

Foreword

It is an honour to be asked to write the foreword for this book. *Settlements at the Edge* is all about the experiences of demographic, social and economic change in the often small and isolated towns and villages in places like the north of Sweden and our neighbours in northern Europe, Australia, Canada, Alaska and Russia. I have been asked to make this contribution in my role as the Mayor of the Storuman municipality. We are located just a few miles south of the Arctic Circle. While we are among the largest of the Swedish municipalities in terms of land area (over 8000 square kilometres), we have one of the smallest populations (just 6000 people). Our three largest towns are separated by nearly 150 kilometres, and we have a number of smaller villages with fewer than 100 inhabitants. Our municipality has both mountain and forest areas, and each part of the region has its own distinctive demographic and economic profile. While we are lucky to have very detailed information about who lives here ‘permanently’, we also have large populations of seasonal residents about whom we know very little. We also have few research methods that can help us anticipate the populations of tomorrow, and their needs for services such as education, health care, and recreation.

Over the past several years, we have become increasingly involved in international research and development projects, and we have learned that we have much more in common with the ‘norths’ of even distant places like Australia and Canada than we do with the urbanised south and east of Sweden. In 2014, we hosted an international conference called ‘Thriving Northern Communities’, which featured some of the contributors to this book. We are also home to the Centre for Rural Medicine, which participates in projects featuring Norwegian, Canadian, Icelandic, Scottish, and Australian partners among others. Connecting to the world and building up our own knowledge in this way will continue to be an important part of our local development strategy.

Settlements at the Edge is designed to progress the academic understanding of towns and villages in sparsely populated areas, but it also covers a range of topics of interest and importance to government, business and community. I am delighted to see our home-grown researcher (and local physician), Peter Berggren, contribute to a chapter on the recruitment and

retention of health (and other) professionals. This is one of our current priority areas. We are also interested in how new technologies are changing what it is possible to achieve in and from our towns and villages. We are interested in how industries such as mining, tourism and energy production can coexist and benefit local people. There are also important insights here for our Indigenous (Sami) populations as we try to ensure that their unique place in the north is respected.

It is great to see Storuman play a small role in the production of this book, and we hope to continue to be engaged in international initiatives such as this. We are always happy to share our experiences and knowledge with researchers and research students, and we hope to welcome more such visitors to our municipality in the future.

Tomas Mörtzell
Mayor
Storumans Kommun
Sweden