

R&D-Report

ECoC Bodø2024: Should I stay, or should I go?

- Settlement intentions among
adolescents in Nordland

Bjørn Willy Åmo
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Nord University
R&D-Report no. 126
Bodø 2025

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ECoC Bodø2024: Should I stay, or should I go? - Settlement intentions among adolescents in Nordland

This report discusses upper secondary school youths in Bodø and Nordland and how art and culture influence their wish to stay in their hometowns as adults. The ECoC Bodø2024 had as among its main goals to make young people from Bodø and Nordland want to stay in Bodø and in Nordland. The ECoC concept increases and enhances art and culture with the intent to improve the livelihood of citizens, which then is supposed to increase the desire to stay. The idea is that art and culture engage people to interact. This interaction then knits bonds between people, and it is this bond that ties people to other people in the region, and then also to the region itself. This report investigates whether and how art and culture in general and the ECoC Bodø2024 megaevent in particular, affect upper secondary school pupils' desire to stay or come back to their hometown or the region as adults after graduation.

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List of Abbreviations

ECoC	European Capital of Culture
EU	European Union
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
SSB	Statistics Norway (Statistisk sentralbyrå)

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Executive summary

This report is prepared by the Monitor2024 team.

The report examines how art and culture influence upper secondary school pupils' willingness to remain in or return to their home municipalities in Nordland, in the context of the ECoC Bodø2024 initiative. Drawing on survey responses from 243 pupils, aged 18-30, across Nordland County, the study explores various factors shaping youth settlement intentions.

The study is grounded in a theoretical model that connects the ECoC concept with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Being an ECoC assumes that cultural investment strengthens social interaction and community identity, thereby increasing regional attachment. Maslow's model allows for the categorization of youth needs, ranging from basic physical and safety needs (e.g., jobs and housing) to higher-level needs for belonging, esteem, cognitive development, and aesthetic fulfilment. This framework provides a structured approach to understanding how cultural initiatives, when integrated with social and economic factors, can influence long-term settlement intentions among young people.

In section 4.8 we consider the specific contribution of ECoC Bodo 2024. A Bodø2024 strategic objective relating to this report, is to reverse the image of Nordland – internally. This objective is linked to the ECoC goal to increase citizens' sense of belonging, and to feel like a member of a cultural group. Our findings indicate that adolescents in Nordland feel strongest belonging to Norway, then to Europe, then to Nordland County, and then to their home municipality. The youths report to be somewhat satisfied with living in their home municipality but could see themselves settling somewhere else.

Our bivariate analysis indicates that job opportunities, social belonging, and quality of life remain the strongest determinants of whether young people envision a future in their home region. While nature is widely valued and forms a core part of regional identity, cultural participation and aesthetic factors play a complementary role by enriching social connections and creating spaces for personal development. Thriving adolescents are much more likely to settle in their home municipality. Multivariate Regression analysis confirms that adolescents' settlement intention is a function of their Own attitude towards their home municipality, Subjective norm – i.e. the opinion of family, friends and important others about settlement, and Perceived Behavioural Control – the extent to which individuals believe they can solve problems associated with settlement in the home municipality. Moreover, our multivariate analysis indicates that the upper secondary school pupils' own attitude toward residing in his or her home municipality explains a large proportion of the variance in settlement intentions. To what extent the adolescent perceives to be able to (i.e. Perceived Behaviour Control) settle in their home municipality also to a significant extent contribute to their intention to do so. Attitudes are relative stable, but perceived behaviour control changes as the individual gain new experiences and impulses.

The findings underscore that culture should be viewed not as an isolated driver of demographic change, but as a critical component of an integrated regional development strategy. By aligning cultural initiatives with employment, housing, education, and social infrastructure, ECoC Bodø2024 and similar programs can help transform cultural investment into long-term population retention.

Culture and art could serve as an arena for socialising, building social bonds, and meet people. For some, it is also an arena for building confidence, showing skills that are admired by others and

contribute to their peers. Culture and art are one such arena. Work, nature and outdoor life, sports, and everyday life also offer such arenas for to contribute socially and bond.

This report concludes with targeted recommendations for policymakers, including the need to integrate culture with economic and social policies, strengthen youth participation in cultural life, facilitate art and culture initiatives articulated toward youth's needs, and ensure equitable access to cultural opportunities across urban and rural areas. The lessons from ECoC Bodø2024 offer valuable insights for future ECoCs, emphasizing the importance of linking cultural initiatives to broader structural conditions that make regions liveable and attractive for young people.

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives related to the ECoC Bodø2024

The Guidelines developed by the European Union (EU) outlines a hierarchy of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative (EU, 2018), as shown in Table 1.1. Among the general objectives, G01 states that the goal of ECoC is to increase citizens' sense of belonging, and to feel like a member of a cultural group. This sense of belonging is expected to contribute to the long-term development of cities and regions. Young people are particularly important for a region, as they represent the future population – socially, culturally, and economically.

Table 1.1. ECoC hierarchy of objectives (EU, 2018)

General Objectives								
Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space (Go1), and foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities (Go2).								
Specific Objectives (SO)								
SO1: Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational co-operation			SO2: Widen access to and participation in culture		SO3: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors		SO4: Raise the international profile of cities through culture	
Operational Objectives								
Stimulate extensive cultural programmes of high artistic quality	Ensure cultural programmes feature a strong European dimension and transnational co-operation	Involve a wide range of citizens and stakeholders in preparing and implementing the cultural programme	Create new opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in cultural events	Improve cultural infrastructure	Develop the skills, capacity and governance of the cultural sector	Stimulate partnership and co-operation with other sectors	Promote the city and its cultural programme	Improve the international outlook of residents

Based upon EU objectives, ECoC Bodø2024 has developed a bid-book that translates these objectives to the local setting. Table 1.2. presents specific objectives of Bodø for its ECoC year. Several of these objectives explicitly target the region's young population. Especially the strategic objective Nr 1, which aims to reverse the image of Nordland – internally and externally. By positioning Bodø as a more attractive place to live and work, the project sets the goal to positively affect the out-migration trends, particularly among young people.

Table 1.2. Objectives of Bodø, the host for ECoC 2024 (Bodø2024, 2019)

NR	Strategic Objectives	Goals
1	To reverse the image of Nordland – Internally and externally	More attractive and exciting to visit, and to study, work, and stay in
2	To widen the production base for culture	More producing, co-producing, and cross-working
3	To connect with groups still not engaged	Addressing issues like diversity, mental health, isolation
4	To make better use of unusual spaces	New cultural areas and venues, driven by where people live
5	To create a connected web of “hotspots” especially for young people	Facilities are improved to create a strong and widely recognised cultural region
6	To make our cultural offer more international	More international collaborations. Better links with European artists and institutions
7	To improve the careers and opportunities for cultural professionals	A major capacity-building focus, which improves skills and experience, and creates jobs
8	To address freedom of expression	With our democratic experience, include freedom of expression in future cultural events

Based on both the EU-level and local Bodø2024 objectives, the Monitor2024 team developed a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that allow us to measure to what extent these objectives are met.

1.2 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

A KPI is an operationalized and measurable indicator for goal achievement. A well-designed KPI should be easy to measure and closely aligned with the intended outcome. Usually, one needs several measures to measure that the wanted change is achieved.

In this report, we focus on measures that allows us to evaluate to what extent ECoC Bodø2024 has contributed to the goals and objectives of EU and Bodø2024. Youths are a subgroup of a general population. Hence, the KPIs for youths will resemble those addressing the general population. The KPIs we aligned to understanding the impact from ECoC Bodø2024 on the youths relates to changes in their attendance related to cultural events, change in interests, how they view Bodø and their home municipality, and how they relate to European cultures in large. The derived KPIs are displayed in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3. Selected KPIs for the report

KPI	Population
DEM003	Frequency of attendance
DEM0031	Museum visits
DEM0032	Cinema visits
DEM0033	Theatre performance visits
OCV003	Change in level of interest by less engaged groups
OCV0081	Bodø (cultural) reputation by local residents
OCV0091	Degree of Europeanness
OCV0092	Degree of appreciation of European diversity of cultures
OCV0093	Degree of awareness of European cultures

For example, KPI DEM003 captures frequency of participation in cultural activities (e.g. museums, cinema, theatre), while KPI OCV003 tracks shifts in interest and affiliation among previously less-engaged groups — including how upper secondary school pupils relate to their home municipality, to Europe, and to European cultures more broadly. Together, these indicators help assess whether ECoC Bodø2024 has achieved its goals related to youths.

1.3 The purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is twofold. Nordland County as the owner of the upper secondary schools and one mayor cofounder of the ECoC Bodø2024 megaevent allowed us to conduct our survey among their upper secondary pupils. Nordland County wanted two insights from this effort. They wanted to know how art and culture in general, and wrapped as a mega event as ECoC Bodø2024, contributes to settlement intentions among adolescents in Nordland.

The occasion for such an investigation is that ECoC offers specific conditions that can lead to more noticeable impact. We then explore whether art and culture can influence young people's desire to stay in, or return to, Bodø and Nordland after completing their education, and to what extent the ECoC initiative contributed toward this end. The findings are intended to provide evidence-based input for local policymakers and EU policymakers seeking to solve the challenge of demographic decline through cultural development. This purpose is driven by a concerning demographic trend.

Ever since industrialization began in the 19th century, people have been moving from rural areas to cities and towns. This process is ongoing in most countries in the world. Norway is no exception from this world-wide urbanization process. From 1980 to 2009, the proportion of the population living in the most central municipalities increased from 61 to 67 % (SSB, 2009). Nordland county lost 2495 inhabitants in 2024 (Nordland County Council, 2025a). Young people under 30 years of age are overrepresented among people who move out of the county.

According to Nordland County Council (2025b), the region is facing a concerning demographic trend: low birth rates, high emigration, and minimal in-migration. Nordland is among the Norwegian counties with the lowest population growth. The age composition of the population is also worrying. About 1 in 4 Nordlanders will be over 67 years old in 2050. This is so even as the population of Nordland has varied little between 1951 and 2025 (SSB, 2025a). According to Statistics Norway (SSB, 2025b), Nordland is the only county in Norway that can expect a decline in population until the year 2050.

While Bodø, the county capital, shows modest growth, it is insufficient to compensate for the broader regional decline. Contributing factors include limited private-sector employment and disproportionately high public-sector dependency. In addition, housing prices in Bodø remain significantly higher than in comparable Norwegian cities.

Other reports address other issues relevant to understand the effects of the ECoC Bodø2024. A list of all reports is presented in Appendix A.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 ECoC and the Conceptual Model of Cultural Development

Based on the general and operational objectives set out by the EU (Table 1.1.) and the local strategic objectives defined by Bodø2024 (Table 1.2.), this report builds a theoretical model that explains how increased access to art and culture may lead to long-term social change. In particular, strengthening the desire among young people to remain in or return to the region as adults.

The overarching aim of the ECoC program is to foster a culturally vibrant society in which people thrive and prosper. For Bodø2024, this translates to a clear end goal: more people choosing to live their lives in Bodø and Nordland. Cultural development is seen as the primary mechanism for achieving this. To structure this change, we develop an Input-Process-Result processual model (see Figure 2.1.), which reflects how investments in culture are expected to produce long-term social outcomes

- » **Input:** resources allocated to art and culture, including funding, international collaboration, and artist residencies made possible through ECoC Bodø2024.
- » **Process:** activities leading to a rise in both the quantity and quality (supply) of local cultural offerings, leading to higher public engagement (demand) with cultural events and initiatives.
- » **Result:** stronger social bonds, improved sense of belonging, and ultimately a higher desire to live, work, or return to the region.

The desired change is that more people should want to live their lives in Bodø and the nearby regions. The ECoC, i.e. the Bodø2024 project, is then an added resource that trigger this process.

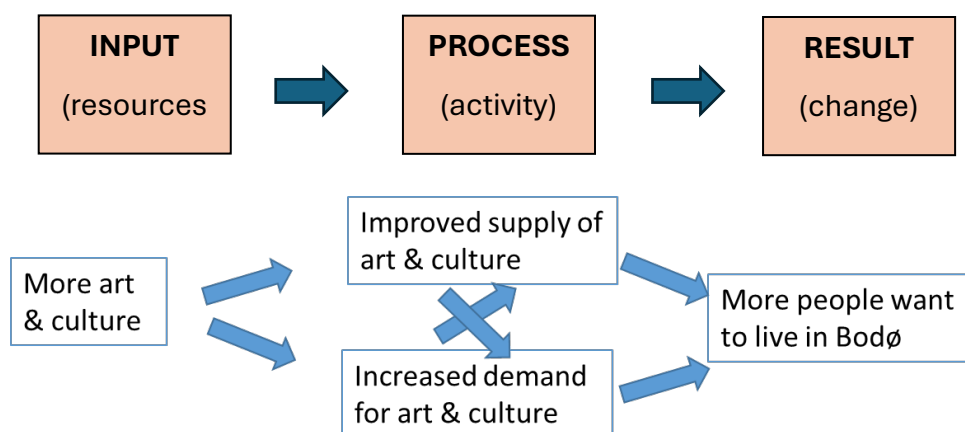


Figure 2.1. The model for the evaluation of Bodø2024

As local and international artists co-create new cultural experiences, both professional and public audiences are exposed to broader artistic offerings. This improves the cultural infrastructure and social vitality of the region, creating a reinforcing supply and demand cycle. The intention is then that the increased demand will last and maintain the added supply. Thus, people interact more and feel at home in Bodø and nearby regions.

2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Cultural Belonging

The assumption behind our conceptual model is that people need social interaction to live their lives fully. To better understand how culture supports individual well-being and place attachment, we use Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943; 1970) as a framework. Maslow's theory (see Figure 2.2.) helps explain how different levels of human needs (from basic survival to self-actualization) assists in explaining how art and culture influence people's well-being and can be addressed through a culturally rich environment. Maslow states that the lower in the pyramid, the more important the need is.

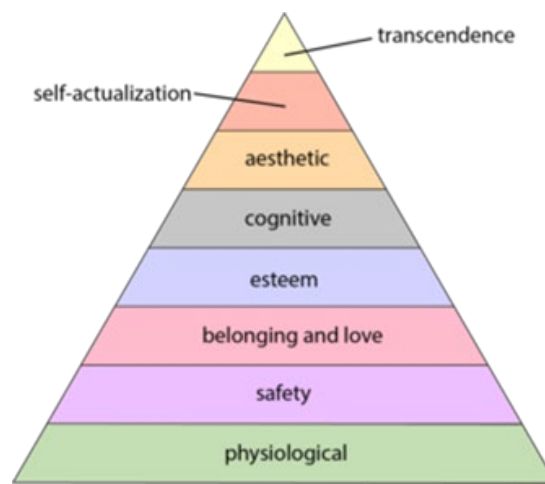


Figure 2.2. The hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943; 1970)

Art and culture events are triggering events that invite for social interaction in several ways that can be attributed to Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

- Physiological and safety needs. For some, the cultural sector is a potential source of income and employment, helping to meet basic security needs.
- Belonging and social needs. Cultural events create opportunities for meaningful interaction, friendships, and community connection, which is essential for well-being.
- Esteem and cognitive needs. Participation in culture allows people to express themselves, shine, build confidence, and engage in intellectually stimulating experiences.
- Aesthetic and self-actualization needs. Exposure to art and nature satisfies deeper emotional and existential needs, which are particularly relevant to quality of life and place satisfaction.

These needs are often interconnected, and culture may play a role at each level, depending on the individual's context, preferences and living situation.

2.3 Ajzen's Theory of Planned behaviour and settlement intentions

Ajzen (1991) states that behaviour is to a large extent decided by intentions. Intentions on the other hand are decided by the individuals' own attitude toward the behaviour, the subjective norm among important others (Denzin, 1966) and to how these people perceive the behaviour, and to what extent the individual perceive to have control of the actions leading to the behaviour. In this situation, where we study upper secondary school pupils and their decision regarding where to settle down as adults, we can only measure their intention. The actual behaviour is still in the future. We can ask the upper secondary school pupils about their own attitude toward settling down in their home municipality; they to a certain extent already have established an opinion. This opinion might change before they are to make their final decision. We can also ask them about how they perceive the want/advice/pressure from those individuals or groups important to them, and how these individuals/groups nub them in their decision process. Likewise, to what extent do they feel that the behaviour, settling down in their home municipality, is feasible for them. Are they able to do so, will this suit their needs. Here Maslow advises us on which issues are considered in this equation.

The research question we address here is as follows: Which factors are related to the intention among adolescents in Nordland to settle in their home municipality? Since we investigate intentions, we apply the most commonly used intention theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). According to the TPB, intentions to settle in the home municipality are determined by (1) attitude towards the municipality, (2) subjective norm, i.e. what family, friends and important others believe about settlement, and (3) perceived behavioural control (PBC), which refers to the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour in question, in this case settling in the home municipality. While we here focus on intentions. There is much empirical evidence for a strong relationship between intentions and behaviour. In fact, intention is the psychological construct that is most closely tied to subsequent actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to the TPB, actual behaviour is a function of behavioural intentions and Perceived Behavioural Control.

Figure 2.3 displays Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour.

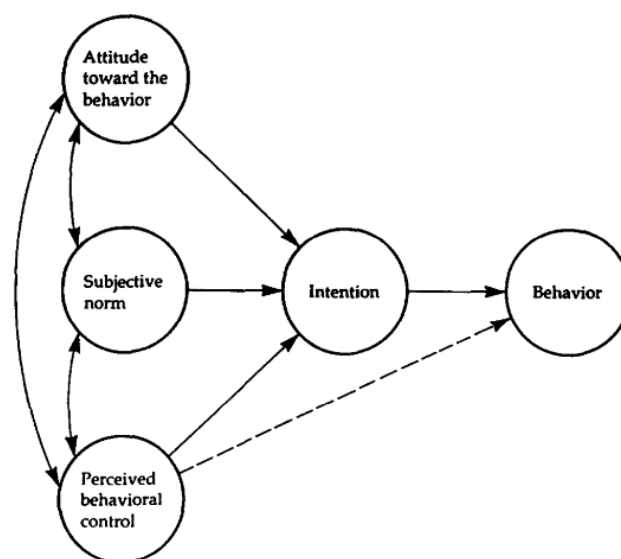


Figure 2.3. Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, p. 182).

2.4 The Model Applied to Youths

While the general ECoC framework targets the population as a whole, this report focuses specifically on one critical subgroup: upper secondary school pupils in Nordland County. Youths represent the future population base of the region. Their life decisions (where to study, work, and eventually settle) shape the demographic and social trajectory of Bodø and Nordland.

To apply the broader conceptual model to this demographic, we adapt the Input–Process–Result model and integrate it with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, tailored to the specific group of young people.

In this adapted model, the Input remains the same: the added cultural investments, activities, and infrastructure enabled through Bodø2024. The Process, however, is filtered through the lived experiences, values, and priorities of upper secondary school pupils. Upper secondary school pupils are often at a transitional stage of life, e.g., exploring identity, developing autonomy, and considering future opportunities. The Result is, thus, more specific: that the youths feel that their home municipality or region can meet their needs, provide meaningful cultural and social experiences, and ultimately offer a viable and desirable place to live as adults.

This assumes that cultural engagement contributes not only to temporary satisfaction or entertainment, but also to deeper, longer-term perceptions of place, including:

- Whether the region supports their physical and economic needs (jobs, housing, transport),
- Whether it allows for social belonging (inclusion, emotional safety),
- Whether it offers avenues for personal growth and expression (leisure, art, career),
- Whether it resonates with their aesthetic and existential values (beauty, nature, identity, freedom).

These categories reflect Maslow’s model but are reframed in terms of youth-specific life concerns.

As illustrated in Figure 2.4., the model for youth assumes that the more needs are met through cultural and social infrastructure, the more likely young people are to imagine a future in their home municipality or region. Conversely, unmet needs (e.g., lack of inclusion, poor access to jobs, housing or cultural spaces) may lead them to envision their future elsewhere.

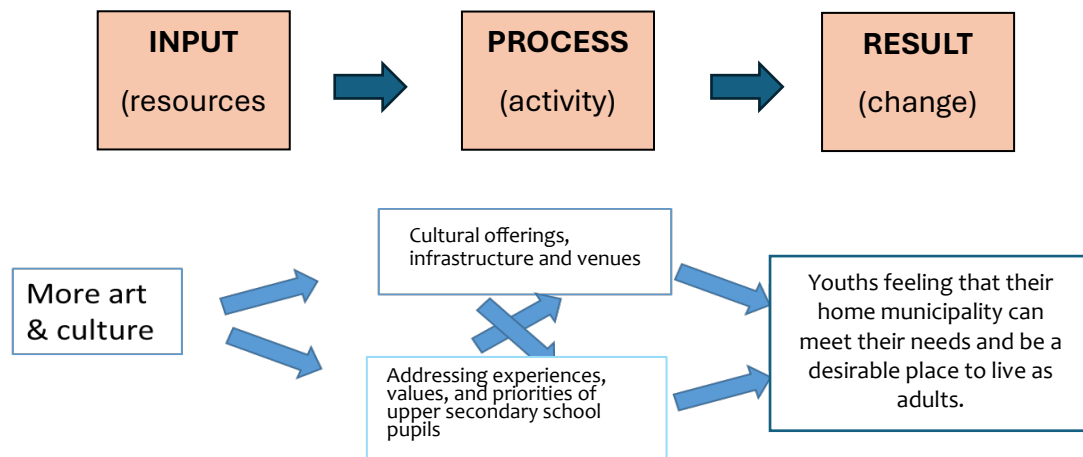


Figure 2.4. The Model applied to the specific group of youths

Thus, this framework guides both the survey design for data collection and the analysis in this report. We evaluate youth satisfaction with culture as well as how different need-dimensions (physical, emotional, cognitive, aesthetic) relate to their intention to stay, return, or leave.

3. Methodology

The primary objective of this report is to explore how art and culture relate to upper secondary school youths' willingness to stay, work, and live in Bodø and the wider Nordland region. The ECoC decision for Bodø in 2024 provided a unique context in which cultural programming was intensified, enabling us to examine whether and how such interventions can influence place attachment among youths. Young people are a particularly significant demographic, as they represent the region's potential future socially, economically, and culturally. This report therefore focuses specifically on upper secondary school pupils' relationships to culture, community, and future residential intentions.

3.1 Target Group and Data Collection

This report builds upon data gathered through a quantitative survey administered to pupils enrolled in upper secondary schools (in Norwegian – videregående skole, or vgsk) across Nordland County. The target population includes pupils following both general academic tracks and vocational education programs, typically in their final year before entering adulthood and making significant life decisions.

In Norway, upper secondary school pupils may choose a three-year academic program preparing them for higher education or a two-year vocational program leading to practical professions. Pupils in vocational programs may also opt for an additional third year to qualify for university studies. There are 16 public upper secondary schools in Nordland County, and in total 26 campuses spread all over the region. Table 3.1. presents an overview of these schools and their geographic distribution.

Table 3.1. The 26 upper secondary schools and their campuses and how they position themselves geographically

Upper secondary school	City	Municipality
Andøy vgsk	Andenes	ANDØY
Aust-Lofoten vgsk	Svolvær	VÅGAN
Bodin vgsk	Bodø	BODØ
Bodø vgsk	Bodø	BODØ
Brønnøysund vgsk	Brønnøysund	BRØNNØY
Fauske vgsk	Fauske	FAUSKE
Hadsel vgsk, studiested Melbu	Melbu	HADSEL
Hadsel vgsk, studiested Stokmarknes	Stokmarknes	HADSEL
Knut Hamsun vgsk, studiested Hamarøy	Oppeid	HAMARØY
Meløy vgsk, studiested Glomfjord	Glomfjord	MELØY
Meløy vgsk, studiested Inndyr	Inndyr	GILDESKÅL
Meløy vgsk, studiested Ørnes	Ørnes	MELØY
Mosjøen vgsk, MRK	Mosjøen	VEFSN
Mosjøen vgsk, Sentrum	Mosjøen	VEFSN
Mosjøen vgsk, studiested Kippermoen	Mosjøen	VEFSN
Mosjøen vgsk, studiested Marka	Mosjøen	VEFSN
Narvik vgsk	Narvik	NARVIK

Upper secondary school	City	Municipality
Polarsirkelen vgsk	Mo i Rana	RANA
Saltdal vgsk	Rognan	SALTDAL
Sandnessjøen vgsk	Sandnessjøen	ALSTAHAUG
Sortland vgsk, avdeling Øksnes	Myre	ØKSNES
Sortland vgsk, Sortland	Sortland	SORTLAND
Sortland vgsk, studiested Kleiva	Sortland	SORTLAND
Vest-Lofoten vgsk	Leknes	VESTVÅGØY

3.2 Survey Scope and Response Rate

In January 2025, shortly after the official closing of the Bodø2024 ECoC, we distributed the survey to all upper secondary schools in the county. Despite efforts to reach all schools, not all schools or campuses were able to facilitate participation. In total, we received 243 complete responses from pupils across 16 of the 26 campuses. Table 3.2. provides the breakdown of responses by school, alongside the estimated number of last-year pupils at each location.

Table 3.2. The 16 replying upper secondary schools, their number of pupils and the number of replies

Upper secondary school	# replies	# last-year pupils
Andøy vgsk	13	45
Aust-Lofoten vgsk	29	123
Bodin vgsk	37	306
Bodø vgsk	14	510
Brønnøysund vgsk	22	96
Fauske vgsk	21	157
Hadsel vgsk, studiested Melbu	0	67
Hadsel vgsk, studiested Stokmarknes	0	86
Knut Hamsun vgsk, studiested Hamarøy	14	34
Meløy vgsk, studiested Glomfjord	11	41
Meløy vgsk, studiested Inndyr	0	42
Meløy vgsk, studiested Ørnes	0	12
Mosjøen vgsk, MRK	0	72
Mosjøen vgsk, Sentrum	9	72
Mosjøen vgsk, studiested Kippermoen	1	109
Mosjøen vgsk, studiested Marka	9	69
Narvik vgsk	7	224
Polarsirkelen vgsk	0	441
Saltdal vgsk	5	84
Sandnessjøen vgsk	16	174
Sortland vgsk, avdeling Øksnes	0	23
Sortland vgsk, Sortland	31	113
Sortland vgsk, studiested Kleiva	0	33
Vest-Lofoten vgsk	4	217
Total	243	3150

3.3 Demographics

Respondents were asked to report their gender, age, and place of residence prior to upper secondary school. Gender was recorded using a male/female/other item, with two respondents selecting “Other.” To preserve anonymity in this relatively small sample, these two were randomly reassigned to male and female, respectively.

The average age of respondents was 20 years, with the oldest participant aged 30.

We sort the pupils’ home-municipality according to the regions consisting of Nordland County, this due to the low number of respondents. Table 3.3. shows the geographical distribution per region and per gender for our sample of youths. The regions are Salten, Helgeland, Ofoten, Lofoten and Vesterålen. The city of Bodø is situated in Salten, and are in this report treated as a separate region. Our analysis then consists of 6 regions:

1. Bodø (regional centre)
2. Salten (excluding Bodø): Gildeskål, Beiarn, Saltdal, Fauske, Sørfold, Steigen, Hamarøy
3. Helgeland: Sømna, Vevelstad, Vega, Bindal og Brønnøy, Leirfjord, Dønna, Vefsn, Herøy, Træna, Rødøy og Alstahaug, Grane, Hattfjelldal, Hemnes, Nesna, Lurøy og Rana and Meløy
4. Ofoten: Narvik, Evenes, Lødingen
5. Lofoten: Vågan, Vestvågøy, Flakstad, Moskenes, Værøy, Røst
6. Vesterålen: Andøy, Bø, Hadsel, Sortland, Øksnes

Table 3.3. Replies distributed per region for males and females

Region	Bodø	Salten	Helgeland	Ofoten	Lofoten	Vesterålen	Total
Male	15	17	24	1	9	15	81
Female	32	22	46	6	25	31	162
Total	47	39	70	7	34	46	243

Respondents were also categorized by type of educational program (vocational or general studies) and further broken down by gender and region. Tables 3.4. and 3.5. present these distributions.

Table 3.4. Sample distribution according to chosen study program and gender

Type of study/gender	2nd year vocational	3rd year general studies	Total
Male	34	47	81
Female	38	124	162
Total	72	171	243

Table 3.5. Sample distribution according to chosen study program and region

Type of study/region	Bodø	Salten	Helgeland	Ofoten	Lofoten	Vesterålen	Total
2nd year, vocational	20	15	25	0	4	8	72
3rd year, general studies	27	24	45	7	30	38	171
Total	47	39	70	7	34	46	243

To explore potential social and economic influences, pupils were asked to self-assess both their academic performance and their family's financial situation. These items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (much better than others) to 5 (much worse than others). The skewness and kurtosis values for these variables fall within acceptable thresholds for normality (Hair et al., 1998), justifying the use of parametric analysis techniques. A positive and statistically significant correlation was observed between perceived family income and self-reported grades (Pearson's correlation = 0.222, significance level < .001), suggesting that socioeconomic background may influence academic self-perception. This relationship is visualized in Figure 3.1.

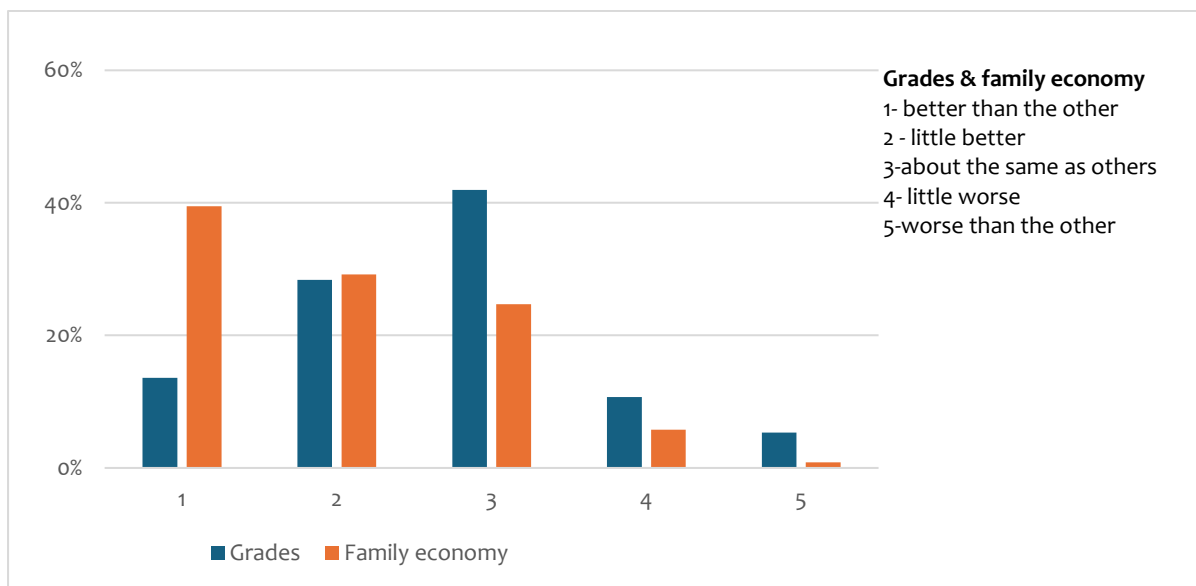


Figure 3.1. Perceived academic performance and family income relative to peers, %

In addition to demographic and background items, the questionnaire included a range of statements designed to assess the upper secondary school pupils' perceptions of the local community, cultural engagement, and future residential intentions. The majority of items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with the question phrased: "To what extent do you agree with the following statement..." Responses ranged from 1 (Totally Disagree) to 7 (Totally Agree). Some questions were posed as Yes/No items, while others required open-ended text responses.

An overview of the items used is provided in Appendix B.

4. Findings

The purpose of the ECoC Bodø2024 project is to increase the local population's desire to live, work, and remain in Bodø and the Nordland region. One of its central strategies is to enhance the availability and quality of cultural experiences, with the expectation that a vibrant cultural environment will strengthen people's sense of belonging. Young people represent a key target group, as their settlement choices will shape the region's long-term demographic and social development.

This empirical section of the report examines how upper secondary school pupils in Nordland assess their home municipality as a potential place to live and work as adults. Specifically, it investigates whether exposure to cultural life and social participation influences their intention to stay, leave, or return after graduation. The guiding assumption, rooted in the ECoC model, is that youths form place attachment through social engagement, both through participating in artistic and cultural activities as an arena for socialising with their peers and communities.

To interpret the data, we apply the conceptual model developed in Section 2. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is useful for understanding how cultural and social factors interact with basic and psychological motivations. Physical needs, such as access to employment and housing, are foundational. However, young people also seek safety, esteem, cognitive growth, and aesthetic satisfaction, needs that art and culture can help fulfil. Importantly, it also fosters the feeling of belonging. The sense of belonging could stem from access and inclusiveness to a network of important others (Denzin, 1966). Thus, culture becomes more than a form of entertainment, but a potential driver of identity formation, self-esteem and inclusion.

This section draws on both quantitative indicators (including regional comparisons and subgroup differences) and qualitative responses from pupils, who were asked to reflect openly on their future residential choices. While the number of responses limits statistical generalization, the data provide valuable indicative insights. The patterns revealed are not conclusive but serve as a basis for understanding how cultural policy can better align with youth expectations and regional development goals.

4.1 Intentions to Stay or Return

This subsection presents survey results on upper secondary school pupils' preferences for staying in or returning to their home municipality or region as adults. The items analysed here are central to the ECoC Bodø2024 objective, as they directly measure the likelihood that young residents will view Nordland as a viable long-term place to live. The findings are broken down across educational background, gender, and region to expose patterns of cultural and geographic mobility.

We posed 3 questions in February 2024 measuring the upper secondary school pupils' intentions to stay or return. The first one is worded:

- Can you imagine living in your home municipality when you grow up?

This question offered the options Yes, No, Don't know. The second question was:

- If you could choose between living in your home municipality and in another municipality, which would you prefer?

The menu of options for this question included:

1. I would definitely prefer to live in my home municipality.
2. I would prefer to live in my home municipality.
3. I think I would prefer to live in my home municipality.
4. Unsure, I can't choose
5. I think I would prefer to live in another municipality.
6. I would prefer to live in another municipality.
7. I would definitely prefer to live in another municipality.

The third question was:

- When you are going to settle down, where would you prefer to live?

The menu of options for this question included:

- My home municipality
- A municipality in Nordland County which is not my home municipality
- In Norway, but other than Nordland County
- Abroad

Key findings:

Males and 2nd year vocational education pupils are more likely to want to settle in their home municipality than are females and 3rd year general education pupils.

We see regional differences, where distance from Bodø indicate less settlement intentions in their home municipality.

The youths are somewhat satisfied with living in their home municipality but could envision settling somewhere else.

The Maslow's needs that youths are concerned about relates to Belonging, Cognitive needs, Physical needs and Safety. Females are more concerned about the Physical, Safety, and Belonging needs than are males. Males are more concerned about Cognitive and Aesthetic needs than are females.

Table 4.1.1. presents the average preference for staying in one's home municipality as an adult, disaggregated by gender (male/female) and by educational program (vocational vs. general studies). Higher percentages reflect a stronger propensity to live, work, and remain in the same municipality where the pupil was located just before entering upper secondary school.

Table 4.1.1. Preferences for staying in home-municipalities as a place to work, stay and live as an adult: total average, gender and vocational/general education

Can you imagine living in your home municipality when you grow up?	Total	Male	Female	2nd year, vocational education	3rd year, general education
No	21 %	19 %	22 %	13 %	25 %
Yes	51 %	54 %	49 %	61 %	46 %
Don't know	28 %	27 %	29 %	26 %	29 %
Total n	243	81	162	72	171

The data reveals notable differences in preferences across pupil subgroups. Pupils enrolled in vocational programs report higher average preferences, indicating a stronger intention to remain in their local area after graduation. In contrast, pupils in general studies programs exhibit lower preferences, suggesting a higher propensity to seek opportunities elsewhere. The gender gap is more modest but present: male pupils express a slightly stronger preference to stay than female pupils.

Table 4.1.2. displays the pupils' preferences for staying in their home municipalities as a site for working, stay and live as an adult, as the total average percentage per region. Data is disaggregated by region, allowing for geographic comparisons across Nordland.

The results show spatial variation in youth attachment to their home municipality. Some regions display relatively high average preference percentages, indicating that pupils there are more likely to envision their future locally. Other regions, especially smaller or more peripheral municipalities, exhibit lower average preference percentages, reflecting weaker ties to place. This data indicate that areas with greater cultural density, education access, or economic opportunity produce stronger retention potential.

Table 4.1.2. Preferences for staying in home-municipalities as a place to work, stay and live as an adult: per region

Can you imagine living in your home municipality when you grow up?	Bodø	Salten	Helgeland	Ofoten	Lofoten	Vesterålen
No	19 %	28 %	20 %	14 %	18 %	22 %
Yes	62 %	46 %	51 %	14 %	68 %	35 %
Don't know	19 %	26 %	29 %	71 %	15 %	43 %
Total n	47	39	70	7	34	46

Table 4.1.3. displays the pupils' preferences for staying in their home municipality or in another municipality, as the total average percentage, for males and females, and as total average percentage for the pupils opting for the vocational as well as the general study.

The data exhibits that pupils enrolled in vocational programs are more likely to prefer staying in their home municipality (50%) compared to those in general studies (39%). The gender gap is less pronounced, with females slightly more inclined to stay than males. Thus, vocational pupils often

see local employment as attainable and appropriate, while general studies pupils, who tend to pursue higher education, are structurally primed for outward migration toward urban centres and university hubs.

Table 4.1.3. Preferences for home- or other municipalities as a place to work, stay and live as an adult: per total average, gender and vocational/general education

If you could choose between living in your home municipality and in another municipality, which would you prefer?	Total	Male	Female	2nd year, vocational education	3rd year, general education
I would definitely prefer to live in my home municipality.	9 %	12 %	7 %	14 %	7 %
I would prefer to live in my home municipality.	14 %	12 %	15 %	17 %	13 %
I think I would prefer to live in my home municipality.	19 %	16 %	20 %	19 %	19 %
Unsure, I can't choose	19 %	25 %	17 %	25 %	17 %
I think I would prefer to live in another municipality.	17 %	14 %	19 %	8 %	20 %
I would prefer to live in another municipality.	11 %	10 %	12 %	14 %	10 %
I would definitely prefer to live in another municipality.	10 %	11 %	10 %	3 %	13 %
Total n	243	81	162	72	171

Moving further, Table 4.1.4. displays the pupils' preferences for staying in their home municipality or in another municipality as site for working, stay and live as an adult, as the total average percentage, per region.

The data similarly highlight spatial inequality in place attachment. In some rural regions, pupils show strong place-loyalty, potentially rooted in community ties or cultural identity. In others, perceptions of limited opportunity or social isolation dominate, pushing preferences toward outward mobility. This finding aligns with the Maslow theory in that youths are unlikely to remain in areas where basic, social, or cognitive needs are perceived as unmet.

Table 4.1.4. Preferences for home- or other municipalities as a place to work, stay and live as an adult: per region

Region	Bodø	Salten	Helgeland	Ofoten	Lofoten	Vesterålen
I would definitely prefer to live in my home municipality.	6 %	5 %	13 %	14 %	12 %	7 %
I would prefer to live in my home municipality.	17 %	8 %	16 %	14 %	18 %	13 %
I think I would prefer to live in my home municipality.	26 %	13 %	19 %	0 %	24 %	17 %
Unsure, I can't choose	17 %	23 %	20 %	14 %	12 %	24 %
I think I would prefer to live in another municipality.	15 %	21 %	16 %	29 %	24 %	11 %
I would prefer to live in another municipality.	15 %	13 %	7 %	0 %	0 %	22 %
I would definitely prefer to live in another municipality.	4 %	18 %	10 %	29 %	12 %	7 %
Total n	47	39	70	7	34	46

Table 4.1.5. further details the pupils' preferences staying in their home municipality or in another municipality as site for to work, stay and live as an adult, as the total average percentage, for males and females, and as total average percentages for pupils opting for the vocational and the general study.

The data indicates that only 41% of pupils currently envision their home municipality as their preferred place to settle. This proportion is stable across gender but is notably higher among vocational pupils (46%) compared to general studies pupils (39%). General studies pupils express the highest preference for leaving Nordland altogether (40%), and the highest share planning to move abroad (10%). By contrast, vocational pupils show stronger regional retention (64% prefer either their home municipality or another one within Nordland), and only 3% express intent to move abroad.

Table 4.1.5. Preferences for staying in home-municipalities as a place to work, stay and live as an adult: per total average, gender and vocational/general education

When you are going to settle down, where would you prefer to live?	Total	Male	Female	2nd year, vocational education	3rd year, general education
My home municipality	41 %	40 %	41 %	46 %	39 %
A municipality in Nordland County which is not my home municipality	13 %	12 %	14 %	18 %	11 %
In Norway, but other than Nordland County	38 %	37 %	39 %	33 %	40 %
Abroad	8 %	11 %	6 %	3 %	10 %
Total	243	81	162	72	171

These findings reflect divergent mobility mindsets. Vocational pupils may be more place-rooted, identifying with localized job markets and social networks, while general studies pupils display a national and global orientation, likely shaped by their higher education ambitions and exposure to broader career options.

Table 4.1.6. further details the pupils' preferences staying in their home municipality or in another municipality as a place to work, stay and live as an adult, per region.

The data reveals regional differences in place attachment and future migration intent.

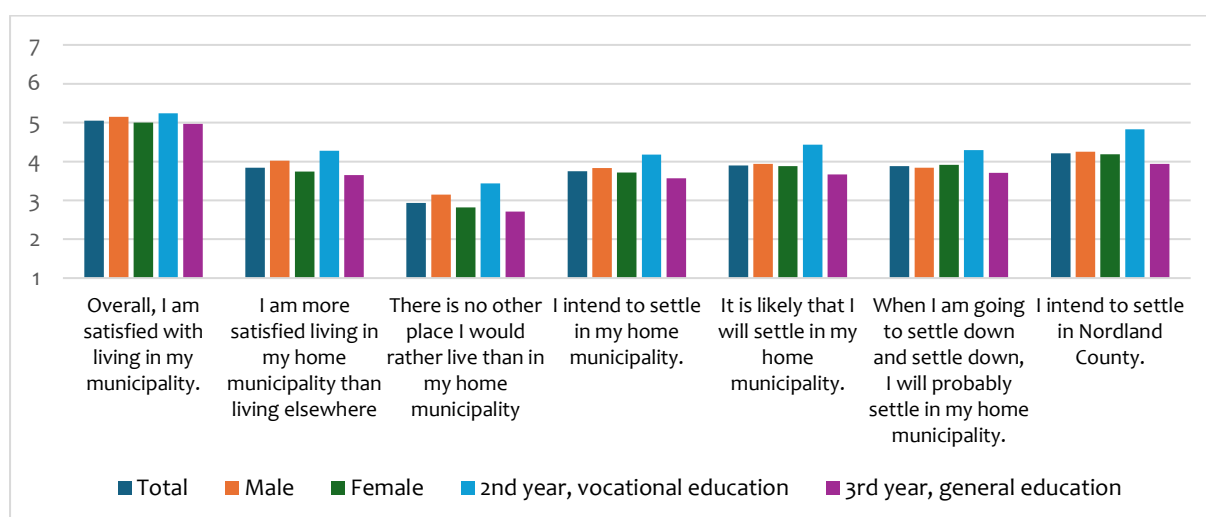
- Helgeland has the highest proportion (53%) of pupils preferring to stay in their home municipality, suggesting a relatively strong satisfaction with the region's living conditions.
- Ofoten records the lowest stay-preference (14%) and highest intra-Nordland mobility (43%), suggesting pupils are open to staying in the county, just not in their hometown.
- Salten and Vesterålen show more fragmented results, with a relatively high share preferring to move to other parts of Nordland or elsewhere in Norway.
- Bodø, despite being the cultural capital and most urbanized municipality, has a relatively modest 40% stay-preference, with another 40% intending to leave Nordland. This shows that even urban youth may seek opportunities elsewhere.
- The lowest preference for moving abroad is in Helgeland (1%) and Ofoten (0%), while Salten and Bodø report slightly higher aspirations for international mobility (15% and 11%).

Table 4.1.6. Preferences for staying in home-municipalities as a place to work, stay and live as an adult: per region

When you are going to settle down, where would you prefer to live?	Bodø	Salten	Helgeland	Ofoten	Lofoten	Vesterålen
My home municipality	40 %	23 %	53 %	14 %	50 %	35 %
A municipality in Nordland County which is not my home municipality	9 %	31 %	6 %	43 %	9 %	13 %
In Norway, but other than Nordland County	40 %	31 %	40 %	43 %	32 %	43 %
Abroad	11 %	15 %	1 %	0 %	9 %	9 %
Total	47	39	70	7	34	46

Taken together, the Tables 4.1.1.-4.1.6. reveal important patterns in how upper secondary school pupils across Nordland relate to their home municipalities and the wider region as potential places to live as adults. While a significant share of youth expresses a willingness to stay or return, particularly among vocational pupils and in certain regions like Lofoten, many (especially those on academic tracks) indicate intentions to move elsewhere in Norway or abroad. These preferences are shaped by both educational orientation and geographic context, pointing to differentiated perceptions of opportunity, identity, and belonging. To further explore these dynamics, the following figures offer a visual representation of how youth evaluate their home municipalities, helping to highlight not just whether they wish to stay, but how positively or negatively they perceive their current place of residence in the broader context of life planning.

Figure 4.1.1. presents the relationship between two key indicators: pupils' overall satisfaction with their home municipality, and their intention to settle there as adults. The results are disaggregated by gender and educational track. The figure shows the results from 7 questions, all measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

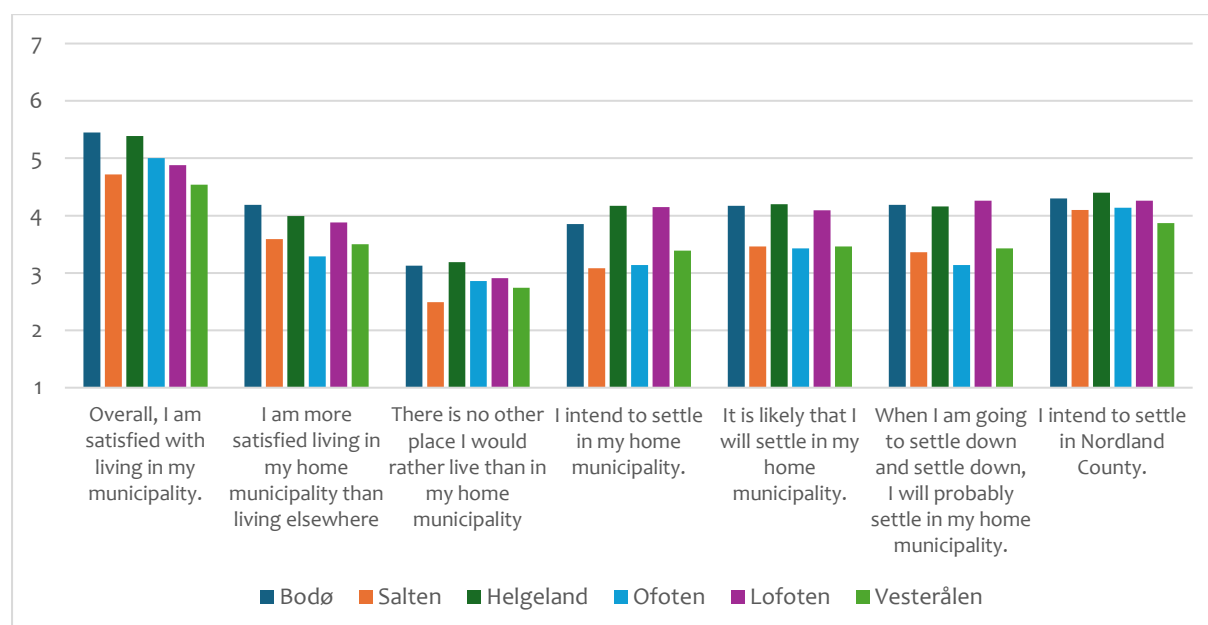


Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent does you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.1.1. Satisfaction with home municipality and intentions to settle down: total average score, gender and type of study program

The data shows that vocational pupils report higher satisfaction with their home municipality compared to general studies pupils. This pattern links with their stronger intention to remain or return after graduation. While both males and females follow this general trend, males in vocational education appear particularly rooted, showing high satisfaction and stronger settlement intentions. General studies pupils, by contrast, report lower satisfaction scores, which aligns with their higher tendency to seek opportunities outside their local area or even outside Nordland. Even as the upper secondary school pupils are more satisfied with living in their home municipality (score about 5, i.e. somewhat agree), they are uncertain about where to settle down (score about 4, i.e. neutral).

Figure 4.1.2. shows the same variables but broken down by region. It visually compares how pupils from different areas perceive their municipality as a place to live and whether they intend to stay. The figure reveals that some regions (Helgeland and Lofoten) have both high satisfaction and high stay intentions, while others (notably Salten and Ofoten) show lower satisfaction and reduced interest in staying. Bodø and Vesterålen fall somewhere in between. This pattern suggests that regional variation in satisfaction is mirrored in future migration intentions. Where local life is perceived as vibrant, meaningful, and supportive, pupils are more likely to stay.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent does you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.1.2. Satisfaction with home municipality and intentions to settle down, per region

To complement the quantitative findings, we included an open-ended question at the end of the survey, asking the question: “What is the most important factor for you when choosing where to live after completing your education and are going to settle down?”

A total of 104 out of 243 respondents provided written responses. These open-text answers offer valuable qualitative insight into pupils’ expectations, values, and priorities regarding their future place of residence. To interpret the responses systematically, we applied a thematic categorization based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic physical needs to aesthetic and self-

actualization goals. Many pupils' statements reflected multiple layers of needs simultaneously, underscoring the interdependence of physical, social, and psychological factors. For example:

Being close to family. Having the opportunity for a job I enjoy. That there are good environments in schools, leisure activities, and among adults. Good opportunities for physical activity and outdoor life. (female vocational pupil, Vesterålen)

The categories, which derived from the theoretical framework touches on at least five dimensions:

1. Physiological needs (income through employment), - job opportunities, housing, public transportation, access to shops and services.
2. Safety needs (health and stable environments), - physical and social security, stability in health and income.
3. Belonging (family and community), - family ties, friendships, local networks, and a general sense of place attachment.
4. Cognitive needs (enjoyable and meaningful work), - career development, respect, self-esteem, leisure activities, and opportunities for personal growth.
5. Aesthetic needs (nature, outdoor recreation, quality of environment), - enjoyment of natural landscapes, cultural events, hobbies, and favourable weather conditions.

These qualitative responses enrich our understanding of youth place attachment and confirm that young people make residential decisions based not only on economic opportunity but also on how well a place meets their broader needs.

Table 4.1.7. presents the total number of verbal responses (n = 104) provided by upper secondary school pupils who answered the open-ended survey question. In total, these 104 pupils produced 269 identifiable need-statements, which were categorized according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The distribution of these needs is shown across gender (male/female) and educational orientation (general vs vocational).

Of the 104 respondents, 40 were male and 64 were female, with 75 enrolled in general studies and 29 in vocational programs. The 40 males expressed a combined 76 individual needs, while the 64 females expressed 136 needs, corresponding to an average of 1.9 needs per male and 2.1 needs per female respondent. This suggests that female pupils were both more expressive and more multifaceted in how they evaluated the conditions that would influence their future place of residence.

Table 4.1.7. The number of statements and how these statements are distributed according to needs: in total, per gender, and per study

Maslow's needs	Total n	Total %	Male	Female	General	Vocational
Physical needs	58	22 %	20 %	24 %	24 %	19 %
Safety	47	17 %	11 %	21 %	17 %	19 %
Belonging	69	26 %	24 %	26 %	24 %	29 %
Self-esteem	7	3 %	5 %	1 %	3 %	3 %
Cognitive needs	60	22 %	26 %	19 %	23 %	19 %
Aesthetic needs	28	10 %	14 %	8 %	9 %	13 %
Total needs	269		76	136	142	70
Total responders (n)		104	40	64	75	29

In terms of content, belonging emerged as the most commonly mentioned need (26%), followed by cognitive needs (22%), physical needs (22%), safety (17%), and aesthetic needs (10%). Self-esteem was rarely cited (3%), but still present. These proportions reflect a rich and nuanced range of motivations and expectations. Gender differences are also evident:

- Females more frequently referred to physical and belonging needs, often expressing concern about future family life, stability, and supportive community environments.
- Males were more likely to express cognitive and esteem-related needs, highlighting aspirations such as meaningful work and career interest.

For example, a male vocational pupil from Helgeland summarized his criteria as:

Money, job, and a wife. (male vocational pupil, Helgeland)

In contrast, a female vocational pupil from Salten emphasized child-rearing and well-being:

That my children have a good upbringing, that I have a good job with a good income. (female vocational pupil, Salten)

These gendered expressions indicate that although job and income security are universal concerns, female respondents more often embed these within a broader social and relational framework.

Table 4.1.8. continues the analysis of qualitative responses, this time categorizing the 269 need-statements by the region where the pupil lives. The number of respondents per region ranges from 3 in Ofoten to 30 in Helgeland. The data are normalized to show the percentage distribution of needs within each region.

Table 4.1.8. The number of statements and how these statements distribute according to needs: per region

Maslow's needs	Bodø	Helgeland	Lofoten	Ofoten	Salten	Vesterålen
Physical needs	16 %	19 %	35 %	20 %	18 %	30 %
Safety	19 %	18 %	15 %	0 %	18 %	18 %
Belonging	27 %	26 %	10 %	60 %	29 %	23 %
Self-esteem	3 %	2 %	5 %	0 %	4 %	2 %
Cognitive needs	24 %	25 %	20 %	20 %	16 %	23 %
Aesthetic needs	11 %	11 %	15 %	0 %	14 %	5 %
Total needs	37	57	20	5	49	44
Total responders (n)	16	30	10	3	27	22

Based on the data outlines in Table 4.1.8, several regional patterns emerge:

- Pupils from Bodø express the highest average number of needs per respondent (2.3), suggesting higher articulation or expectation regarding quality of life and settlement conditions.
- In Lofoten and Vesterålen, physical needs dominate, accounting for 35% and 30% of all expressed needs in those regions, respectively. These needs frequently referred to public transport and employment opportunities. For example, a female general studies pupil from Vesterålen stated: "Accessibility and good opportunities for varied jobs."

- Pupils from Ofoten (though small in number) strongly emphasized belonging (60%), suggesting high emotional attachment despite other factors possibly being lacking.
- Cognitive needs were consistently mentioned across most regions (16–25%), reflecting a shared demand for meaningful engagement, education, and interesting careers.
- Safety and aesthetic needs appear more evenly distributed, though slightly more prominent in Bodø and Helgeland.

This regional variation underscores the importance of context-sensitive cultural and policy strategies. While some areas are marked by a demand for infrastructure and employment (e.g., Lofoten), others require support for social cohesion and identity (e.g., Ofoten). Urban areas like Bodø show more complex and layered expectations, possibly reflecting broader exposure to options and comparison points.

4.2 Physical needs: Job, Housing, Family

This section explores how upper secondary school pupils in Nordland evaluate the practical and material conditions in their home municipalities. Specifically, their perceptions of whether local environments can meet their basic physical needs for adulthood. In the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these foundational requirements include employment opportunities, financial security, housing access, and conditions for family life. These are critical enablers for a young person's decision to settle down in their home community or move elsewhere.

To assess how youth perceive these conditions, we included a set of targeted survey items that reflect both current evaluations and future priorities. The following 6 statements offering a were used, all measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree:

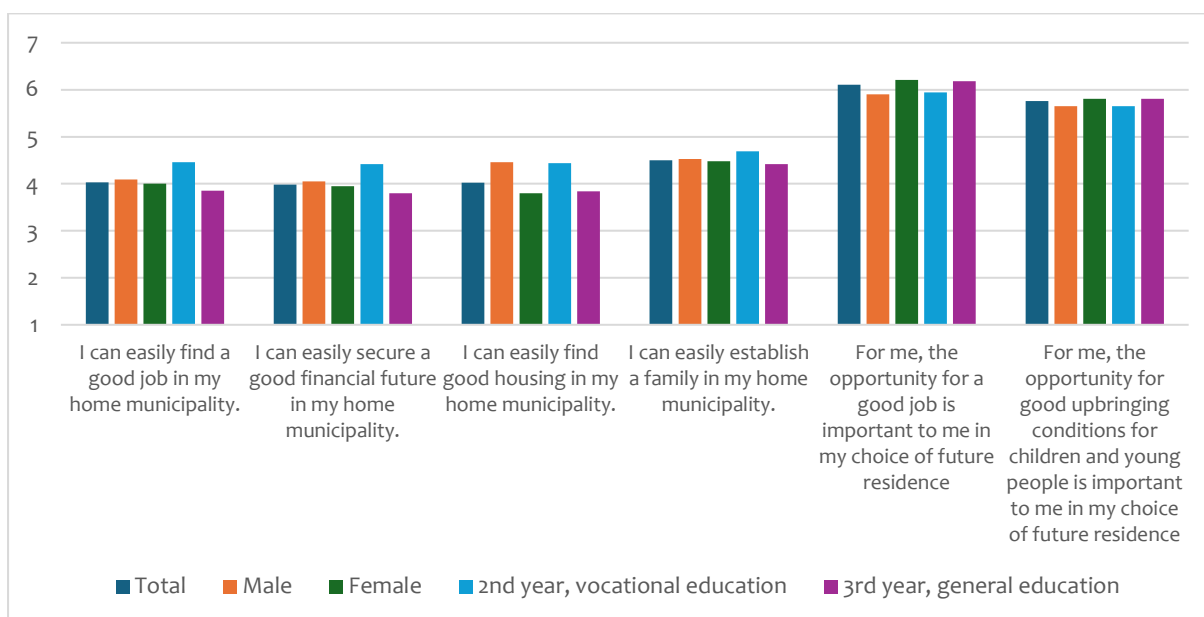
- I can easily find a good job in my home municipality.
- I can easily secure a good financial future in my home municipality.
- I can easily find good housing in my home municipality.
- I can easily establish a family in my home municipality.
- For me, the opportunity for a good job is important to me in my choice of future residence
- For me, the opportunity for good upbringing conditions for children and young people is important to me in my choice of future residence

Key findings:

It is very important for the youths to see opportunities for getting a good job and find good opportunities for bringing up kids, but they to lesser extent see such opportunities at their home municipality.

We see regional differences, where distance from Bodø indicate that the youth see less such opportunities at their home municipality.

Figure 4.2.1. illustrates how pupils assess the availability of resources needed to lead a secure and stable life in their home municipality. The data are structured by gender and type of education program (vocational vs general studies).



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.2.1. How the home-municipality is perceived regarding access to resources securing a good life: total average score, gender and type of study program

The results indicate that, on average, pupils are neutral to slightly sceptical about whether their home municipalities can provide them with the opportunities needed to build a good adult life. Through all groups, responses to statements about job availability, financial security, housing, and starting a family tend to cluster around the midpoint of the scale, suggesting limited confidence in local infrastructure and opportunity.

These findings show that pupils on vocational tracks may perceive local communities as more likely to fulfil basic and security-related needs (employment, housing), while general studies pupils may be more influenced by the availability of cognitive, aesthetic, and esteem-related opportunities – often associated with urban centres or university towns.

However, when asked about what matters most in their future place of residence, pupils express clear priorities. Both good job opportunities and conditions for raising children emerge as highly important factors across the sample. This decoupling between what pupils find important and what they believe their home municipality can offer, suggests a significant gap in perceived capacity versus aspirational needs.

The open-ended responses further illuminate these perceptions. Many pupils explicitly tie their future living preferences to expectations of employment and secure living conditions:

That my place of residence has the job opportunities I want and that the housing market has good options so I can get a nice house that can last a lifetime (female general studies pupil, Lofoten)

Good job opportunities. A safe and good place for my future children to grow up. Good access to public transport, many shops, activity options, and leisure activities. (female general studies pupil, Salten)

These statements highlight a desire for comprehensive and future-oriented infrastructure, not just a job, but a full infrastructure that supports family life, mobility, and recreation.

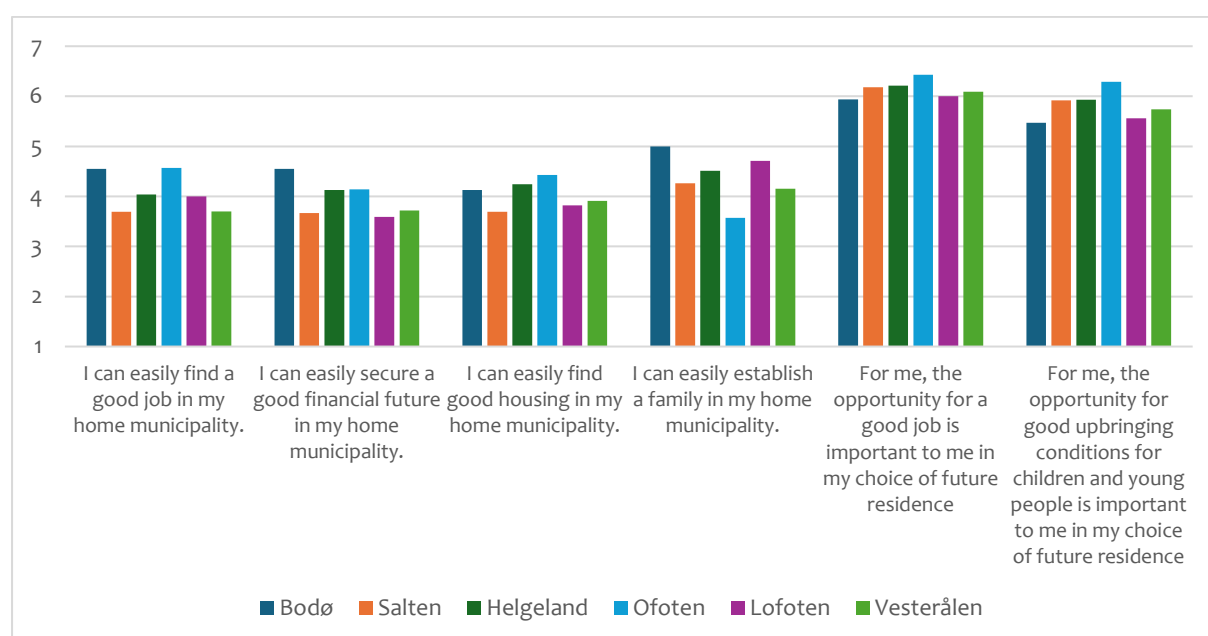
Vocational pupils, while slightly more optimistic about the local conditions, express similar concerns. Their responses emphasize practical matters such as housing availability and local job markets:

Better housing plots, affordable. (male vocational pupil, Helgeland)

That I get a good job with a good work environment, which I don't think exists in my hometown municipality. (female vocational pupil, Vesterålen)

Figure 4.2.2. presents the average perception scores of upper secondary school pupils across different regions in Nordland regarding the availability of key resources needed to build a secure life; namely access to jobs, housing, and conditions suitable for raising children. The figure structures results by region, allowing for a comparison of local perceptions across geographic contexts.

The results indicate relatively modest variation across regions. In general, pupils from all areas rate the availability of jobs, housing, and child-raising conditions close to the neutral midpoint, suggesting a lack of strong confidence in the adequacy of local resources. Nevertheless, some regional differences are worth noting. Pupils from Bodø consistently rate their home municipality more favourably across all items compared to those from Salten and Vesterålen, whose ratings fall slightly below average. This may reflect Bodø's position as a regional centre with more developed infrastructure and broader employment opportunities.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.2.2. How home-municipality is perceived regarding access to resources securing a good life: shown per region

Despite these differences, pupils from all regions express similar priorities regarding what they seek in a future place of residence. The importance of good jobs and safe, supportive environments for raising children is emphasized consistently, regardless of local context. This convergence reinforces the idea that, while perceptions of current opportunities vary slightly, the values guiding settlement choices are shared across the youth population.

4.3 Safety and Infrastructure

This subsection examines how upper secondary school pupils perceive the extent to which their home municipality supports a socially connected life. The following 6 survey measured along a 7-point Likert scale items were used:

- I can easily feel safe in my home municipality.
- I can easily have good healthcare in my home municipality.
- For me, accessibility to shops, restaurants and other services is important in my choice of future residence.
- For me, accessibility to public transport is important in my choice of future residence.
- For me, accessibility to the health services I need is important in my choice of future residence.
- For me, proximity to family and friends is important in my choice of future residence.

Key findings:

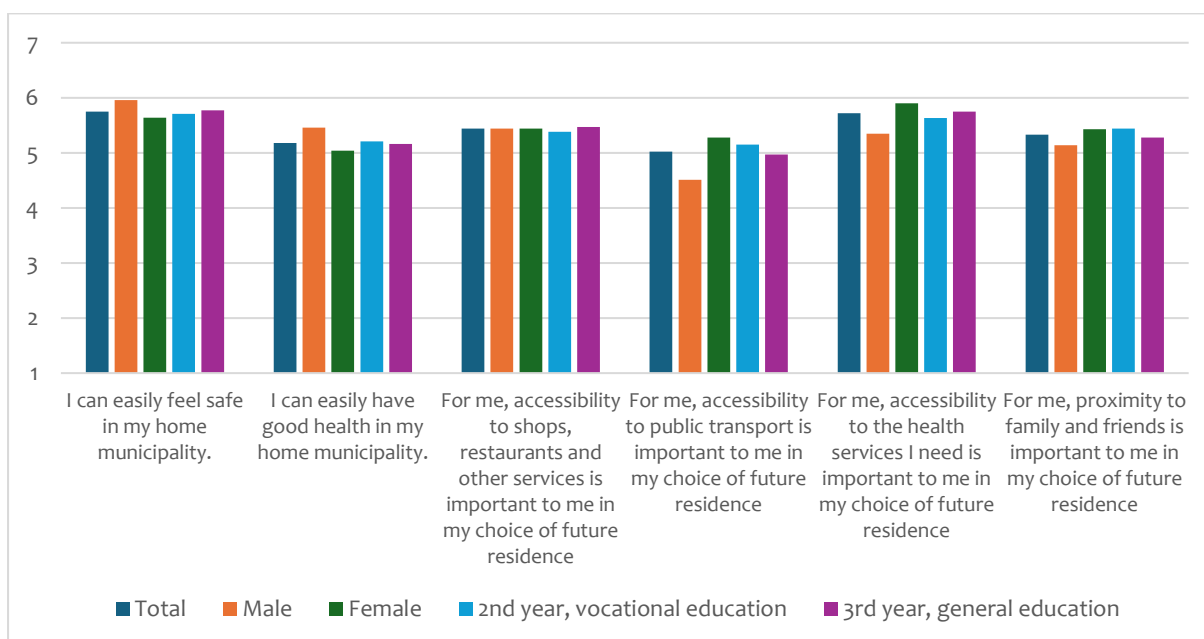
The youths feel safe and reports good access to health services in their home municipality.

Accessibility to health services, proximity to family and friends, access to shops and other services, as well as accessibility to public transport is important in their choice of where to settle down.

We see regional differences relative to access to health services, where distance from Bodø indicate that the youth see less such accessibility at their home municipality.

Figure 4.3.1. presents average responses to these items, broken down by gender and type of study program.

The data shows that upper secondary school pupils typically feel safe in their home municipality. They are a bit concerned about public transport and their safety related to health. These two issues are linked, as healthcare is centralized and access to such depends on well functional public transport. There are only minor differences due to gender or type of education, even if females seem to be more concerned about public transport than is males.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent does you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.3.1. To what extent would they feel safe in their home municipality: total average score, gender and type of study program

These issues concern the upper secondary school pupils and influence their choice of residence as adults. A female from Bodø doing general studies express it like this: *That the express boat service gets better and the boats actually run on schedule so people living on the islands can trust the service. That would make it much easier and more attractive to settle in the county.*

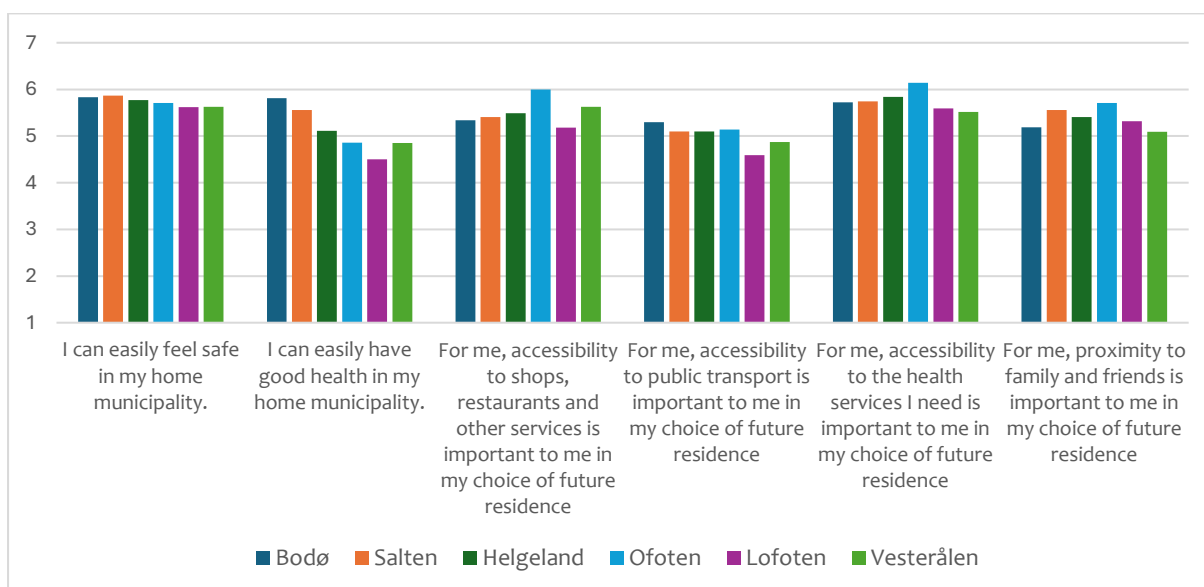
Reliability in necessary services. A female from Salten doing vocational studies express it like this: *Actually, good healthcare services.*

These sentiments suggest that even when material conditions are adequate, the presence or absence of infrastructure ensuring personal safety can be a deciding factor in whether young people choose to remain in the region.

Figure 4.3.2. presents average responses to the safety and infrastructure items, broken down by region.

The overall trend remains stable across regions. The further away from Bodø the pupils live, the more concerned are they for their safety related to their health. In addition, they perceive their accessibility to public transport to be worse the further from Bodø the pupils reside.

Figure 4.3.2 shows how pupils in different regions perceive their social environment.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent does you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.3.2. To what extent would they feel safe in their home municipality: per region

When asked what is important in their choice of future settlement, a male from Helgeland doing general studies express it like this: *Mainland connection!* Similarly, a female from Helgeland also doing general studies states: *For me to settle in my hometown municipality, it would require a mainland connection.* A female from Lofoten doing general studies states: *It's important to me that there's a good public transportation system.* Access to shops and being together with the near ones is also important, as stated by a female from Ofoten doing general studies: *Family, friends, places to eat, shops, and opportunities for physical activity.*

Thus, safety is an important issue for upper secondary school pupils in their choice of residence when settling down as adults. They are concerned about access to health care, and by such, also concerned about access to public transport. The upper secondary school pupils want it all, a female from Helgeland doing vocational studies express it like this: *Better and cheaper public transport for children, youth, and pupils. That my dreams and dream profession are there. Good hiking trails. Dog-friendly place. Good access to grocery stores. Not far from family and friends. Good place for children to grow up.*

4.4 Belonging and Social Ties

A sense of belonging is a key psychological need that strongly influences an individual's attachment to a place. For young people, feelings of inclusion, community, and social connectivity are vital when deciding whether to remain in or return to their home region. In the context of the Bodø2024 project, cultural participation is expected to play a central role in strengthening social bonds and fostering belonging.

This section explores to what extent youth feels social ties to the place and the people in their home municipality and beyond. We operationalize this as what Maslow calls "belonging" through the following 9 items, measured along a 7-point Likert scale:

- I have a strong local affiliation to the place where I live
- I have a strong affiliation to the county and region where I live
- I have a strong affiliation to Norway
- I have a strong European affiliation
- I feel that I belong in my home municipality
- I am interested in what is going on in my home municipality.
- When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to consider what my immediate family thinks.
- When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to consider what my best friends think.
- When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to consider what other people who are important to me think.

Key findings:

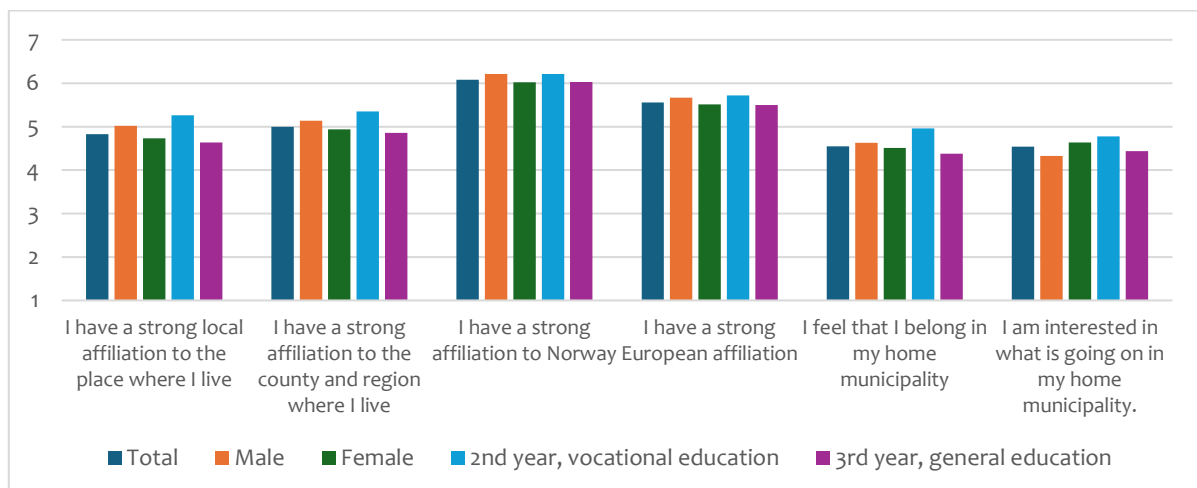
The adolescents feel strong affiliation to Norway, little less so to Europe, and less so to the county or region, and less so to their home municipality. The felt affiliation is positive, and the young feel a belonging and are interested in what is going on in their home municipality.

We see regional differences as well as differences in felt affiliation due to type of education.

Affiliation needs to be earned and cannot be enforced. Affiliation to a region is earned if the person feels that what the region offer aligns with his/her needs.

Figure 4.4.1. shows how the pupils perceive their ties to their home-municipality, to the county, Norway and Europe across gender and study track.

As shown in the Figure 4.4.1., the upper secondary school pupils feel a strong affiliation to Norway and Europe, and less affiliation to their home municipality and toward Nordland County. They are somewhat interested in what is going on in their home municipality and they have a weak feeling of belonging to their home municipality.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent does you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

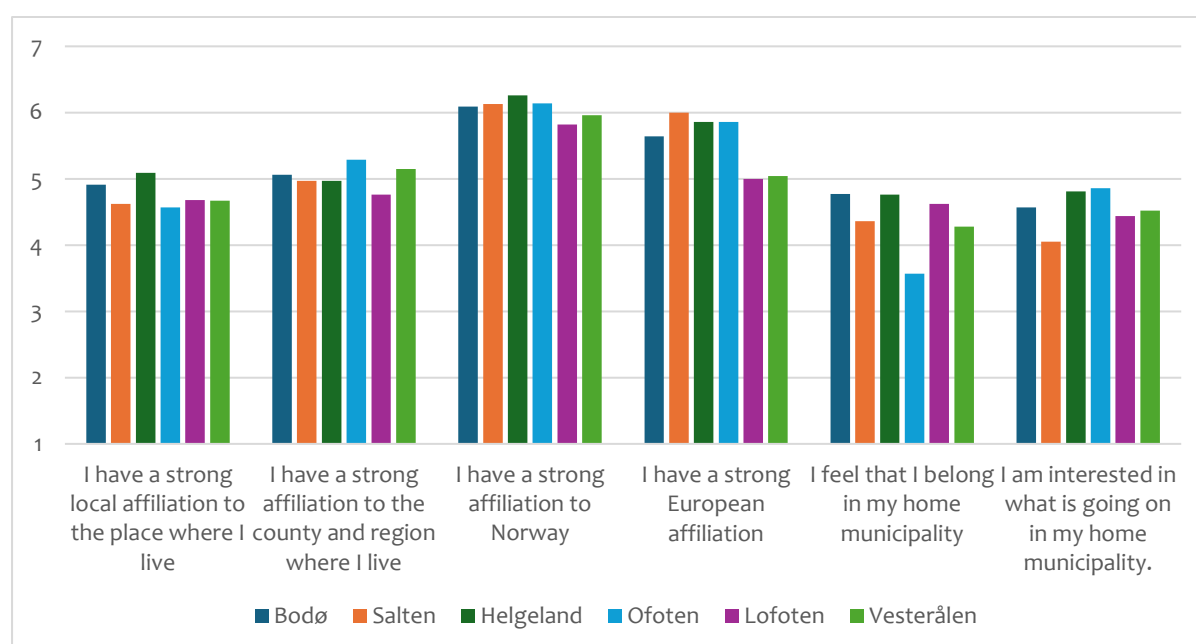
Figure 4.4.1. Perception of ties to their home-municipality, to the county, Norway and Europe: total average score, gender and type of study program

The upper secondary school pupils state that belonging is important for them. The belonging they mention is the relations they have with their family, their friends and the nature they are used to. A female from Vesterålen doing general studies states: *For me, it's important that I feel a connection to the place I choose to live. Leisure activities are important, access to necessary things like healthcare, etc., is also important. Safety/security is also very important.* A female from Salten doing vocational studies states: *Nature, future for possible children, leisure activities for them, venues, functioning public transport.*

The belonging goes beyond the nature, it includes more, as expressed by a female from Vesterålen doing general studies: *For me, it's important to find a place where I can feel a strong sense of belonging and that has good opportunities to be a good place to raise children in the future. At the same time, it's also important that my education can be used where I settle.* A female from Bodø and Helgeland doing general studies states: *Living somewhere where I feel at home and I want to live somewhere near my family.*

Figure 4.4.2. shows how the pupils perceive their ties to their home-municipality, county, Norway and Europe per region.

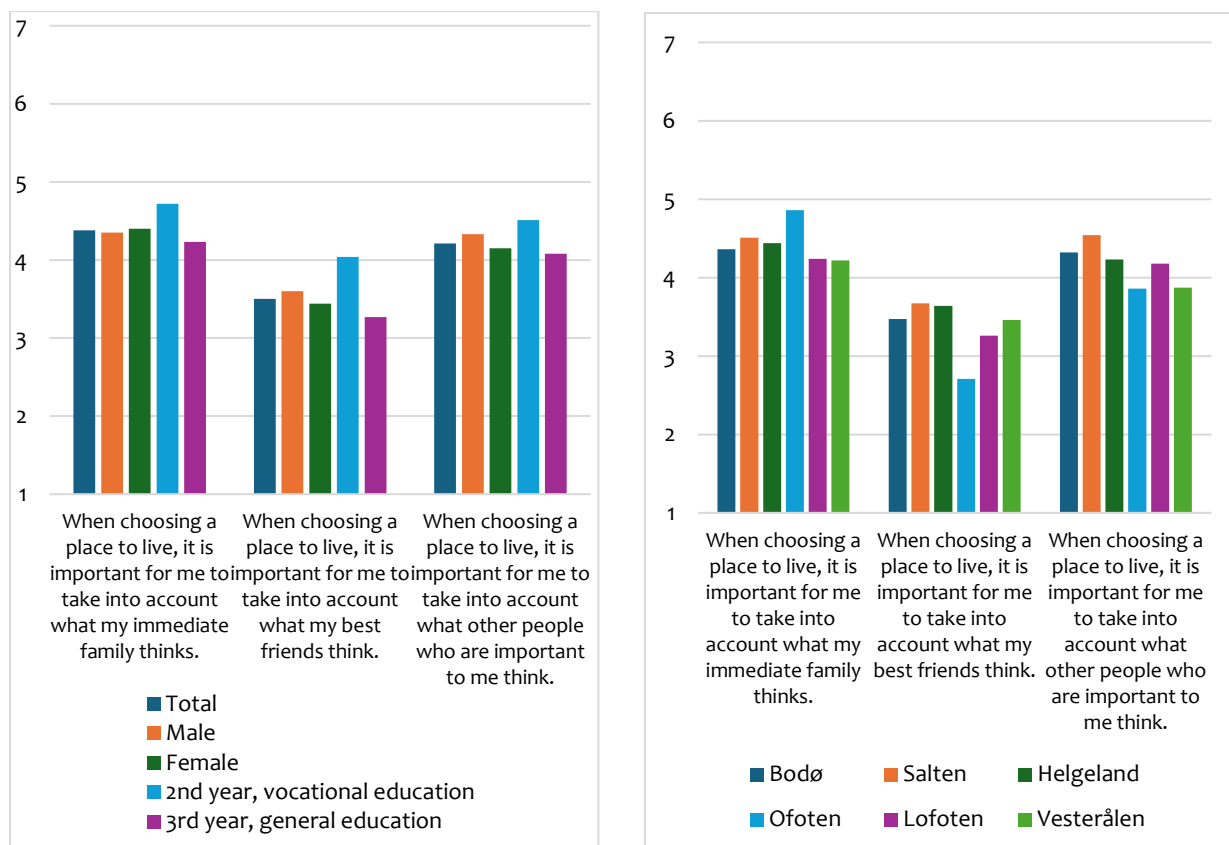
The overall trend remains stable across regions. We see some regional differences in felt belonging to their home municipality and in their interest in what is going on in their home municipality. Upper secondary school pupils from Bodø and Helgeland are more likely to feel a local belonging and to be interested in what is going on, than are youths from Salten.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent does you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.4.2. How the pupils perceive their ties to their home-municipality, county, Norway and Europe: per region

Figure 4.4.3. further illustrates the upper secondary school pupils value the opinions of important others (Denzin, 1966) in youth intention to settle down (across gender, study track and the region).



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.4.3. Importance of opinions of family and peers in settlement decisions

The data shows that upper secondary school pupils are inclined to listen to their parents and their family more than to their friends in issues on where to settle as adults. There are no regional differences in this aspect. The upper secondary school pupils are in a flux; they have not yet decided on where to settle as adults. Some statements underpin this.

The most important thing to me is being able to educate myself and work in what I want, while my future family and I are in good health. Since educational offerings in Nordland County are very limited and the healthcare system is laughable, I can say with great certainty that I won't settle here in the future (female vocational pupil, Vesterålen).

It entirely depends. I want to be near my family, who all live in Bodø, but at the same time, it's not completely unlikely I'll settle somewhere else. I don't know where that would be, but I can imagine living outside of Bodø, at least for a part of my life (male vocational pupil, Bodø).

Wherever I can get a stable job in the profession I want with stable income (male pupil, general studies, Vesterålen).

4.5 Self-Esteem and Social Participation

According to Maslow (1943; 1970), esteem needs encompass both the desire for internal self-respect and external validation from others. Thus, a way to measure self-esteem could be through level of ease to make and be with friends. For young people, opportunities to feel competent, appreciated, and recognized are particularly influential in shaping life satisfaction and future settlement decisions. Cultural engagement can serve as a meaningful avenue for developing self-esteem, especially through platforms that celebrate youth participation and expression.

This section explores pupils' experiences with respect, recognition, and the ability to influence their community. The following 6 survey items measured on a 7-point Likert scale were used:

- I can easily be with friends in my home municipality.
- It is important for me to be able to do music when I choose my future place of residence.
- It is important for me to be able to do performing arts (theatre, dance, opera, performance, show, revue, stand-up, musical, historical play) when I choose my future place of residence.
- It is important for me to be able to do sports when I choose my future place of residence.
- It is important for me to be able to do outdoor activities when I choose my future place of residence.
- It is important for me to be able to do other leisure activities than those mentioned above when I choose my future place of residence.

Key findings:

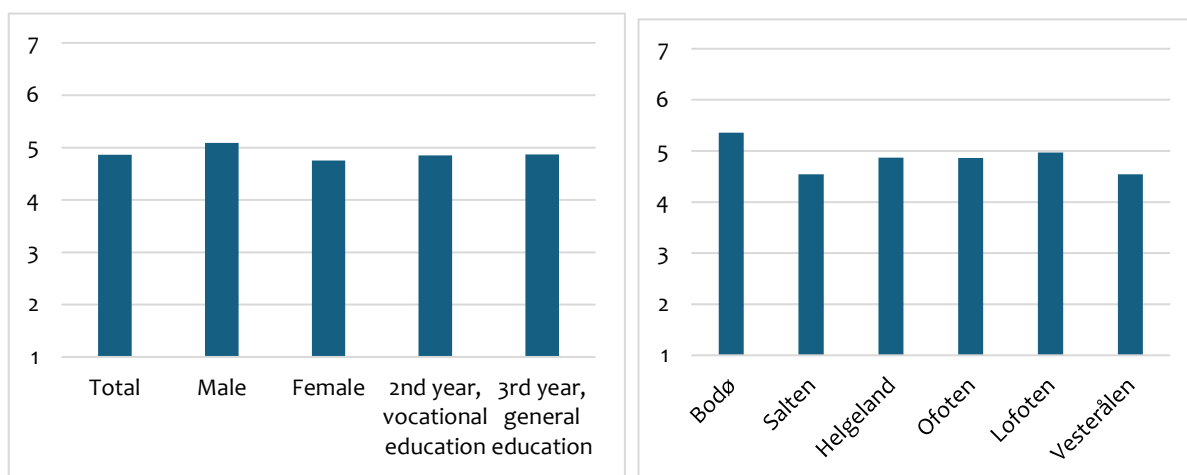
The youths somewhat agree that it is easy to be with friends in their home-municipality.

On average, youths are much more interested in sports, outdoor activities and other leisure activities than they are interested in doing music or performing arts. Those interested in sports etc, are not interested in doing music or performing arts, and vice versa. Importantly, 12% find it very important for them to be able to do music or performing arts.

Here again, we see some regional differences in the youths expressed interests.

We begin by analysing how the pupils perceive the ease of making friends and being with friends in their home-municipality (see Figure 4.5.1. indicating gender, type of study program and regional distribution).

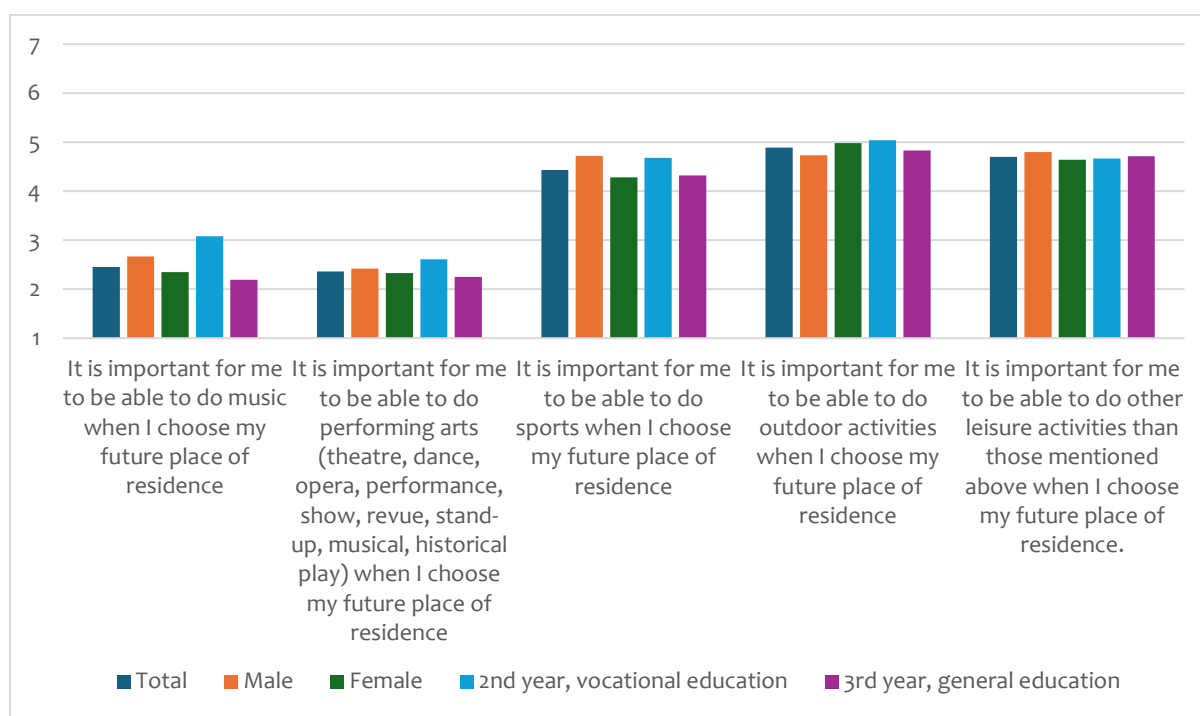
Answering the question “*I can easily be with friends in my home municipality*” did not show substantial regional differences regarding how easy the upper secondary school pupils find it to make and be with friends in their home municipality, except that upper secondary school pupils residing in Bodø find it easier to be with friends than does other upper secondary school pupils. On average the upper secondary school pupils somewhat agree that they can easily be with friends in their home-municipality.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.5.1. Perception of the ease of making friends in their home-municipality

People need an arena for building self-esteem. Art, sport, and hobbies could serve as such arenas. We asked the upper secondary school pupils about how important it is for them to be able to express themselves in those arenas and then related to their choice of location for where to settle as adults. Figure 4.5.2. shows how home-municipality is perceived regarding the ability to express oneself through art and culture, and display this per total average score, gender and type of study program.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent does you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.5.2. Perception of home-municipality regarding the ability to express oneself through art and culture: total average score, gender and type of study program

The data shows that on average, art as music and performing art are not that important for upper secondary school pupil. It was marked by several pupils that sports, outdoors activities and other leisure activities are far more important:

Job, music, school, hospital (male vocational pupil, Helgeland).

Opportunity to do sports and outdoor activities (female vocational pupil, Salten).

Sports and nature (male vocational pupil, Bodø).

More cultural and sports offerings. In addition to good job opportunities (female vocational pupil, Helgeland).

Still, for some, art as music and performing arts are important.

It's important to me that I have the opportunity to learn to play piano and other things so I can try something new, that there are good people I can talk to, that there are offers of therapy/help because life is hard, and activities where I can meet new people and make friends. (female pupil, general studies, Salten).

There has to be things to do here instead of just sitting at home all the time, more offerings for young people (male pupil, general studies, Salten)

Table 4.5.1. displays the number of upper secondary school pupils expressing their relationship with art and sport leisure activities. We see that 12% of upper secondary school pupils totally agree, agree or somewhat agree that the ability to do music is important for them in their choice of residence. Similarly, 11% find it important to be able to do performing arts, 53% find it important to do sports, 64% find it important to do outdoor activities, and 57% find it important to do other leisure activities not specified in our survey.

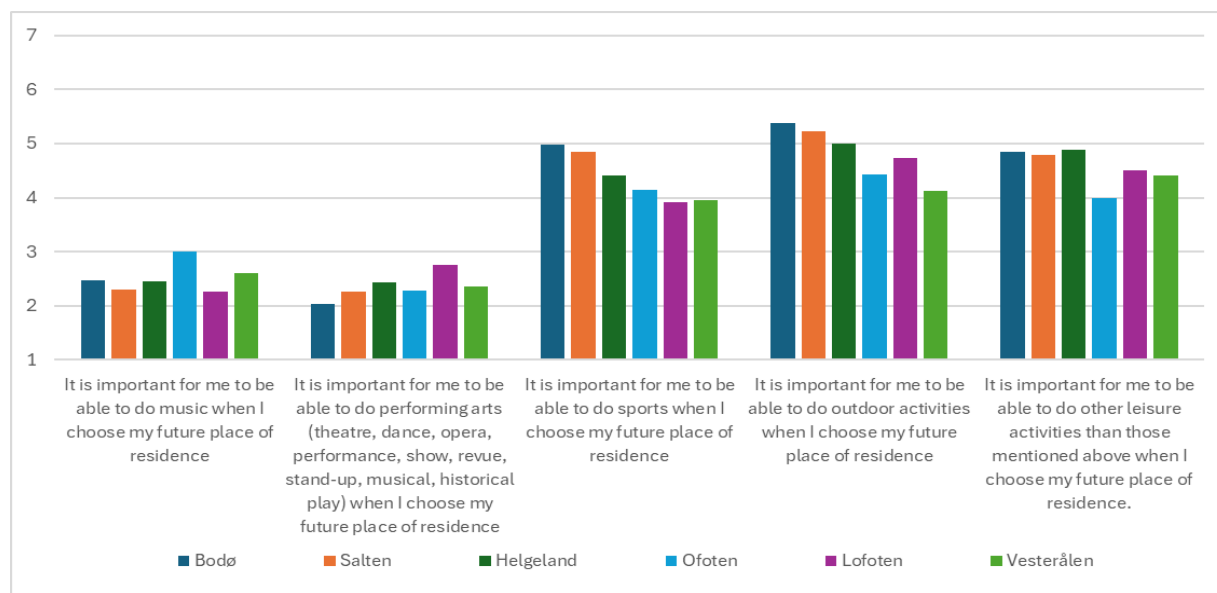
Table 4.5.1. Upper secondary school pupils expressing their relationship to art and sport leisure activities

It is important for me to be able to do ... when I choose my future place of residence (n=243)	... music ...	... performing arts (theatre, dance, opera, performance, show, revue, stand-up, musical, historical play) ...	... sports...	... outdoor activities ...	... other leisure activities than those mentioned ...
Totally agree	9	6	34	47	31
Agree	6	10	47	56	55
Somewhat agree	15	10	47	52	53
Neutral	40	44	53	45	69
Somewhat disagree	24	20	17	15	6
Disagree	41	32	13	11	6
Totally disagree	108	121	32	17	23

A Pearson correlation between these 5 variables indicates that those interested in music and art, are not interested in sports, outdoor activities or other leisure activities. Those upper secondary

school pupils interested in sports are also interested in other outdoor activities and other leisure activities than investigated in our survey.

Figure 4.5.3. shows how the home-municipality is perceived regarding the ability to express oneself through art and culture, and display this per region. The figures show that youths have the same priorities regardless of the region they currently live in.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.5.3. Perception of home-municipality regarding the ability to express oneself through art and culture: per region

The analysis shows that while most upper secondary school pupils find it relatively easy to make and maintain friendships in their home municipality, their preferred arenas for building confidence and social identity are primarily linked to sports, outdoor activities, and general leisure opportunities, rather than to art and cultural activities. Nevertheless, for a smaller but significant group of pupils, access to music, performing arts, and cultural participation play an essential role in personal expression and well-being. These findings suggest that while nature and sports remain the dominant social and esteem-building arenas for youths in Nordland, expanding cultural offerings could provide valuable complementary spaces for self-expression and inclusion, particularly for those whose interests extend beyond traditional outdoor or sports-related activities. Strengthening these cultural arenas may therefore be an important pathway for enhancing youths' self-esteem and, ultimately, their attachment to their home region.

It would be interesting to see if these preferences differed before and after ECoC Bodø2024. We are not able to track any changes in this regard, as the survey were only performed after the end of ECoC Bodø2024.

4.6 Cognitive Needs and Lifestyle Fit

Cognitive needs refer to the human desire for intellectual engagement, knowledge, and personal development. For young people, these needs are not only related to formal education but also to whether their living environment aligns with their preferred lifestyle and offers opportunities for personal growth. We interpret this dimension as encompassing the ability to “live life the way one wants,” combining practical resources, cultural offerings, and social opportunities into a fulfilling environment. In the context of Bodø2024, cultural events may serve as informal learning experiences that stimulate curiosity and provide avenues for exploration and self-development outside the classroom.

This section investigates the extent to which pupils perceive their home municipality as a place that stimulates curiosity and learning. The following 4 survey items measured on a 7-point Likert scale were used:

- My home municipality is the place that best suits my lifestyle
- My home municipality is the best place to do what I like to do
- Living in my home municipality is better than living elsewhere
- I can easily live life the way I want it to be in my home municipality.

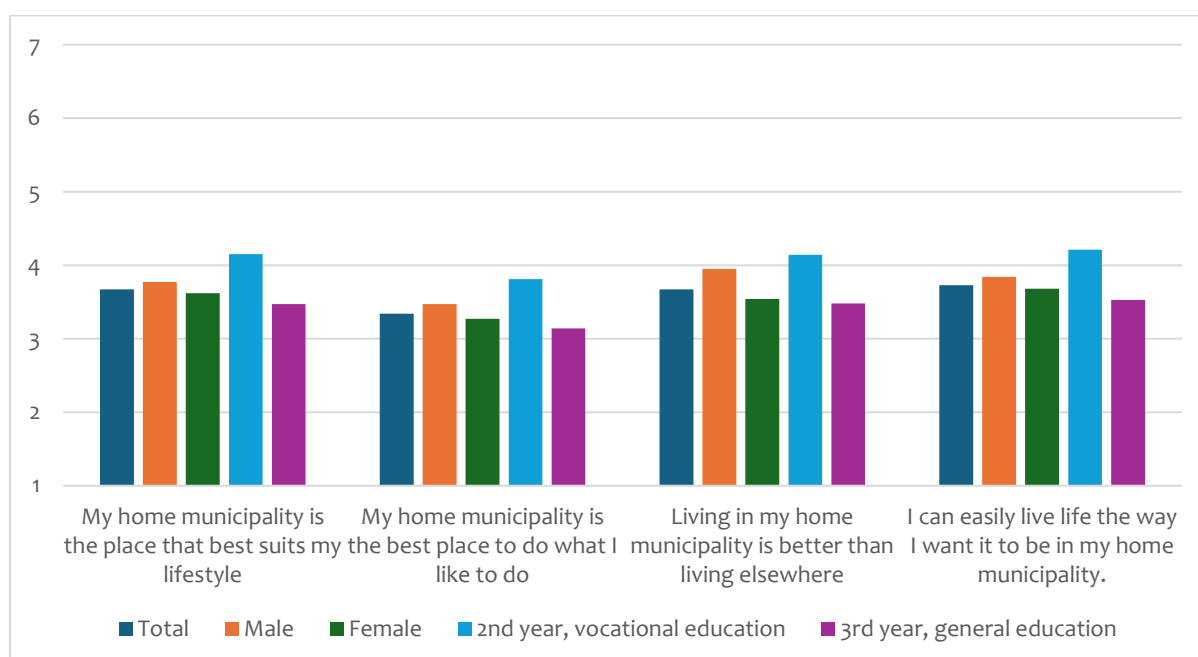
Key findings:

The youths to a little extent see their homeplace suiting their preferred lifestyle allowing them to live their life as wanted.

Youths pursuing vocational education are generally more positive to their homeplace, than are youths pursuing general educations.

We see regional differences, where youths from Bodø indicates to be more positive to their home municipality.

Figure 4.6.1. illustrates how upper secondary school pupils assess their home municipality with respect to these factors, broken down by total average score, gender, and type of study program.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.6.1. How the home-municipality is perceived to serve the pupils' cognitive needs: total average score, gender and type of study program

The results indicate that, on average, pupils tend to disagree or remain neutral on these items, see this as the average score fell lower than the scale mid score 4 (i.e. neutral). Many do not perceive their home municipality as the ideal setting for their desired lifestyle. Female pupils express stronger disagreement than males, and general studies pupils are somewhat more critical than their vocational counterparts. This pattern aligns with previous findings suggesting that pupils on academic track are more likely to envision a future outside their home region, whereas vocational pupils tend to see more potential for staying. The open-ended statements support this.

Here we present some statements from the upper secondary school pupils exemplifying the variety in issues related to cognitive needs.

Space for the fishing boat and a wild outdoor environment with cheap beer (male, vocational studies, Bodø).

That it offers opportunities for me to pursue my interests and that there are good conditions to continue living there and start a family (male, vocational studies, Bodø).

The pupils also offer interesting insights into art as a means for fulfilling cognitive needs:

It's important to me that I have the opportunity to learn to play piano and other things so I can try something new, that there are good people I can talk to, that there are offers of therapy/help because life is hard, and activities where I can meet new people and make friends (female pupil, general studies, Salten).

Marching band, cultural school, cultural offerings, and a music program (male, vocational studies, Helgeland).

The career was named as a means for fulfilling cognitive needs:

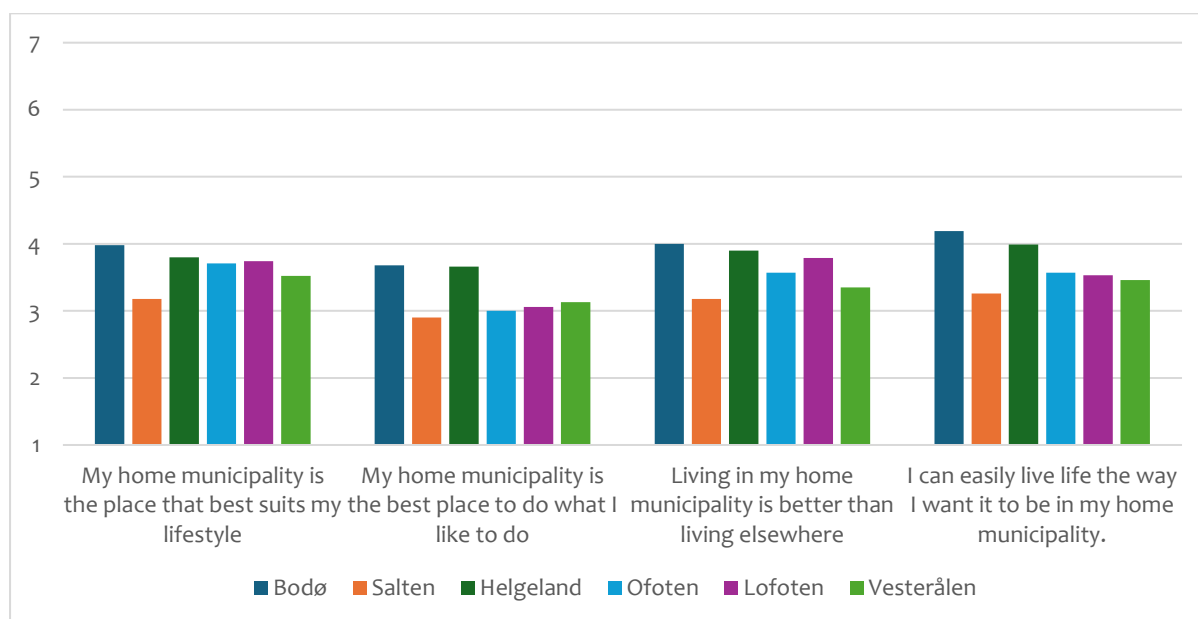
Settling in a place where I can get a relevant job, as I want to study science (female pupil, general studies, Bodø).

Where I get my dream job and can live with my loved ones. A good home in a location that suits my needs (female, vocational studies, Bodø).

A female from Helgeland doing general studies summarizes these wants into a statement: “A place where I can experience city life but also feel I can take a break from the busy every-day. That I live in my dream home, with a nice big garden, a nice view. That nature is considered in the design and architecture of the town. That architecture isn’t boring and depressing, which it’s starting to become. That I have access to stores, grocery shops, transport, nice beaches, scenic hiking spots, a nice and safe neighbourhood, community, and probably much more I can't think of right now.”

Figure 4.6.2. illustrates how pupils across different regions perceive their home municipality in terms of fulfilling their cognitive needs.

The results indicate an urban–rural divide. Pupils from more urbanized areas, such as Bodø, tend to agree more strongly that their home municipality offers conditions suitable for their desired lifestyle, while pupils from more rural regions express significantly lower agreement. We see that upper secondary school pupils from Salten are particularly not agree that their home municipality is a good place to settle down. This pattern suggests that urban centres may provide a broader range of opportunities for intellectual engagement, leisure, and cultural participation, whereas rural environments are perceived as offering fewer such options.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.6.2. How the home-municipality is perceived serving pupils cognitive needs per region

These findings reinforce the earlier conclusion that many pupils do not view their home municipality as the optimal place to settle down as adults when considering their cognitive needs. This perception gap highlights the importance of aligning regional cultural and educational offerings with the expectations of young people.

4.7 Aesthetic Needs: Nature and Culture

Aesthetic needs include the human desire for beauty, harmony, and meaningful surroundings and are among the high end needs according to Maslow's hierarchy. Fulfilling these needs leads to a deeper sense of satisfaction and harmony in life, as individuals seek environments and experiences that are pleasing and resonant with their sense of beauty. For the upper secondary school pupils in this study, these needs are primarily fulfilled through nature, which remains one of Nordland's most distinctive assets. While cultural elements such as architecture, public spaces, and artistic offerings play a role, nature emerges as the dominant factor influencing how pupils evaluate their home municipality.

The survey included the following 3 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale:

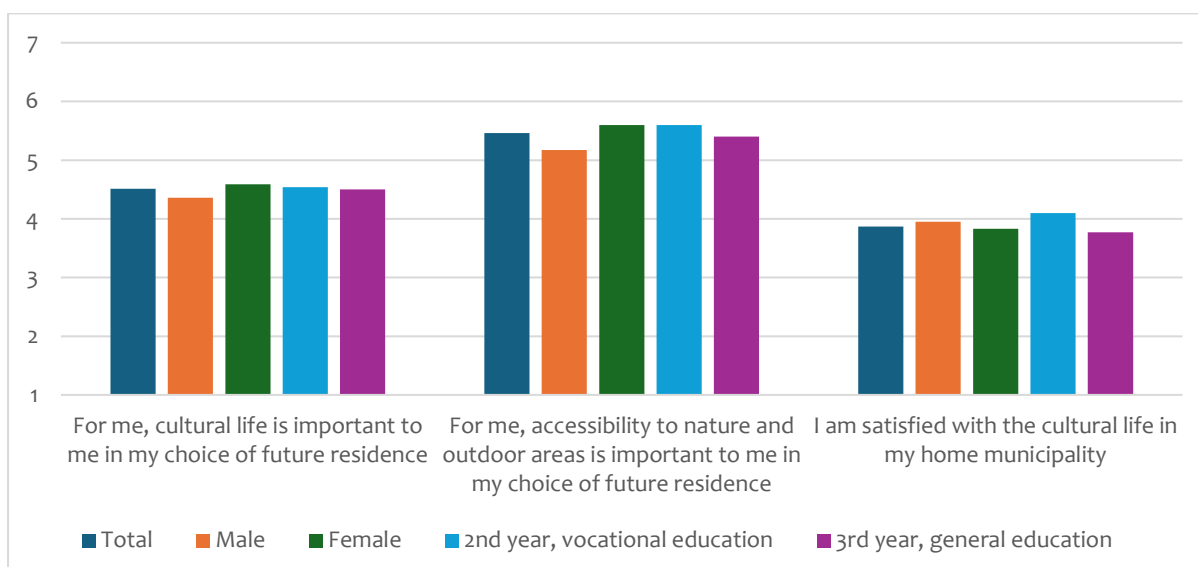
- I am satisfied with the cultural life in my home municipality
- For me, cultural life is important to me in my choice of future residence
- For me, accessibility to nature and outdoor areas is important to me in my choice of future residence

Key findings:

Accessibility to nature and outdoor areas are very important for the youths, the cultural life opportunities are also important, but less so than nature and outdoor opportunities.

There are only minor differences due to gender, type of study and regions to this topic.

Figure 4.7.1. shows that pupils, on average, strongly agree that nature is an important component of their quality of life. Cultural and architectural aspects, however, are evaluated less necessary, suggesting that they are less prominent in shaping pupils' overall satisfaction with their home municipalities.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.7.1. How the home-municipality is perceived to serve the pupils' aesthetic needs: total average score, gender and type of study program

There is a negative difference between the satisfaction with the cultural life in their home municipality and the importance the upper secondary school pupils assign to the local cultural offerings.

Some statements support the data regarding the importance upper secondary school pupils assign to nature and outdoor life as visualized in Figure 4.7.1.

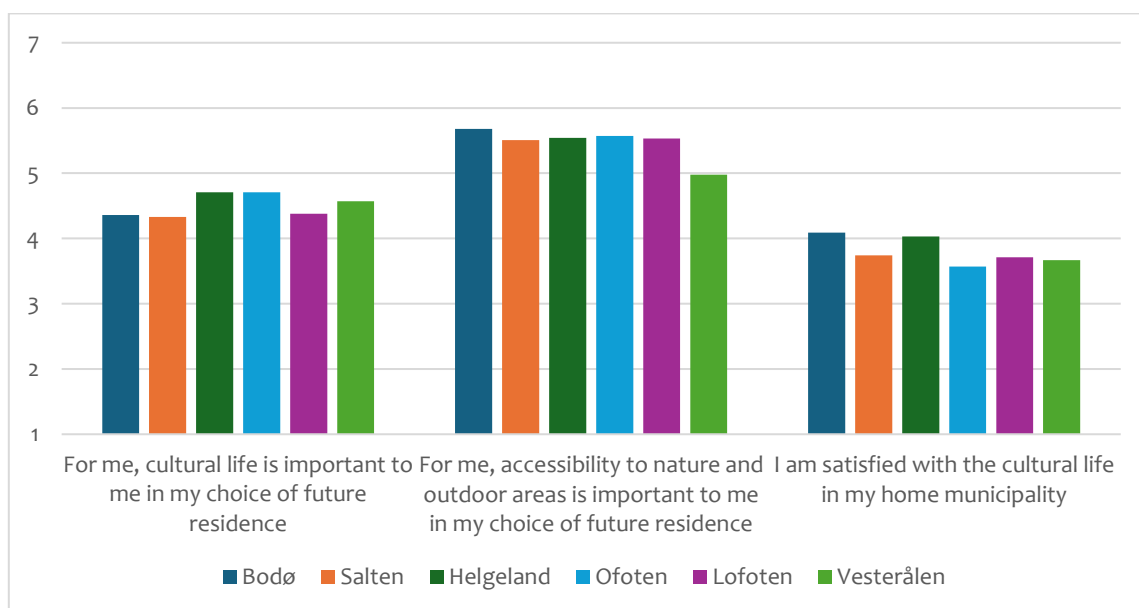
Have access to the sea and be able to handle a boat (male pupil, general studies, Lofoten).

Mountains and jobs. (female, vocational pupil, Lofoten).

Job opportunities, social environment, economy, opportunities for leisure activities, access to schools and upper secondary schools. (male, vocational pupil, Salten).

Figure 4.7.2. tells how the home-municipality is perceived to serve the pupils' aesthetic needs and show this per region. The figure shows that the situation and the needs are close to similar across all regions in Nordland County. The data hints that maybe more rural areas offer better conditions for meeting upper secondary school pupils' aesthetic needs than do more urban areas.

Upper secondary school pupils would like to have access to nature and to enjoy nature where they are to settle as adults. Nature is more important than the cultural life in their settlement choice, and they are not happy with the cultural offerings in their home municipality.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.7.2. How the home-municipality is perceived to serve the pupils' aesthetic needs: per region

It seems as if upper secondary school pupils regard the cultural offerings as an arena for socializing and meeting and making friends. Some statements underpin this.

It's important to have places to socialize, my hometown municipality has NONE (male, vocational pupil, Salten).

The most important thing to me is that close friends or family and good job opportunities are nearby. And that my future children have a good upbringing there (female pupil, general studies, Bodø).

The most important thing for me is that there are meeting places, both through leisure activities and other opportunities to meet people. Public transport within the municipality, as well as in and out of the municipality, is an important factor for me, and it is currently too poor, which can make living there inconvenient. (female pupil, general studies, Salten).

These findings demonstrate that while nature forms a strong and shared basis for regional identity, enhancing cultural and aesthetic elements could provide an important complement, particularly for pupils who value a more diverse and vibrant living environment.

4.8 Upper secondary school Pupils and ECoC Bodø2024

Bodø2024 made particular efforts to engage adolescence in art and culture during the ECoC Bodø2024 year. UNG2024 was the youth initiative within Bodø2024 and played a decisive role in securing the ECoC title. The project aimed to strengthen young people's sense of belonging in Bodø and Nordland, counteract outmigration, and foster pride in the region through culture, creativity, and broad youth participation. UNG24 was one of the major projects of ECoC Bodø2024,

and UNG24 and its actions and achievements is detailed in the ECoC Bodø2024 Project report (PPR). We urge interested readers to visit this report for further details.

The organization of UNG24 was built around a project team led by Charlotte Nyheim Eriksen from 2021 to 2024, supported by a youth board of 13 members aged 13–19. Meeting weekly, the board contributed to planning, implementation, marketing, and advising. In addition, a reference group, the volunteer platform UNG Crew (which grew from 20 to 200 members), and collaboration arenas such as the 2024Team, the Young Culture Team, and the 2024Network brought together over 200 actors from across Nordland. Actions and achievements regarding UNGcrew is detailed in the ECoC Bodø2024 Volunteer report (VR).

As evidenced by series of interviews with the ECoC Bodø2024 project coordinator, Charlotte Nyheim Eriksen, and discussed in the ECoC Bodø2024 Project report (PPR), youth participation increased throughout the UNG24 sub-project. Through the youth ambassador program and a youth-led grant process, they evaluated 210 applications and distributed NOK 4 million to 77 projects across the county. These initiatives spanned municipalities from Værøy to Narvik and reflected a wide artistic and cultural variety (from gaming and performing arts to festivals, workshops, and local cultural events).

In 2024, UNG2024 itself organized several major events, including UNG Opening, the Hjertebank Festival, UNG Scene, the Open Art Festival, and the concluding UNG Finale. Altogether, nearly 300 young people were actively engaged, more than 10,000 young participants attended events, and the project built a digital following of around 5,000 across TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.

The impact extends beyond the cultural capital year. As described in the ECoC Bodø2024 Project report (PPR), several networks and teams have been continued, and the experiences are now integrated into Bodø municipality's work with youth culture. UNG24 aimed to reach meaningful youth involvement can create lasting structures, vibrant communities, and a stronger cultural life throughout Nordland.

We aimed to capture how the upper secondary school pupils engage with this opportunity and how they perceive it. The survey then included the following 1 item measured on a 7-point Likert scale:

- The capital of culture Bodø2024 concerns me

As well as 4 items measured as Yes/No:

- Did you know that Bodø is the Capital of Culture in 2024, also called Bodø2024?
- Have you participated in any Bodø2024 events?
- Have you participated in any UNG2024 events?
- Have you participated in the Hjertebank festival or similar?

Key findings:

Knowledge about Bodø2024 is high among youths from Bodø and the nearby locations.

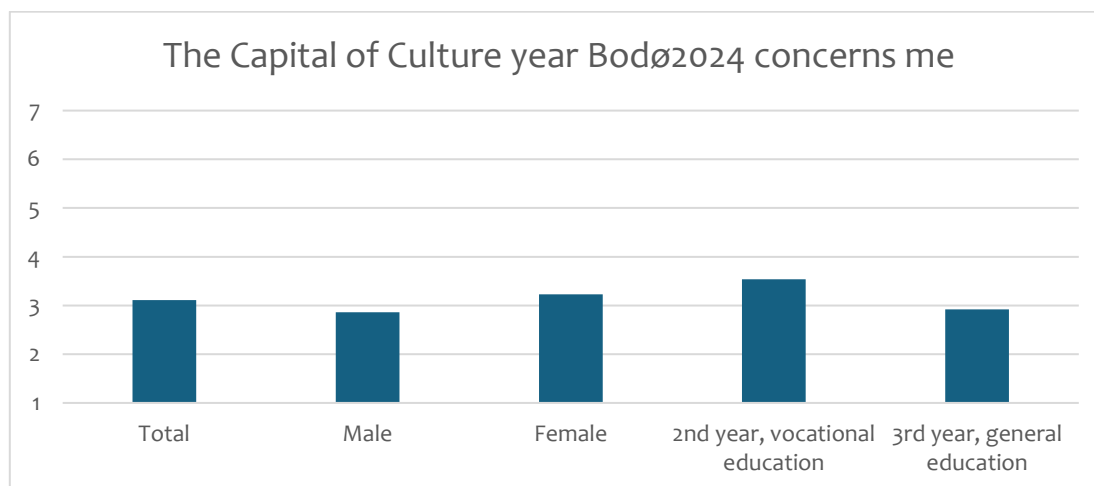
The youths to a little extent reports that Bodø2024 concerns them, males less than females, 3rd year general pupil less than 2nd year vocational pupils.

We see regional differences, where distance from Bodø indicate that the youth further away from Bodø feel less engaged by Bodø2024 and its events.

Youths does not pay much attention to who arrange art and cultural events and why.

Figure 4.8.1. shows that upper secondary school pupils, on average, somewhat disagree that the ECoC Bodø2024 concerns them. Males and upper secondary school pupils doing general education is lesser concerned about the ECoC Bodø2024 initiative.

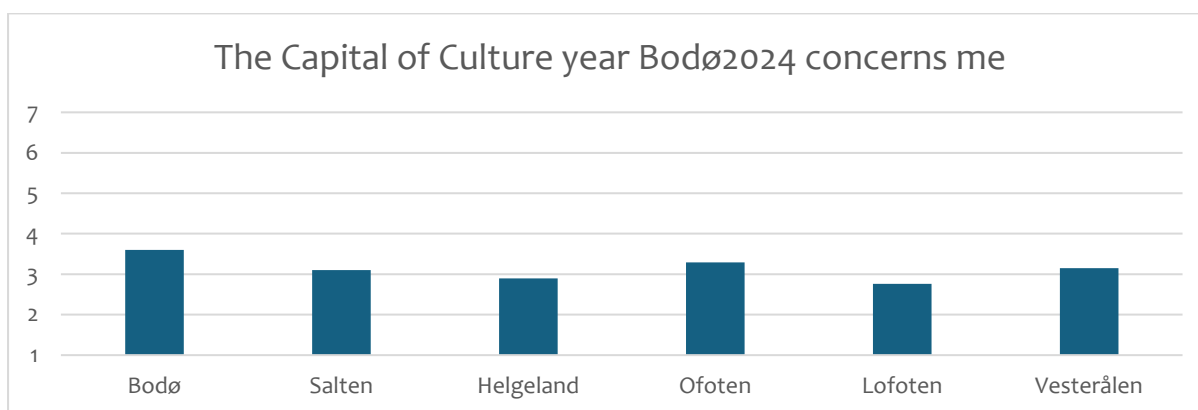
We speculate that UNG24 was heavily branded as such, and that the Bodø2024 brand was vanishing as a key point for the youths. This might be among the reasons for this low score on our statement to the upper secondary school pupils regarding to what extent ECoC Bodø2024 concerns them.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.8.1. Upper secondary school pupils' response to the statement: The capital of culture Bodø2024 concerns me, in total and per gender and study program

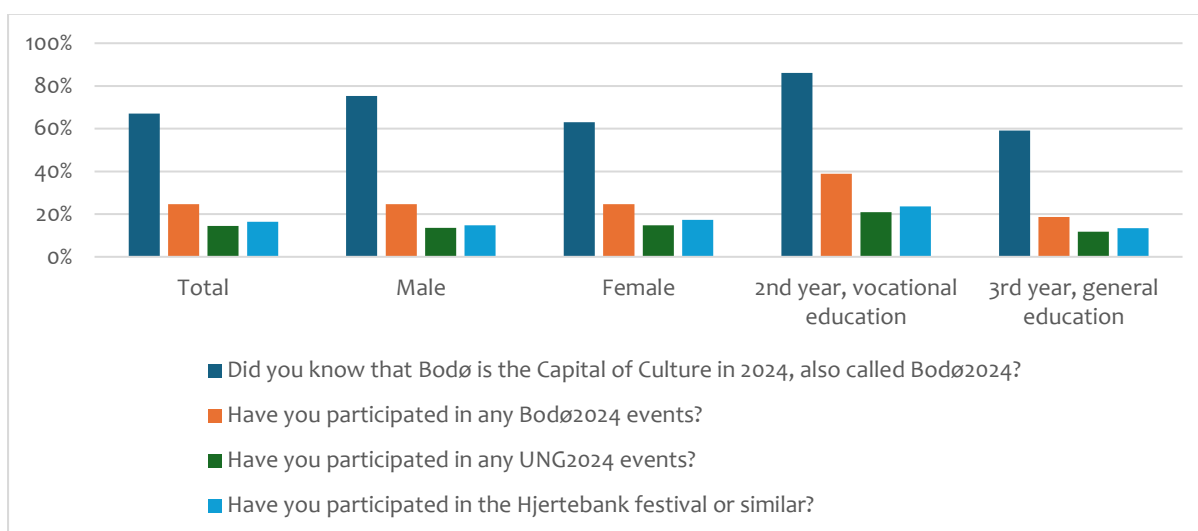
Figure 4.8.2. display the response to the statement “The capital of culture Bodø2024 concerns me” per regions. Here we see that the upper secondary school pupils in Bodø are more engaged than upper secondary school pupils from other parts of Nordland County. As evidenced in your other ECoC related reports, much of the ECoC Bodø2024 events took place in Bodø. This might be the reason for the upper secondary school pupils from Bodø responding more positive to our statement than does the other upper secondary school pupil groups.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

Figure 4.8.2. Upper secondary school pupils' response to the statement: The capital of culture Bodø2024 concerns me, per region

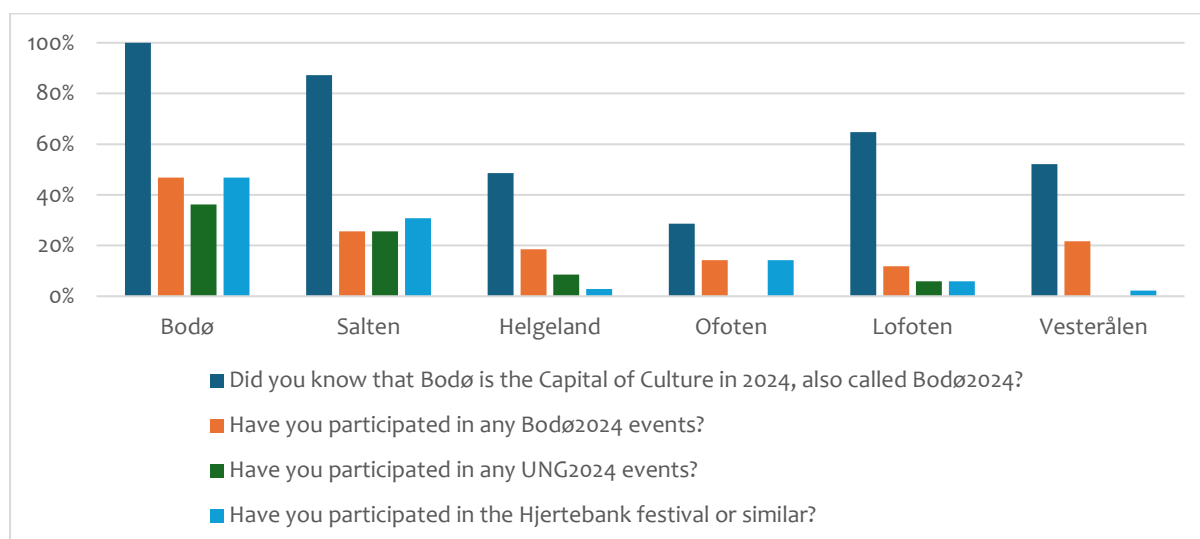
Figure 4.8.3. evidence the response on our 3 Yes/No statements. The responses are normalized to show percentages per group. Here we see that 67% of the upper secondary school pupils across Nordland County reports to know that Bodø was celebrating ECoC Bodø2024. Males and upper secondary school pupils doing 2nd year vocational studies were more knowledgeable than were females and pupils doing general education. About 25% of the upper secondary school pupils had participated in any Bodø2024 events, and upper secondary school pupils doing 2nd year vocational studies were more active in this respect than their counterparts. Participation in any UNG24 events follow the same patterns. Overall, 14% participated, and upper secondary school pupils doing 2nd year vocational studies were more active in this respect than their counterparts. Across Nordland County, 16% participated in the Hjertebank festival or similar festivals. Females and upper secondary school pupils doing 2nd year vocational studies were more active in this respect than their counterparts.



Note: The diagram shows the percentage of the upper secondary school pupils that stated Yes to the statements

Figure 4.8.3. Upper secondary school pupils' knowledge of and participation in Bodø2024 events, in total and per gender and study program

Figure 4.8.4. shows Upper secondary school pupils' knowledge about Bodø2024 and their participation in Bodø2024 events, per region. The figure shows that 100% of the upper secondary school pupils in Bodø were aware of Bodø2024, and that the awareness fell with distance for Bodø. Only 29% of the upper secondary school pupils in Ofoten reports to have knowledge of ECoC Bodø2024. Similar, attendance in Bodø2024 events, Ung2024 events or the Hjertebank festival fell with distance from Bodø.



Note: The diagram shows the percentage of the upper secondary school pupils that stated Yes to the statements

Figure 4.8.4. Upper secondary school pupils' knowledge of and participation in Bodø2024 events, per region

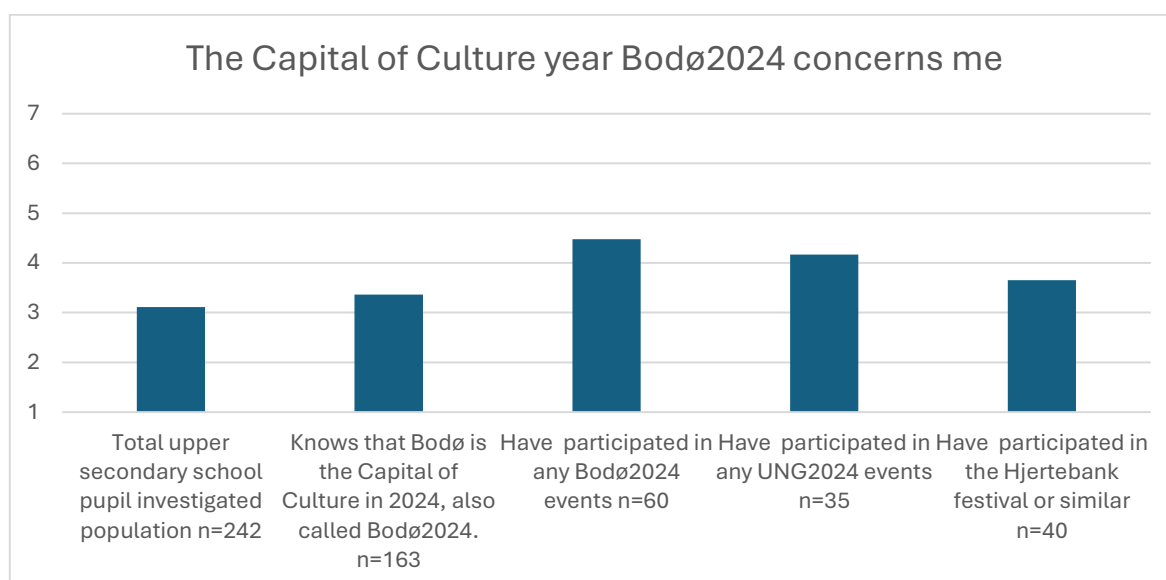
Figure 4.8.5. display the response to the statement “The capital of culture Bodø2024 concerns me” per knowledge of ECoC Bodø2024. We explore this along the following grades of knowledge; knows that Bodø celebrate ECoC Bodø2024 in 2024, participated in any Bodø2024 events, participated in any UNG24 events, participated in Hjertebank or other events.

Here we see that the upper secondary school pupils in total among the upper secondary school pupil investigated population (i.e. n=243) in general somewhat disagree that the Capital of Culture year Bodø2024 concerns them. Those who knows that Bodø is the Capital of Culture in 2024 (i.e. n=163) also somewhat disagree that the Capital of Culture year Bodø2024 concerns them. The upper secondary school pupils who have participated in any Bodø2024 events (i.e. n=60) are neutral to somewhat agree that the Capital of Culture year Bodø2024 concerns them. The upper secondary school pupils who have participated in any UNG2024 events (i.e. n=35) are neutral to that the Capital of Culture year Bodø2024 concerns them. The upper secondary school pupils who have participated in the Hjertebank festival or similar (i.e. n=40) are neutral or somewhat disagree to that the Capital of Culture year Bodø2024 concerns them.

Among the 80 who reported to not knowing that Bodø was awarded ECoC Bodø2024, 4 had participated in a ECoC Bodø2024 event and 10 reported to not knowing if they had done so. Among the 80 who reported to not knowing that Bodø was awarded ECoC Bodø2024, 2 had participated in a UNG24 event and 11 reported to not knowing if they had done so. Among the 80 who reported to not knowing that Bodø was awarded ECoC Bodø2024, 2 had participated in the Hjertebank

festival event and 6 reported to not knowing if they had done so. Among the 40 who reported to have participated in the Hjertebank festival event, only 24 knew that this was a UNG24 event.

We note that upper secondary school pupils do not direct much attention to ECoC Bodø2024, UNG24 or the names of the festivals they attend. We speculate that even if UNG24 was heavily branded as such, upper secondary school pupils do not necessary take much account of who arranged such festivals and why they do so.



Note: The respondents were asked: To what extent do you agree on the following item, where 1 - Totally Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - somewhat Disagree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - somewhat Agree, 6 - Agree, and 7 - Totally Agree.

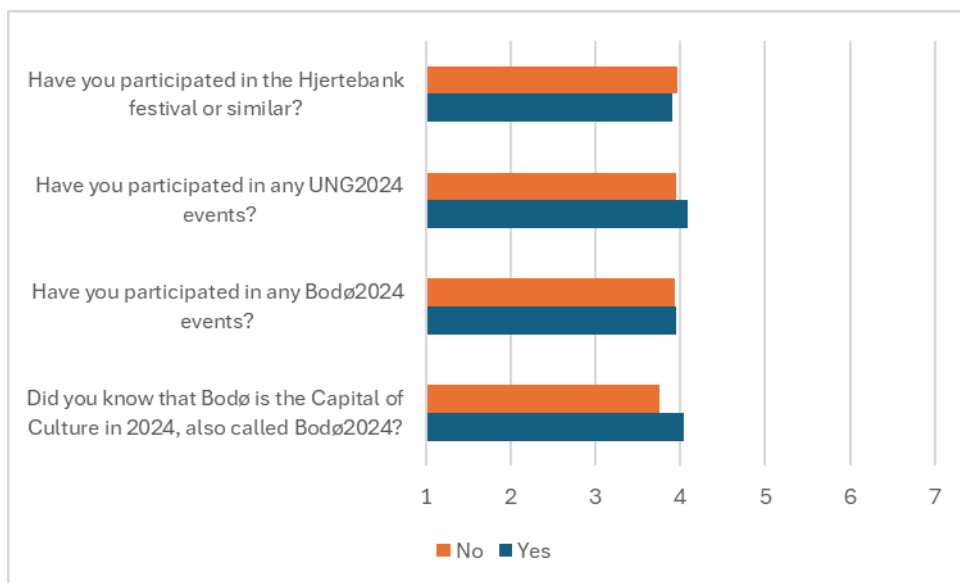
Figure 4.8.5. Upper secondary school pupils' response to the statement: The capital of culture Bodø2024 concerns me, per knowledge of and participation in ECoC Bodø2024

Figure 4.8.6. display the response to the No/Yes statement "If you could choose between living in your home municipality and in another municipality, which would you prefer?" per knowledge of ECoC Bodø2024. We explore this along the following grades of knowledge; knows that Bodø celebrate ECoC Bodø2024, participated in any Bodø2024 events, participated in any UNG24 events, participated in Hjertebank or other events.

The menu of options for this question included:

1. I would definitely prefer to live in my home municipality.
2. I would prefer to live in my home municipality.
3. I think I would prefer to live in my home municipality.
4. Unsure, I can't choose
5. I think I would prefer to live in another municipality.
6. I would prefer to live in another municipality.
7. I would definitely prefer to live in another municipality.

Here we see that the upper secondary school pupils in average are unsure where to settle down, regardless which knowledge they bear regarding ECoC Bodø2024, UNG24 or their participation in UNG24 events.



Note: The respondents were asked the following item, where 1 - I would definitely prefer to live in my home municipality, 2 - I would prefer to live in my home municipality, 3 - I think I would prefer to live in my home municipality, 4 - Unsure, I can't choose, 5 - I think I would prefer to live in another municipality, 6 - I would prefer to live in another municipality, 7 - I would definitely prefer to live in another municipality.

Figure 4.8.6. Upper secondary school pupils' response to the statement: If you could choose between living in your home municipality and in another municipality, which would you prefer? per knowledge of and participation in ECoC Bodø2024

4.9 Multivariate analysis: The larger picture on settlement intentions

Up to this point, the report has examined youth needs within distinct dimensions aligned with Maslow's hierarchy – security, social belonging, esteem, cognitive engagement, and aesthetic fulfilment. To move beyond bivariate descriptive findings, we conducted additional statistical analyses to explore how these different needs interrelate, and to what extent they predict pupils' intention to stay in their home municipality as adults. In this analysis we then look at Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour for inspiration.

Key findings:

The youths' own Attitude toward their home municipality to a large extent decides their intentions to settle down in their home municipality. Their attitude correlate with thriving. Attitude is a deeply rooted personal characteristics difficult to change.

Youths Perceived Behavioural Control express the extent the youths feel to be able to fulfil necessary conditions for mastering an adult life when settling in their home municipality are also influencing their intentions to settle in their home municipality. The question the pupil's raises are, will my needs be met? Conditions and perceptions consisting of this are more open for change.

Realizing that it often is difficult to identify practical implications for policy makers using the TPB, we also include a set of control variables, which may be related to settlement intentions and if they are, eases the task of suggesting specific measures to reduce adolescents' intentions to leave their home municipality. According to the TPB these control variables should not be directly related to settlement intentions, only indirectly through their effect on attitude, subjective norm and PBC.

Measures: The dependent variable, **settlement intentions**, is measured by the average of the following items: (1) If you could choose between living in your home municipality and in another municipality, what would you prefer? (2) I intend to settle in my home municipality. (3) It is likely that I will settle in my home municipality. (4) When I am going to settle down, I will probably settle in my home municipality. Responses were given along a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. All items were loaded on a single Principal Component Analysis (PCA)-component with satisfactory loadings, and Cronbach's alpha for this index was 0.95.

We measured **attitude** using the average score on the following items: (1) My home municipality is the place that best suits my lifestyle, (2) My home municipality is the best place to do what I like to do, (3) Living in my home municipality is better than living elsewhere, (4) I am more satisfied living in my home municipality than living elsewhere, (5) There is no other place I would rather live than in my home municipality, and (6) I feel that I belong in my home municipality. Responses were given along a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. In a PCA all items loaded satisfactory on a single dimension. Cronbach's alpha for the subjective norm index was 0.93.

Subjective norm is measured by an index calculated as the average score on the following items: (1) When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to take into account what my immediate family thinks. (2) When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to take into account what my best friends think. (3) When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to take into account what other people who are important to me think. Responses were given along a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. In a PCA all items loaded satisfactory on a single dimension. Cronbach's alpha for the subjective norm index was 0.77.

We calculated an index for **PBC** as the average of the following items: (1) I can easily find a good job in my home municipality. (2) I can easily secure a good financial future in my home municipality. (3) I can easily find good housing in my home municipality. (4) I can easily establish a family in my home municipality, and (5) I can easily live life the way I want it to be in my home municipality. Responses were given along a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. All items loaded satisfactory on a single component in a PCA. Cronbach's alpha for this index was 0.86.

In the correlation exploring (1) Settlement intentions, we included the following control variables: (2) Gender (male=1, female=0) since it has been suggested that females are particularly inclined to move away from their home municipality. (3) Upper secondary school grades (from 1=under average to 5=over average) since one may expect pupils with good grades to be more likely to settle away from home. (4) Pupils choose between university preparation (=1) and vocational studies (=0), and we may expect pupils who prepare for university studies to be more likely to move away from their home municipality. (5) Some pupils have to move away from their home municipalities for their education, and may therefore be prone to moving in the future too (moved=1, stay=0). (6) Distance to school is a dummy variable indicating whether the pupil's current address has the same postal code as the school (1=yes, 0=no). Pupils who live far away from the school may be more inclined to move away from home in the future. (7) We control for the family's economy, since pupils from wealthy families may be more likely to move away from

their home municipalities (from 1=under average to 5=over average). (8) We also control for parents' education since pupils with highly educated parents may be more likely to settle away from home (high education 1=yes, 0=no). (9) We control for university plans since pupils who plan to go to universities may be more likely to move away from home (1=yes, 0=no). (10) We included a control for municipality size measured by the number of inhabitants in 2024, since pupils from rural areas may be more inclined to move away from home. Finally, we included two geographical dummy variables, indicating whether the pupils home municipality is (11) Bodø (the county capital, 1=yes, 0=no) or is situated (12) south of Saltfjellet, a big mountain that divides the county in two (1=yes, 0=no). Thriving (13) is measured by the "Overall, I am satisfied with living in my municipality" item. Responses were given along a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.

The descriptive statistics and the correlations among the analysis variables are shown in the table below.

Table 4.9.1 shows that the three TPB variables attitude, subjective norm and PBC are all significantly related to adolescents' intention to settle in the home municipality. The highest correlation is between attitude and settlement intention ($p=0.83$), followed by PGC ($p=0.68$) and subjective norm ($p=0.37$). The extent to which pupils are thriving in their home municipality stands out as the most important control variable. A few other control variables are also significantly related to the dependent variable. Pupils who have chosen vocational education are more interested in settling at home than pupils who follow the university preparatory route. Pupils from wealthy families are more likely to intend to settle away from their home. Pupils from the county capital Bodø are more interested in settling in their home municipality than pupils from other parts of the county.

The correlation coefficients show the relationship between two variables. Regression analysis (table 4.9.2.) helps to understand how multiple factors (independent variables) influence each other as well as the dependent variable, in our case intentions to settle in the home municipality. While we find a strong correlation between thriving and intentions to settle in the home municipality, this relationship disappears in the multiple regression as the Theory of Planned Behaviour proves to be a sufficient explanation of the phenomenon.

We also see that the TPB proves to be sufficient, as the control variables are unrelated to settlement intentions after attitude, subjective norm and PBC are entered into the equation. This indicates that the control variables are not directly related to settlement intentions, only indirectly thru their effect on attitude, subjective norm and PBC. Helping adolescents to thrive in their home municipality increases their intentions to settle in their home municipality not because there is a direct relationship between thriving and settlement intentions, but because of an indirect effect of thriving on settlement intentions thru attitude, subjective norm and PBC.

Table 4.9.1. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among the analysis variables

#		Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Settlement intention	3.90	1.62	--															
2	Gender	0.33	0.47	0.01	--														
3	Upper secondary school grades	3.34	1.02	0.04	0.02	--													
4	Preparatory studies	0.70	0.46	- 0.18	- 0.19	0.01	--												
5	Moved to study	0.27	0.45	0.09	- 0.12	- 0.02	- 0.17	--											
6	Distance to school	0.82	0.38	0.03	0.01	- 0.10	- 0.18	0.28	--										
7	Family economy	4.01	0.98	0.17	0.05	0.22	0.08	- 0.03	0.02	--									
8	Parents' education	0.74	0.44	- 0.05	0.01	0.16	0.16	- 0.17	- 0.02	0.18	--								
9	University plans	0.85	0.36	- 0.10	- 0.31	0.04	0.43	- 0.08	- 0.02	0.02	0.30	--							
10	Municipality size	18K	24K	0.07	0.01	0.18	- 0.13	- 0.12	0.14	0.00	0.21	0.07	--						
11	Bodø	1.48	0.50	0.16	0.00	0.05	- 0.19	0.00	0.19	- 0.03	- 0.06	- 0.14	0.29	--					
12	Sothern Nordland	1.71	0.45	- 0.12	- 0.01	0.04	0.09	- 0.20	- 0.08	0.05	0.25	0.21	0.30	- 0.66	--				
13	Thriving	4.05	1.32	0.57	0.04	0.08	- 0.08	0.07	0.04	0.29	0.10	- 0.02	0.05	0.22	- 0.14	--			
14	Attitude	3.67	1.40	0.83	0.08	- 0.02	- 0.22	0.11	0.04	0.20	0.00	- 0.18	0.06	0.17	- 0.10	0.67	--		
15	Subjective norm	4.03	1.32	0.37	0.04	0.02	- 0.20	0.10	0.10	0.09	- 0.03	- 0.07	- 0.02	0.04	- 0.04	0.22	0.34	--	
16	PCB	4.05	1.32	0.68	0.08	0.14	- 0.19	0.05	0.10	0.24	0.04	- 0.14	0.17	0.19	- 0.06	0.54	0.71	0.33	--

Note: Pearson Correlation, correlations > .13 are statistically significant at the .05 level, correlations > .17 are statistically significant at the .01 level.

The regression model reported in 4.8.2. adheres to standard quality assessments. There are no multicollinearity issues, the variables are sufficient normally distributed and the ratio of respondents to variables is within acceptable limits, Cronbach alphas and PCA indicators all suggests a good model (Hair et al., 1998). Table 4.8.2. summarizes the regression results.

The strongest predictors of pupils' settlement intentions are Attitude, followed by Perceived Behaviour Control and Subjective norm. These 3 variables explain 70.5% of the variance in Settlement intentions. The Standardized Beta (St.D Beta) value for Attitude informs that if Attitude increase 1%, then Settlement intentions increase 0.7%. None of the control variables add explanation power to the model. The model explains 70.5% of the variance in upper secondary school pupils desire to stay in their home municipality as adults.

Table 4.8.2. Factors that predict upper secondary school pupils desire to stay in their home municipality as adults

Dependent Variable: Settlement intentions	St.D Beta	St.D Beta
Constant	***	
Gender	-0.042	-0.042
Upper secondary school grade	-0.013	0.037
Preparatory studies	-0.126 *	-0.021
Moved to study	0.009	-0.024
Distance to school	-0.023	-0.016
Family economy	0.037	-0.015
Parents' education	-0.081	-0.067
University plans	-0.02	0.08
Municipality size	0.099	0.049
Bodø	-0.079	-0.075
Southern region	-0.094	-0.108
Thriving	0.562 ***	0.008
Attitude		0.699 ***
Subjective norm		0.078*
PCB		0.165 **
Multiple R	.600	.851
Adjusted R square	.327	.705
Increase in R square		.364
F value	10.779	39.630
Significance of F	***	***

The findings indicate that the intent to stay in their home municipality decision is shaped by a complex interplay of needs, economic, social, cognitive, and aesthetic. Culture alone does not appear sufficient to counterbalance weak job markets or limited educational opportunities. However, cultural life significantly enhances the attractiveness of a place when combined with other supportive conditions.

We look at Scales et al. (2011) to explain this, Scales (ibid) used data from 1817 15 years old teenagers in the USA to identify factors associated with adolescents thriving. They found thriving to be associated with (1) sparks or deep passions, (2) many relational opportunities, and (3) the experience of a sense of empowerment. Scales et al. (2011, p. 266) used the following question to determine whether the participants had a spark: “When people are really happy, energized and passionate about their talent, interest, or hobbies, we say they have a “spark” in their life. This spark is more than just interesting and fun for them. They are passionate about it. It gives them joy and energy. It is a really important part of their life that gives them real purpose, direction or focus. Do you have this kind of spark in your life? (Respondents could answer “yes”, “no”, or “unsure”).

Sparks that are tied to the home municipality are more likely to be associated with intentions to settle there. For example, some boys and girls have been working for the family business or farm and are prepared to take over their parents’ businesses in due time. Others may have talents, interests or hobbies that are particularly tied to their home municipality. Adolescents who have been brought up close to the sea are likely to be interested in boats, fishing and other activities related to the sea. Young people from the inland, are probably more interested in hunting, hiking, skiing, and snowmobiles.

While sparks, relations and empowerment are important, a number of other factors are also likely to be associated with the flourishing of adolescents. Examples include health and safety, bullying, discrimination, and the 6 Cs of competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution (King et al., 2005).

Thus, cultural initiatives that promote social belonging, enable self-expression, and provide intellectually and aesthetically enriching experiences can help retain young people, especially when aligned with broader policies on education, employment, and youth empowerment. Bodø2024 and future cultural initiatives must therefore work in tandem with structural investments if the goal of long-term regional retention is to be achieved.

We conclude that behavioural intention is the best predictor of actual behaviour. Adolescents’ intent to settle in their home municipality is therefore relevant. Intentions are determined by attitude, subjective norm and PBC. Adolescents’ intentions to settle in the home municipality is a function of: (1) Adolescents’ attitude concerning their home municipality, (2) what important others think they should do with regard to settlement, (3) the degree to which adolescents believe they have the ability to solve the challenges associated with settlement in the home municipality. In our survey all three predictors of settlement intentions are statistically significant with attitude as the most important predictor of settlement intentions, followed by PBC and subjective norm. Other factors have no direct link to intentions, only indirectly through a possible effect on attitudes, subjective norm and PBC. Our survey shows that thriving in the home municipality is by far the most important variable that influences attitude, subjective norm and PBC. Thriving increases the odds of young peoples’ settlement in their home municipality.

Culture is probably one of several factors that influence thriving, but this remains an issue for future research in a municipality setting. Among the variables included in our model, thriving and PBC are probably the easiest to influence through local policy measures.

4.10 Summary: Art, Culture, and Youth Retention

The overarching goal of the Bodø2024 project is to create results that provide conditions that foster a lasting desire among residents, especially young people, to live and thrive in Bodø and the broader Nordland region. As established in Table 1.1., several KPIs were designed to monitor whether this objective was met among the youth demographic. These KPIs focused on the pupils' attendance at cultural events, their interest in local cultural life, and their perceived satisfaction with cultural offerings in their municipality.

Key findings:

The adolescence in general is more interested in sports and outdoor activities than in art and culture, but for a distinct subsample, art and culture is the very important.

The adolescence reports to feel more connected to Norway than to their home municipality.

The anticipated input that should provide these results were art and culture offerings. The question then is, does the provided art and cultural offerings provide the wanted results? While the survey did not measure frequency of participation in cultural activities, it asked pupils to evaluate their satisfaction with the availability and quality of local cultural life. The findings indicate that overall satisfaction is low. Upper secondary school pupils generally identify more strongly with nature, sports, and outdoor leisure activities than with art and culture. However, this does not imply that culture is unimportant, on the contrary, a notable subset of pupils consider cultural life a meaningful factor in deciding where to live in the future. The answer is then; to some.

So, why not for all? This again raises the question; what purpose does art and culture play in youths' life? An answer to this could link to our findings that many pupils express a desire for more inclusive meeting places and opportunities to socialize. Culture and art could serve as an arena for socialising, building social bonds, and meet people. For some, it is also an arena for building confidence, showing skills that are admired by others and contributes to their peers. Culture and art are one such arena. Work, nature and outdoor life, sports, and everyday life also offer such arenas for to contribute socially and bond. Relating to processes, this then represents a call for art and culture that are more socially engaging as seen from the youth's perspective.

Moreover, pupils tend to feel more connected to Norway as a whole, or to broader European contexts, rather than to their specific municipality or to Nordland County. This may suggest that while nature provides a valued and shared backdrop, cultural initiatives (particularly those tied to place) need to work harder to foster regional identity and pride.

5. Conclusions & Implications

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The survey results among 243 upper secondary school pupils across Nordland provide an interesting insight on youth perceptions regarding their home municipalities. Despite the limited sample size, indicators remain rather stable across gender, study program, and region, reinforcing the reliability of the findings. Pupils' willingness to provide written answers in the surveys further supports the authenticity of their responses.

Key findings:

The adolescence in general sees themselves settling down in their home municipality, males and vocational pupils, pupils in Bodø and Lofoten, more than others. They are somewhat satisfied with living in their home municipality. It is important for them to find a good job there, but they do not see great opportunities for such. They feel safe there, and that is important for them. They feel a positive affiliation to their home municipality, but do not regard it as the only place for them. They report to make up their own mind about where to settle. Art and cultural offerings are in general less important than sport, nature, outdoor life and other leisure activities, but it is very important for a substantial part of the adolescence. They do not see their home municipality as the best place to live their life as wanted and needed. The most important predictor for their settlement intentions is how the adolescence feels in control of securing their wants and needs.

The findings show that job opportunities and secure living conditions (housing, financial stability, and conditions for establishing a family) are fundamental to settlement decisions. Social belonging and opportunities for interaction also strongly predict the intent to stay, while cultural and aesthetic dimensions play a complementary role by enriching the quality of life.

Bivariate analysis demonstrates that while cultural participation alone does not outweigh the importance of economic security, it strengthens local attachment when combined with other structural factors. Many pupils' express dissatisfaction with local cultural offerings, and they identify more with nature, sports, and leisure activities than with art and culture. Nevertheless, a subset of youth's place value on cultural opportunities, particularly those that foster social interaction and community identity.

The correlation between perceived belonging, job opportunities, and settlement intentions highlights that youth retention requires a multi-dimensional strategy that integrates cultural development with broader socioeconomic measures.

The findings reported in the multivariate regression analysis support the Theory of Planned Behaviour in that adolescents' intention is a function of their attitude towards their home municipality, subjective norm – i.e. the opinion of family, friends and important others about settlement, and Perceived Behavioural Control – the extent to which individuals believe they can solve problems and issues associated with settlement in the home municipality. Whereas attitude and subjective norm are relatively stable over time, PBC can change over time suggesting that training and information can improve adolescents' sense of control. Through training they can

improve their ability to find employment, to start businesses, to find housing and to improve their relational opportunities.

Thriving adolescents are much more likely to settle in their home municipality. Measures aimed at helping young people to thrive in their home municipality should therefore increase their odds of settling there. While thriving is not directly related to settlement intentions, thriving has an indirect effect on settlement intentions through attitude, subjective norm and PBC. While there are many factors contributing to adolescents thrive, the presence of sparks appears to be particularly important. Helping young people to search for, identify, and develop sparks is therefore likely to influence thriving and their settlement decisions.

5.2 Alignment with ECoC Bodø2024 Objectives

ECoC Bodø2024 aimed to reverse out-migration trends by making the region a more attractive place for young people to live and work. The findings demonstrate the role of culture in reaching this objective. While cultural activities alone are insufficient to ensure retention, they are an essential component of a broader ecosystem that includes:

- Strengthening social infrastructure through meeting places and community networks.
- Enhancing employment prospects, especially in industries relevant to young people.
- Integrating cultural programming into everyday community life rather than treating it as an isolated sector.

In this sense, Bodø2024 has laid a foundation for long-term cultural development, but its full potential will only materialize if cultural policies are integrated with regional development strategies in education, labour markets, and housing as well as outdoor nature experiences.

5.3 Recommendations for Local and Regional Policymakers

The following recommendations outline concrete steps for local and regional policymakers to address the interconnected nature of abovementioned trends:

1. **Integrate cultural and economic development.** Cultural initiatives (like Bodø2024) should be linked to job creation and capacity building for the youth. This includes creating cultural hubs that also serve as co-working and innovative spaces for young people.
2. **Enhance social meeting places where the youths could build self-esteem through culture or sport.** Many pupils call for informal spaces where they can meet and socialize. Finding new and developing existing solutions (like cultural centres, sports facilities, and hybrid venues) combining leisure and cultural activities should be prioritized.
3. **Support youth participation in culture.** Build spaces where the youth could succeed, build confidence, shine, and be visible as a capable actor. Move beyond consumption-oriented cultural policies to include active participation and co-creation. Training programs, youth-led festivals, and mentorship opportunities can increase engagement.

4. **Focus on accessibility and equity.** Regional disparities can be addressed by ensuring that smaller municipalities have access to cultural programming through touring events, digital platforms, and partnerships as well as ad hoc public transport.
5. **Leverage natural assets in cultural policy.** Combine Nordland's strong identification with nature and outdoor life with cultural initiatives, e.g., festivals and events in natural settings.
6. **Establish long-term monitoring.** Continue measuring youth perceptions using KPIs aligned with ECoC objectives to evaluate the lasting impact of cultural investment.

5.4 Implications for Future ECoC Programs

The experience from Bodø2024 provides several lessons for future ECoC initiatives:

- **Apply culture as a pivotal important element.** While cultural investment is necessary for improving place attractiveness, it cannot replace structural reforms in housing, education, and job creation. Future art and culture programs should be explicitly embedded in wider regional development plans.
- **Youth-centric design.** Programs must be tailored to the specific needs of younger populations, emphasizing active engagement, self-initiated action, informal cultural spaces, and social belonging.
- **Focus on inclusivity and accessibility.** Efforts should reach beyond urban centres to ensure cultural benefits for rural youth.
- **Stronger evidence-based governance.** Using data-driven evaluation methods, including multivariate analysis as correlation and regression analyses, can help policymakers track the impact of cultural initiatives on demographic trends and refine interventions accordingly.
- **Sustainability and continuity.** The ECoC year should not be seen as a one-year event but as a catalyst for long-term cultural, social, and economic transformation. Mechanisms for maintaining momentum after the ECoC year are essential.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that Bodø2024 as an ECoC has the potential to contribute to youth retention if accompanied by complementary policies addressing structural needs. By combining cultural vitality and empowerment with employment opportunities, housing, and social infrastructure, Nordland can move closer to reversing its demographic decline and securing a sustainable future for the region.

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Appendixes

A. List of Monitor2024 Reports

Nr	Title (hyperlink)	Short summary
BLR	Baseline report	
IR	Inception report	
SR	Scenario report	
NMAAR	Norwegian media AI-assisted analysis report	
AR	ECOC Bodø2024: Should I stay, or should I go? - Settlement intentions among adolescents in Nordland	The report examines how art and culture influence upper secondary school pupils' willingness to remain in or return to their home municipalities in Nordland, in the context of the ECoC Bodø2024 initiative. Drawing on survey responses from 243 pupils across the region, the study explores various factors shaping youth settlement intentions.
PER	Program event report	
PRR	Projects report	
ACWR	ECOC Bodø2024: artists expectations and experiences	The ECoC Bodø2024 event promises to enhance the quantity and quality of the offered artistic and cultural offerings in Bodø and in the Nordland County through facilitating artistic and cultural events during the cultural year 2024. This report then details the effects from this effort as perceived by the artist community. We report on the perceived short- and long-term effects as well as how the artist community perceive the cultural infrastructure to be enhanced by the Bodø2024 events and efforts.
VR	ECOC Bodø2024: Volunteers and their experiences	This report discusses volunteers and their experience with engaging in the Bodø2024 ECoC. The idea is that art and culture engage people to interact. This interaction then knits bonds between people, and it is this bond that ties people to other people in the region, and then also to the region itself. This report investigates if and how art and culture engage volunteers and how the ECoC Bodø2024 offers opportunities for to build bonds with other citizens.
USR	ECOC Bodø2024: Students settlement intentions and their use of art and culture	Student's settlements intentions as adults are discussed. We link to their use and want for art and culture, and we show the perceived offer

		of such prior to ECoC Bodø2024. We also show the students expectations for ECoC Bodø2024.
PJR	People's jury report	
SoMeR	Social media report	
USR	Updated scenario report	
UBLR	Updated baseline report	

B. Survey Items and Constructs

Table B.1 Table with list of items used in the upper secondary school pupil survey

Gender
Year of birth
Postal code where you lived when you were in 10th grade in lower secondary school (your municipality of residence)
Do you think you have better or worse grades in upper secondary school than the rest of your class?
Has your family had bad or good finances in the last two years?
Do any of your parents/guardians have a university or college education?
Do you plan to take a university or college education?
Overall, I am satisfied with living in my municipality.
I am interested in what is going on in my home municipality.
If you could choose between living in your home municipality and in another municipality, which would you prefer?
When you are going to settle down and settle down, where would you prefer to live??
Can you imagine living in your home municipality when you grow up?
I have a strong local affiliation to the place where I live
I have a strong affiliation to the county and region where I live
I have a strong affiliation to Norway
I have a strong European affiliation
My home municipality is the place that best suits my lifestyle
My home municipality is the best place to do what I like to do
Living in my home municipality is better than living elsewhere
I am more satisfied living in my home municipality than living elsewhere
There is no other place I would rather live than in my home municipality
I feel that I belong in my home municipality
I intend to settle in my home municipality.
It is likely that I will settle in my home municipality.
When I am going to settle down and settle down, I will probably settle in my home municipality.
I intend to settle in Nordland County.
When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to take into account what my immediate family thinks.
When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to take into account what my best friends think.
When choosing a place to live, it is important for me to take into account what other people who are important to me think.
I can easily find a good job in my home municipality.
I can easily secure a good financial future in my home municipality.
I can easily find good housing in my home municipality.
I can easily establish a family in my home municipality.
I can easily live life the way I want it to be in my home municipality.
I can easily be with friends in my home municipality.
I can easily feel safe in my home municipality.
I can easily have good health in my home municipality.
For me, cultural life is important to me in my choice of future residence

For me, accessibility to shops, restaurants and other services is important to me in my choice of future residence
For me, accessibility to public transport is important to me in my choice of future residence
For me, accessibility to the health services I need is important to me in my choice of future residence
For me, accessibility to nature and outdoor areas is important to me in my choice of future residence
For me, the opportunity for a good job is important to me in my choice of future residence
For me, proximity to family and friends is important to me in my choice of future residence
For me, the opportunity to follow my ambitions and make a career is important to me in my choice of future residence
For me, the opportunity for good upbringing conditions for children and young people is important to me in my choice of future residence
I am satisfied with the cultural life in my home municipality
There are good opportunities for doing music in my home municipality
There are good opportunities for doing performing arts (theatre, dance, opera, performance, show, revue, stand-up, musical, historical play) in my home municipality
There are good opportunities for doing sports in my home municipality
There are good opportunities for doing outdoor activities in my home municipality
In my home municipality there are good opportunities for doing other leisure activities than those mentioned above.
It is important for me to be able to make music when I choose my future place of residence
It is important for me to be able to do performing arts (theatre, dance, opera, performance, show, revue, stand-up, musical, historical play) when I choose my future place of residence
It is important for me to be able to do sports when I choose my future place of residence
It is important for me to be able to do outdoor activities when I choose my future place of residence
It is important for me to be able to do other leisure activities than those mentioned above when I choose my future place of residence.
Did you know that Bodø is the Capital of Culture in 2024, also called Bodø2024?
The Capital of Culture year Bodø2024 concerns me
Have you participated in any Bodø2024 events?
Have you participated in any UNG2024 events?
Have you participated in the Hjertebank festival or similar?
What is the most important thing for you in your choice of place of residence when you have finished your education and are going to settle down?