions about the economic state of the city, metrics they follow, future developments and conflicts arising in their area of responsibility. We will return to the expert interview in the analysis section.

3. Analysis

3.1 Economic adaptation and resilience

Economic adaptation and resilience have become important globally to understand how large, middle-sized and small towns develop and maintain sustainability. Smart adaptations to improve economic stability in the long term have become essential, especially in stagnating towns located near larger population centers that possess the means to support reorientation of smaller or middle-sized towns (Powe, Connelly & Nel, 2022).

Smart adaptation offers a pathway for regions and municipalities to tap into opportunities presented by demographic transitions, both positive and negative. Smartness in economic adaptation means preparing for future risks that are also outside direct economic control, such as climate change, various inequalities between people, and technological leaps. It involves taking into account factors that contribute to quality of life (Peters et al., 2018) instead of reaching for the highest financial growth. Because many issues today are national or even global, political commitment at the national level is essential for proactive and cohesive approaches. Research on climate change adaptation, especially, shows that multiple levels of governance are required for smart adaptation to materialize (Fünfgeld, Fila, & Dahlmann, 2023).

Lazzeroni (2022) emphasizes that, the road towards the resilience of small towns with an industrial past and a typical one-company profile is more tortuous; in a scenario of economic decline and growing unemployment, it could suffer in terms of decreasing place quality, persistence of conservative attitudes and nostalgic attachment to the past. This perspective is relevant to Kirkkonummi, which as a small town focuses on identifying its economic stability. It helps in understanding its story as a small town, with their crises, restarts and implications considering their relationship with large cities and processes of increasing urbanization.

Similarly, Mustofa (2020), mentioned that the economic adaptation and resilience of small businesses also rely heavily on support from local communities and institutions in small towns. Strong communities and social networks around small businesses can provide support in the form of information, resources, or collaborations that help small businesses stay afloat despite economic

pressures, which is relevant to Kirkkonummi's economy. Community and institutional cooperation can foster the adaptive reuse, and preservation of the economic development of Kirkkonummi without compromising its local identity and strengthen its strategies.

As Kim (2024) concludes, the city is a space for those who live in it. Kirkkonummi's strategy also promotes the importance of communality (Kirkkonummi, 2024). Understanding the task of Finnish municipalities in securing and enhancing "livability" through this communal and social infrastructure lens, will help in improving the resilience of the municipality.

3.1.1 Integrating resident survey results

We found out through survey interviews (2025) that residents do already view the overall services in Kirkkonummi adequate, pointing out the nature, renovations of the built environment, and new commercial services as positive. However, the spread-out structure of Kirkkonummi (with three centers) means questions of accessibility require further research. One resident claimed that Masala used to have better services but now they have to visit Kirkkonummi center area more (survey interview, 2025).

The findings of Peters and others (2018) support Kim (2024) in that economic and physical/spatial infrastructure don't work as the basis for "smart" strategies, such as "smart shrinkage", and instead focus should be shifted toward the social fabric and social networks, highlighted also by Mustofa (2020). Integrating all social groups, for example, into digitalization initiatives would alleviate the pressure the elderly faces with digitalization. Two older interviewees mentioned their concern with the growth of digital services, while a younger person commented that it's "evolution" (survey interview, 2025). This means there is a discrepancy between generations on projects that are pursued by the municipality, mainly through the data center.

With the redevelopment of Kirkkonummi's center area, these questions between social, economic, and physical infrastructure are of vital importance to the municipality. Aligning the "built environment more closely with the existing and foreseeable future populations by adjusting the amount of land available for development" (Schilling & Logan, 2008 in Kim, 2024) would require dropping the growth-oriented approach that current indicators emphasize. As alluded to before, it wasn't the quantity of services but their variety and distribution that residents brought up during interviews (survey interview, 2025).

In turn, a development strategy in line with "smart shrinkage" literature could help secure better job markets for Kirkkonummi's future (Peters et al., 2018) and help zoning/city planning in preparing for climate change risks (Fünfgeld, Fila, & Dahlmann, 2023). Both (job markets and ecology) are concerns among some of the residents in Kirkkonummi (survey interview, 2025). For example, during one of the group interviews (survey interview, 2025), residents commented that "[Kirkkonummi] has had some projects related to ecological sustainability, but they haven't really worked out". Yet, many residents did note the solar panels used by Prisma as well as the amount of charging spots for electric cars.

These are very visible for residents in their daily life and for decision-makers they are related to wider questions of land use and planning.

According to our survey interviews (2025) with the residents, Kirkkonummi has experienced fast development in business and physical infrastructure. But the railway track is perceived to divide the city center into a residential and a business area, which one person claimed “sucks” (survey interview, 2025). A large municipality like Kirkkonummi faces problems of cohesion in social and economic terms, like connecting residents and services in suburbs and in centers, which concerns the strategy for zoning. This inherent spatial difficulty is acknowledged by decision-makers and experienced by the residents. We believe that this can create what Schilling and Logan (2008) call “distressed neighborhoods” which Kim (2024) suggests resolving through methods of greening (for example, urban agriculture), improving distribution of (welfare) services, and importantly for Kirkkonummi diversification local industries. We highlight these in our policy recommendations.

3.2 Analysis on tourism and visitors

Tourism in Kirkkonummi represents a modest yet emerging local economic activity that intersects with the municipality’s broader development goals, particularly the ambition to create a more lively town centre and strengthen local services. Although the municipality is not widely recognized as a major tourist destination within the Helsinki metropolitan area, both academic literature and the fieldwork conducted for this study indicate that Kirkkonummi has identifiable strengths that could support future tourism development. This analysis examines these potentials and constraints through three lenses: (1) course themes and scientific research, (2) the municipal strategy, and (3) interview data collected during fieldwork.

Tourism is frequently seen as an economic catalyst for small municipalities, offering opportunities to diversify local economies, generate demand for services, and enhance place attractiveness (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). In contexts like Kirkkonummi - where nature, heritage sites, and proximity to a large urban population coincide - tourism can function as a complementary activity supporting cafés, retail businesses, recreational services, and cultural institutions. Research on small-town development emphasizes that even limited but well-managed visitor activity can contribute to local vitality if aligned with community needs and sustainable planning principles (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021).

According to Stock (2007), the growth of city tourism has four processes which are the presence of tourists, local authorities desire to welcome tourists, negative attitudes towards tourism and how tourism is seen by the world. These processes impact on how tourism in the area will develop in the future and they should be thought about.

The interview data collected in Masala and Kirkkonummi centre reflect this dynamic. Although respondents did not observe large numbers of tourists, they repeatedly identified places that attract

visitors - Porkkalanniemi, Hvitträsk, Meiko Nature Reserve, the seaside, and the medieval stone church. These destinations align with broader trends favoring nature-based and cultural tourism in Finland, sectors known to generate steady regional economic activity (Hiltunen, 2021). The strong recognition of nature as an asset among residents suggests both awareness of local strengths and potential support for developing tourism that remains environmentally grounded.

Kirkkonummi's municipal strategy emphasizes sustainable development, maintaining green spaces, strengthening local identity, and improving services - particularly in central areas. These goals closely align with the improvements identified by interview participants, who wished for a livelier town centre, better public transport, enhanced walkability, and more communal spaces. Such improvements are known to contribute not only to residents' quality of life but also to visitor experiences, reinforcing the symbiosis between local services and tourism potential (Richards, 2018).

Respondents' desire to preserve the municipality's rural character and green environment is consistent with Finland's broader planning principles, which seek to balance growth with environmental protection. Tourism development in Kirkkonummi therefore needs to prioritize sustainability and community integration to avoid undermining local values. Literature on nature-based tourism highlights that destinations with sensitive ecological areas must manage visitor flows and ensure that infrastructure supports low-impact recreation (Kaján & Saarinen, 2013). This consideration is highly relevant for sites like Porkkalanniemi and Meikko, where rising visitor numbers could strain ecosystems if not strategically managed.

The fieldwork conducted for this study generated three main insights relevant to tourism as an economic activity:

1. A Positive Quality of Life and Strong Place Attractiveness

Interviewees in both Masala and Kirkkonummi centre described their environment as peaceful, safe (with one noted exception), and supportive of a good everyday life. Such characteristics are key components of place attractiveness, a concept emphasized in regional development literature as crucial for both residents and visitors. The identification of green spaces and natural landscapes as defining features suggests that Kirkkonummi's tourism potential is anchored in its environmental assets.

2. Gaps in Services and Infrastructure that Limit Tourism Potential

Respondents pointed to several service gaps - most notably limited public transportation, lack of a central gathering place, and insufficient walkability. These findings align with well-established research showing that tourism growth in small towns depends heavily on accessibility and local amenities (Page & Connell, 2020). Without improvements, the municipality's most attractive destinations may remain difficult to reach, particularly for visitors without cars.

Furthermore, the safety concerns raised about a specific corner near the R-kioski, while localized, indicate that urban design improvements could enhance both resident wellbeing and the visitor experience. A more vibrant, cleaner, and active town centre is often associated with increased economic activity and higher visitor appeal.

3. Strong Alignment Between Resident Recommendations and Tourism Assets Despite limited personal encounters with tourists, residents consistently identified the same destinations - Porkkalanniemi, Hvitträsk, Meikko, the church, and seaside areas - indicating shared local knowledge of tourism potential. This cohesion suggests that the municipality already possesses a clear foundation for tourism branding, even if such branding has not yet been systematically developed. Interestingly, cultural sites such as Hvitträsk, alongside high-quality public buildings like the Fyyri library, were noted as emerging attractors. These locations reflect both heritage value and contemporary architectural appeal, supporting a diversified tourism profile that extends beyond nature alone.

Course concepts related to “small-town renaissance” emphasize the revitalization of local economies through the enhancement of place identity, the strengthening of local networks, and investment in shared spaces. Kirkkonummi exhibits several characteristics supportive of such a renaissance:

- strong community attachment evident in interview responses,
- widely recognised natural assets, and
- a growing town centre with potential for new services.

However, the municipality’s tourism economy remains at an early stage, constrained by infrastructure gaps, limited visibility, and the absence of a unified tourism strategy. Interviewees’ desire for more communal areas and lively services aligns with research showing that tourism is most sustainable when it supports- and is supported by- local everyday life (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). Thus, rather than developing tourism as an isolated sector, Kirkkonummi could integrate tourism into broader economic planning focused on enhancing liveability and service provision.

3.3 Analysis on business and investment

Kirkkonummi’s economic strategy relies on sustainable investments, cost efficiency, and growing their revenue base, which they believe will result in a balanced municipal economy in the long term. They strive to be an entrepreneur-friendly municipality in terms of provision of business premises by zoning and ease of gaining permits. In their vision, the city center will be developed like a city on a small scale, and the core would be characterized by events and services. In their rhetoric, the city leadership draw comparisons to Espoo, but our findings suggest that small towns shouldn’t mimick what bigger cities are doing but rather build on the local community strengths (Feldman, 2014).

Kirkkonummi monitors the state of their businesses with a variety of metrics, including number of firms, metrics on profitability and personnel of local businesses, industry structure, employment rate, job self-sufficiency rate, number of new and shut down businesses, investments and customer flows in public services aimed at supporting business in Kirkkonummi. Depending on the issue, the city also monitors reference cities in the Uusimaa region that share a decentralized urban structure, such as Tuusula, Nurmijärvi and Sipoo.

According to Head of business development Katja Harri, the biggest challenges in Kirkkonummi's economic leadership are not dissimilar to said reference cities, namely finding a balance between growth, nature preservation and construction, ensuring the provision of plots, the supply of a skilled work force and the limited maneuverability within the municipal budget. The balancing acts manifest themselves in particular zoning and permit processes, but according to Harri the job of the city is to fit together at times contradictory goals and to find a balance in the big picture. She brings up the city center development as an example, where the initial demolition and construction phase will bring inconvenience, but when finished will create new opportunities and vitality. Another project that exemplifies finding different pathways towards a balance is the Microsoft partnership, where they are committed to preserving more natural area than they use for development, and have done so together with the Finnish Natural Heritage Foundation (City of Kirkkonummi, 2025a). Individual zoning projects are markedly initiated by private actors, landowners and businesses, but also from the city's plans to increase vitality, like the city center development. This emphasizes the city's role in finding solutions, locations and balance to potentially conflicting land use needs. Residents and businesses are also involved in the decision making with workshops, hearings, invitational meetings, online surveys and feedback channels.

The data center in collaboration with Microsoft and Fortum is a big profile investment in Kirkkonummi, with national and even transnational significance. We were interested in its implications on the city and its economy, but throughout the city's strategy document and our email questionnaire we got rather little substance. The strategy paper only mentions the runoff heating benefits and "boosting sustainable digitalization". Head of business development Harri states, that attracting a data center investment wasn't a strategic goal, but it is aligned with the strategy of forming lasting partnerships with responsible actors. The public response to the data center construction from Harri's perspective has been twofold: the impacts on vitality and jobs are seen as positive, but environmental and scenic effects raise doubts. Our street interviews echoed similar doubts, with the optimism towards job creation limited to the construction phase. With our literature review also indicating that the employment effects being limited after the construction phase (CFI, 2025), we can infer that Kirkkonummi is not placing big expectations on the data center alone to provide to the local economy. Rather than speaking about the data center, the city representatives use language of digitalization being the enabler of future growth. Providing digital infrastructure generally is seen as enabling cooperation and digitalizing jobs in Kirkkonummi.

When asked about the city's means of attracting business other than the city center redevelopment, Harri says there are means, but they are limited, and she does not state what those means are. In their rhetoric, the city officials assume that the accessibility, entertainment capacity, events and community functions will increase the demand for services. While acknowledging that efforts to improve the quality of life is congruent with the city's goal of attracting and retaining a skilled work force (Hartt, 2019), placing too much expectation on the city center redevelopment boosting the economy is risky and in addition efforts should be placed in forming a dense support ecosystem for entrepreneurs, that leverages the community-based strategies and networks that people and entrepreneurs engage in in small towns (Motoyama & Henderson, 2023). The local market around small towns can rely on the community dynamics even over a wide geographic area, instead of expecting growth and urbanization (ibid.), but we will return to this topic in our policy recommendations.

4. Conclusions

Our opinion is that the contemporary moment is crucial in preparing for long-term sustainability and resilience. With the concerns we have raised relating to interdependence of economic, physical, ecological, and social arenas, for example, through infrastructure, digitalization and tourism, we hope that Kirkkonummi reconsiders how it can adapt and thrive in the future. Not by maintaining the same growth-oriented trajectory that seems easier and secure but by exploring new indicators that promote social well-being and communal decision-making which reflects on the whole economy equally.

By approaching sustainability issues proactively, Kirkkonummi can ensure they aren't handed down national level policies in one-size-fits-all solution. Proactivity enables room to move without getting stuck in the past nostalgia which Lazzeroni (2022) stated happens easier to smaller towns. Kirkkonummi has the potential to lead the way in smart adaptation strategies due to its current size as well as stable economic and population trends contrary to many other municipalities in Finland, which, however, cannot be depended on to last indefinitely.

Tourism in the other hand in Kirkkonummi functions more as a latent economic activity than a fully developed sector. The municipality's natural and cultural resources match wider tourism trends, and residents demonstrate clear awareness of local strengths. Nevertheless, infrastructure limitations, a relatively quiet town centre, and limited tourism branding inhibit the municipality from fully realizing this potential.

The findings suggest that modest but strategic interventions - improving public transport, investing in central meeting places, enhancing walkability, and supporting sustainable access to nature areas- could simultaneously improve residents' quality of life and stimulate tourism-driven economic activity.

In this way, tourism can contribute meaningfully to Kirkkonummi's broader development goals without compromising its valued environmental character.

Local perspectives on economic development and large-scale projects highlight both opportunities and challenges for the municipality. While many residents employed locally perceive sufficient job prospects, others, particularly those working in communications or as entrepreneurs, anticipate greater uncertainty regarding employment and the local economy. Opinions on the emerging data centre are also mixed. Some expect job creation during construction, while others express concern about environmental impacts, electricity costs, and unclear long-term benefits.

These observations align with broader trends in infrastructure and data center projects, where optimism for economic growth coexists with apprehension regarding environmental and societal consequences (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Siddik, Shehabi & Marston, 2021). Strategically, Kirkkonummi monitors economic indicators such as employment, firm numbers, and investment activity, while large-scale investments like the Microsoft-Fortum data centre are positioned within broader goals of sustainable digitalization and responsible partnerships rather than as sole drivers of growth. Balancing development, land-use conflicts, environmental preservation, and community input, the municipality emphasizes digital infrastructure as an enabler of cooperation, employment, and long-term resilience.

5. Policy recommendations for Kirkkonummi

5.1 Economic adaptation and resilience

The first area of policymaking we want to highlight is related to polarization. "The polarization of incomes" that concerns some residents (survey interview, 2025) should in our view be of concern to Kirkkonummi. Polarization is a global trend, a Finnish trend, and local in Uusimaa. Percentage of smaller income households (pientuloisuusaste) and especially unemployment has risen, even in Kirkkonummi which according to *Kirkkonummen kunnan laaja hyvinvointikertomus* (Kirkkonummi, 2025b) has fared better than many other cities in Finland. But income inequality or unemployment aren't just current threats, they are fluctuations in the economy that have to be prepared for, regardless of the current moment. More so, these measures are not simply for building resilience against the polarization of incomes but for social and ecological cohesion that works as the basis of a healthy economy, according to smart adaptation literature (Mustofa, 2020; Kim, 2024).

Taking measures for preventing inequality would attract people from different socio-economic backgrounds, like blue-collar workers who, as Peters and others (2018) argue, have been observed to improve quality of life and ensure better smart adaptation results for smaller towns. Peters and others (2018) have promoted a metric of "entrepreneurial social infrastructure" (ESI) in North America to measure the "smart shrinkage" efforts of small towns. In our view, this wide-ranging framework

provides Kirkkonummi with a new arsenal for guiding the economy toward resilience through three themes: legitimacy of alternatives, resource mobilization, and network quality.

ESI measures engagement of people and assesses options to prevent segregation of groups and destructive conflict in decision-making (*legitimacy of alternatives*). It focuses on measuring the diversity in networks and decision-making vertically (relations between state and local governance) and horizontally (relations between local organizations). Paying attention to who is contributing and how will give the municipality information about how they could broaden the community resource base (*network quality*), meaning what are the limitations of people getting involved in decision-making right now or taking part in projects together for ensuring “communal Kirkkonummi” as a long-term goal.

Overall, entrepreneurial social infrastructure (ESI) measures norms that promote collective action and identifies important community needs and networks (see more details in Peters et al., 2018). Economically, ESI utilizes metrics such as “private individual investment” and “public collective investment” and their correlation among the population to prevent inequality in the distribution of resources (*resource mobilization*). This means understanding where the resources come from when something is done, whether it’s a private individual investing their time and money or whether the municipality or a larger organization contributes (public). Adopting this indicator for decision-making would firstly help in understanding what are the indicators that drive smartness and quality of life in relation to the economy. Second, it would assist in founding a direction that doesn’t focus solely on economic growth but on social networks as a basis for a resilient and innovative economy.

The second feature of policy we want to direct attention to is the interdependence of digitalization, ecology, and businesses. Residents told us that there are inadequate job opportunities in Kirkkonummi, as many have to travel to other cities for work. We found concern among the elderly about digitalization efforts that “make their lives more difficult”; however, ecological sustainability attempts (usually involving new technology) were well received when they affected people’s surroundings (survey interview, 2025).

This leads us to conclude that promoting local identity and businesses through a more communal and social decision-making process that, in relation to ESI which addresses important community needs, can simultaneously resolve multiple issues. Concrete steps that could be taken are “greening”, for example, through urban agriculture, communal gardens, and local food production with resident involvement to deepen their relationship with Kirkkonummi’s important nature, especially in the face of increasing climate crisis. This type of project on a municipal level could be done in cooperation with local organizations and one way to utilize ESI “network quality” measurement. It can promote new kinds of networks between Kirkkonummi’s residents, allowing people to involve themselves with nature and local food production while giving the municipality a way to experiment with decision-making processes and ecological solutions.

Second, the improvement in the distribution of services to cover the whole area of Kirkkonummi so that issues of inequality or growth of digitalization don't decrease accessibility for the ageing population. This will introduce more working people into Kirkkonummi and widen the base that supports local business development or starts a business themselves. Finally, the diversification of local industries and job markets outside construction work and bigger companies, like Prysmian and Microsoft. Local business is currently supported through groups such as Kirkkonummen Yrittäjät and economic advisors provided by the city. Yet, with the reconstruction of the new center area there is potential to build stronger, long-term ties to locally emerging actors and the community as a whole. This can be integrated with greening projects since local food production has commercial potential and can employ people with a variety of skills from the knowledge economy to manual labor. It can also happen through more attention being put into tourism.

5.2 Ideas for tourism development

Tourism subgroup got a few ideas for future development of Kirkkonummi's tourism development. Firstly, it would be beneficial to add on Kirkkonummi's reputation of being an outdoorsy municipality and include more low effort outdoor sporting possibilities in the area. One of our interviewees had a great example of self service rental equipment on a beach. Similar things could be added to other beaches and for example, in the winter, there could be a sled rental option near a snowy hill.

In the interviews we gathered also another theme occurred, that people of Kirkkonummi could use a gathering space to build a sense of community. The former market square played that part in the past, but now there could be a space for that kind of structure. When a place has a strong sense of community and spirit, more tourists could also find their way into Kirkkonummi to enjoy it. In Helsinki there are many places for social gathering, and for example the Christmas market serves as that, which is extremely popular among the tourists.

Depending on how important the municipality considers tourism to be, there could be made a tourism development plan that would help attract tourists. In this day the role of social media presence is a key factor in many things, and we would suggest that Kirkkonummi could try to gain tourists through good social media presence. In a study made in 2013, was mentioned how approximately 1/3 of UK tourists choose their destination based on social media (Leung et. Al., 2013) and in this current day the number will most likely be more than half.

In this day we would suggest that content would be created to Instagram and especially to Tiktok in short video form. This will give younger audience a possibility to see what could be done in Kirkkonummi and gain more local tourism. And if some of the videos would be produced in English, it can reach international audience and some curious individuals might come to Kirkkonummi, while visiting Finland.

5.3 Business and investment

Embracing and giving a place to the community spirit also gives a chance for serendipity in business, for the unexpected to happen by bringing active residents of Kirkkonummi together. It shouldn't be assumed that redeveloping the city center alone will bring vitality, so we recommend bold strategies to ensure the provision of facilities to small local businesses, rather than big corporations. In Nordhavn, Copenhagen, the city owned port authority that manages the newly developing district, set up a subsidiary company that manages the ground floors of otherwise privately owned buildings (Financial Times, 2025). This ensures that rents for these ground floor business facilities are not market rate, and large companies who would inevitably be higher bidders will not be able to price out small local entrepreneurs for the facility. A similar program on a smaller scale could be experimented with in the new city center.

We find there is a risk of linear thinking (Kiviaho & Toivonen, 2024) in Kirkkonummi when following reference cities. Kiviaho & Toivonen's futures wheel method and Qian & Acs' Entrepreneurial ecosystem (2023) help avoid getting stuck in one's ways. Since Kirkkonummi strives to be an entrepreneur friendly municipality, entrepreneurial ecosystem thinking is recommended to refresh the more traditional cluster theory. An entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) is not limited to building on a certain industry cluster in the region, but it helps sharing knowledge about founding a company, gaining funding, finding facilities etc, knowledge that is useful for all contemporary industries. The ecosystem thus depicts endogenous interlocking networks that help sustain local business from within. It is built on the celebration of entrepreneurship, sharing stories and knowledge, and developing the "sum of small things" (Qian & Acs, 2023, p. 99) consisting of high-quality infrastructure, facility provision, turnkey permit processes and a dense support network. We find that Kirkkonummi's small things are summing up quite well in the knowledge economy age, but we recommend taking these EE actions into consideration in strategic planning: lift up local businesses by telling their stories and listen to their needs. Prepare for creative forms of support to the EE's functions, which could be financial, but also facilities, light and multi-language permit processes or connections to other ecosystems and the University of Helsinki for instance. Finally, as the municipal leadership, actively enable, sponsor or arrange events where locals can gather and be the uniting force between different stakeholders, the residents and local business.

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