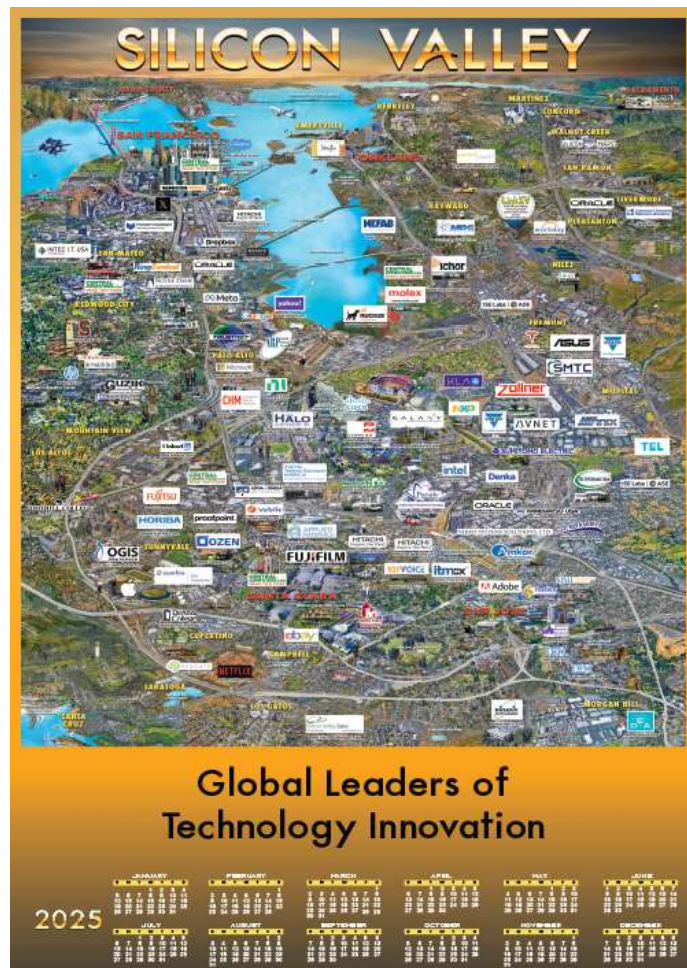


Small places and the importance of agency

MAGNUS NILSSON, CIRCLE & DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION, LUND UNIVERSITY
LINDA STIHL, CIRCLE & DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC HISTORY, LUND UNIVERSITY



Small, peripheral or left behind



- Small vs Large
- Center vs Periphery



Industrial

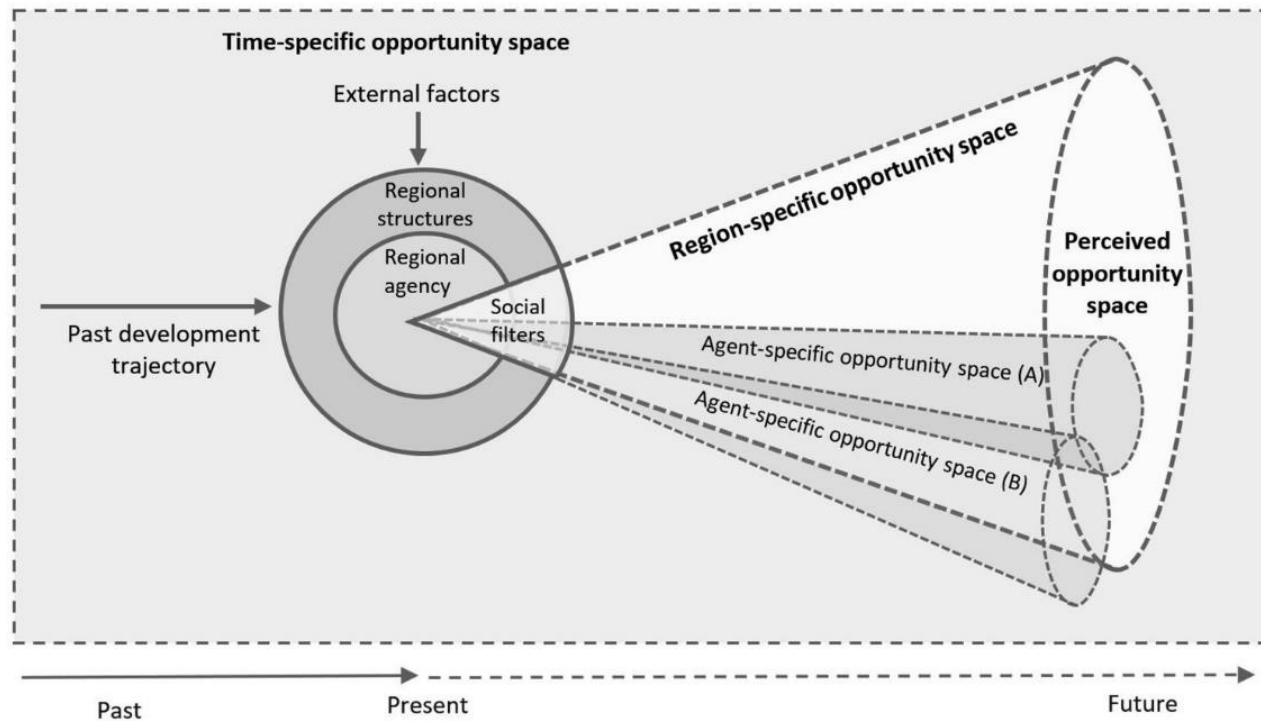


Mechanisms of places

- Small vs Large
- Centre vs Periphery
- Lagging vs Leading
- Knowledge intensive vs Old industrial
- Labor / human capital (critical mass)
- Markets / customers
- Suppliers
- Skill and knowledge spillovers
- Local buzz / global pipelines
- Lock-ins (technological, cognitive, institutional, functional)
- Culture

Agency vs Structure

Opportunity spaces



- Region specific
- Time specific
- Actor specific

Figure 1. The perceiving of opportunity space.

Source: Kurikka, H., Kolehmainen, J., Sotarauta, M., Nielsen, H., & Nilsson, M. (2022). Regional opportunity spaces – observations from Nordic regions. *Regional Studies*, 57(8), 1440–1452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2022.2107630>

Human agency



Source: Linda Stihl

Definition: “intentional, purposive and meaningful actions, and the intended and unintended consequences of such actions”

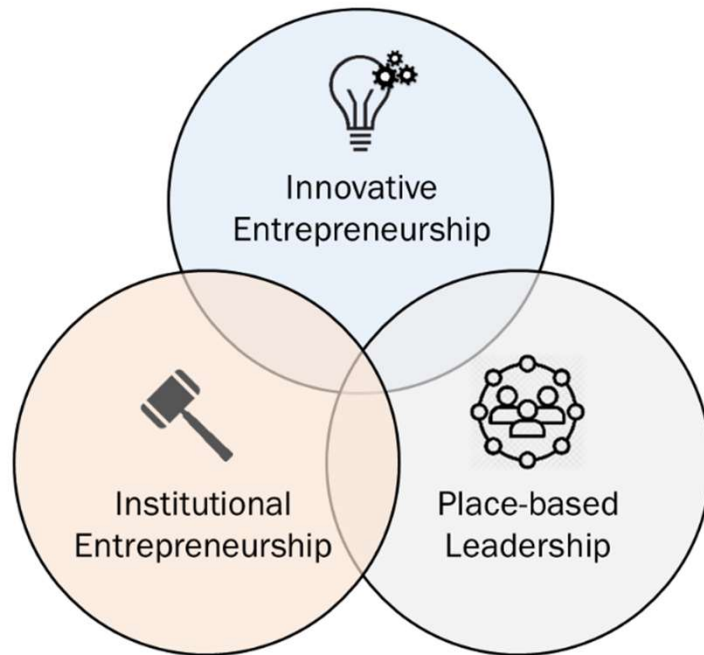
(Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020:707).

We are shaped by **past experiences**, the **present** situation and expectations of the **future**

Also consider:

- Structural preconditions
- Intentions
- Responsibility of effects
- Opportunity

Change agency



- Different approaches to initiate change in order to:
 - To change local conditions
 - To start new industry paths
- Change takes time



Innovative entrepreneurship





Institutional entrepreneurship



Place-based leadership



Reproductive agency



Source: Linda Stihl

Most agency does not create change

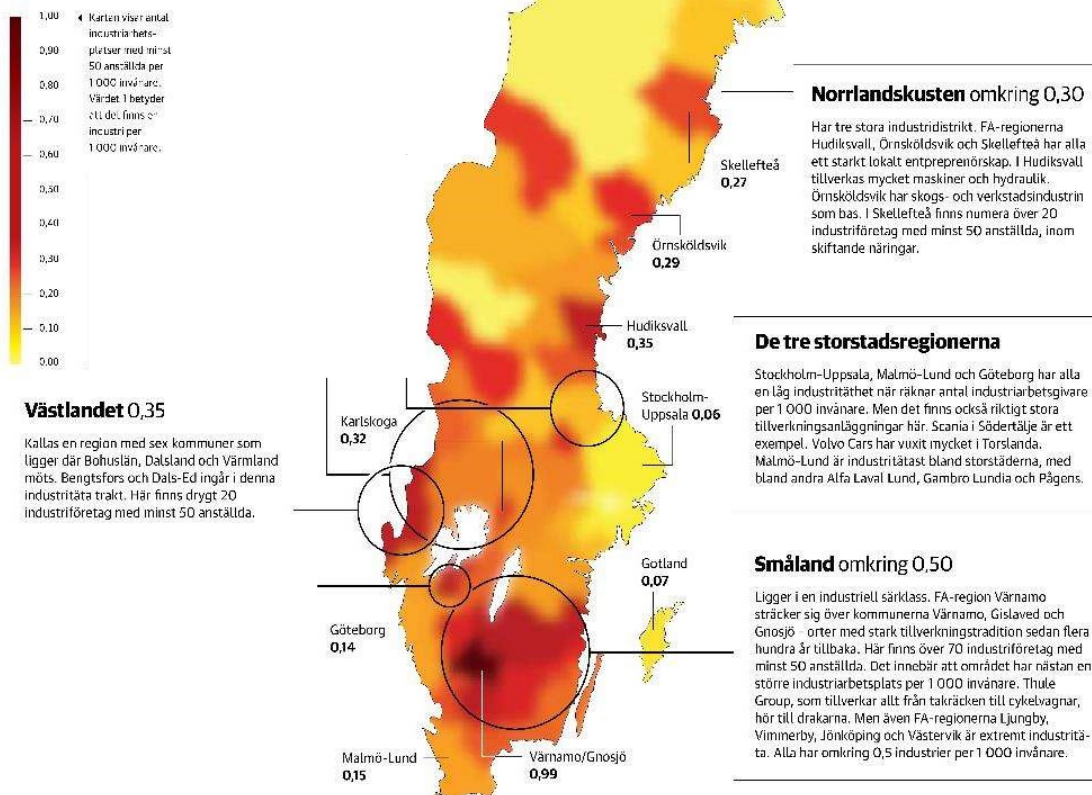
- Resisting change
- Stabilize the current
- Not perceiving to have agency

Gnosjö industrial district

Här är svensk industri som hetast

En kartläggning av svenska industriarbetsplatser visar var tillverkningsföretagen ligger som tätast. Spridningen är stor.

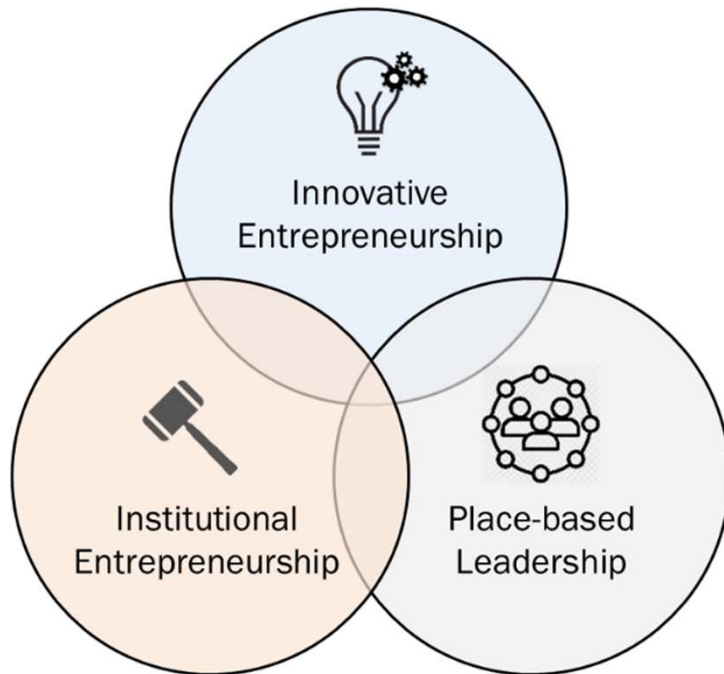
Grafik: Johan Andersson. Fakta: Carl Johan von Seth. Källa: Industrins ekonomiska råd, SCB.



The regional partnership is a cooperation between the four municipalities Gislaved, Gnosjö, Vaggeryd and Värnamo (GGVV) in the county of Jönköping.



Structure and agency in Gnosjö



Foundation for agency

- Culture & History
 - Family, church and community (föreningsliv)
 - Networks
 - Global customers, Local suppliers
 - Entrepreneurial spirit
 - Strong individuals (characters) – opportunity focus
 - Problem solvers
- Less radical change, more incremental change
- Builds resilience

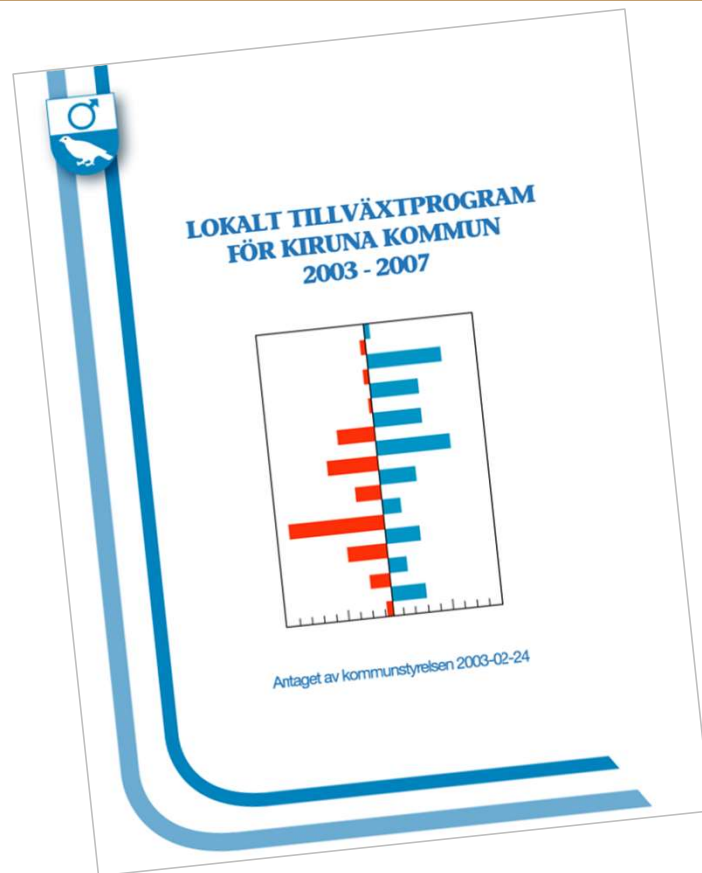
Creating new industry paths in Kiruna



Source: Linda Stihl

- Dominating industry:
 - Iron ore mining (state-owned)
 - Low tradition of working in networks and collaborations
 - Low tradition of entrepreneurship
- Growing industries:
 - Winter tourism
 - Space industry
 - Resource rich
 - Resource scarce (labour, land)

Local agency vs external decisions

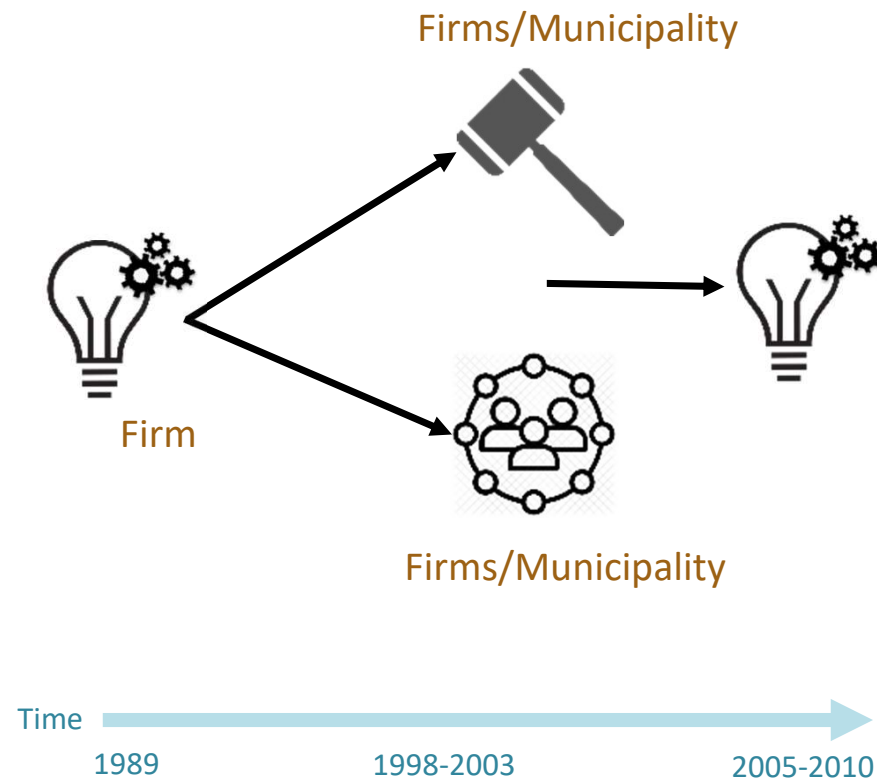


Source: SVT, 2025

Creating new industry path in Kiruna



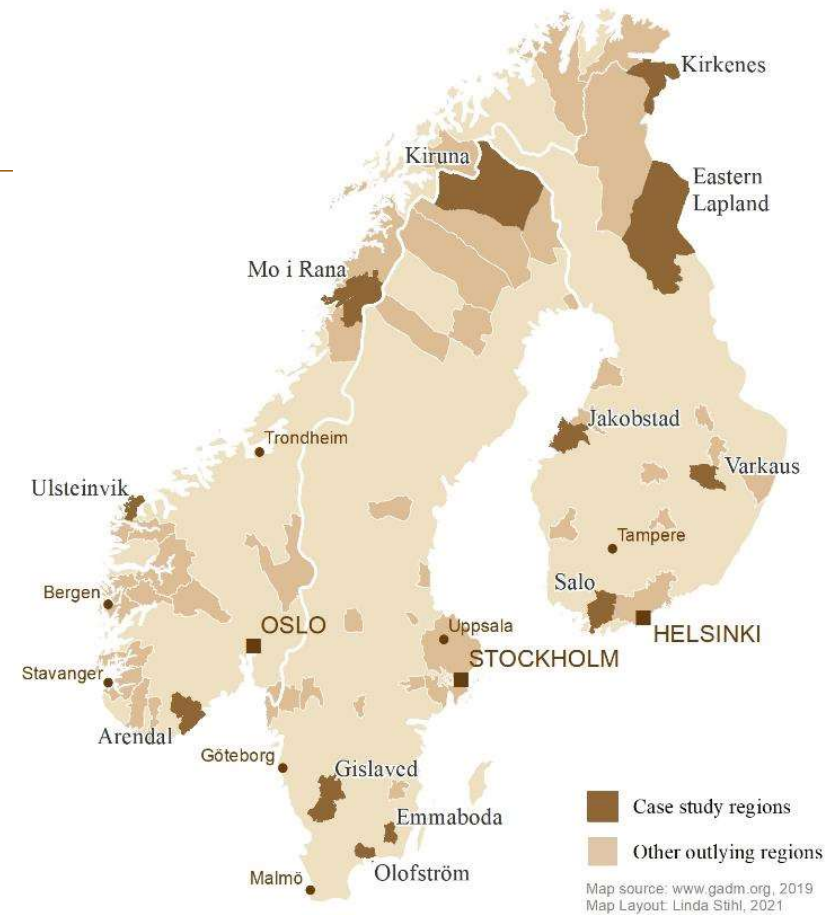
Source: Linda Stihl



Comparison

- Difference in industrial structures
- Difference in local culture and mindset
- Difference in actor roles (who does what)

> One size does not fit all



”But this cannot be my responsibility?”



Source: Linda Stihl

- **Who:**
 - Different actors may lead
 - Stronger together, but also individuals (non)decisions make ripples on the water
- **How:**
 - Identify areas you can influence
 - » Find opportunities in legislation or decisions
 - » Form and work in networks
 - Help others to see their blind spots
- **Needed:** Courage, enthusiasm, trust, coherence
+ endurance

Key take aways



- Change agency is possible and opportunity exists
- Think outside the box
- Adapt to preconditions > change processes will come in different shapes
- Pool resources and collaborate