

Internship Spring 2021 – Nordregio

NGEA51 Internship, Michael Oakden – Lund University

Introduction

During the period from February 12th to June 24th 2021, I worked as a GIS intern at Nordregio in fulfilment of the NGEA51 Internship course at Lund University.

Nordregio is a leading Nordic and European research institution with a specialization in regional development, planning, and policy. Nordregio's core research areas include regional development, rural development, urban planning, demography, and governance. Nordregio conducts applied, solution-oriented research to help policymakers and practitioners address these challenges in effective and sustainable ways across a wide geographic scope, including but not limited to the Nordic, Baltic, and Arctic regions.

The Nordregio office is based in Stockholm, but the majority of the internship was carried out remotely from Lund due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Some time was spent working on-location at the Stockholm office towards the end of the internship.

Throughout the internship, I was in frequent contact with colleagues through Microsoft Teams. The internship was supervised by Linda Randall (Researcher & internship co-ordinator) and Oskar Penje (GIS specialist and academic co-ordinator), both of whom met with me weekly to discuss my workload, personal development, and any other questions or concerns. I also met regularly with colleagues in GIS team and project-related meetings, organisation-wide meetings, and external events with research partners and stakeholders.

Duties/activities

GIS mapping and analysis play an integral role in much of Nordregio's work, so the aims and structure of the internship were kept largely flexible to allow me to gain experience in a wide variety of areas within the organisation.

I regularly worked with the GIS team to maintain, edit, and update the datasets and map templates used to produce Nordregio's cartographical materials. My internship took place during a transition away from ArcGIS Desktop within the GIS team, so I assisted in adapting materials like map templates to be usable in other software suites like QGIS and ArcGIS Pro. I also played an active role in discussions about the transition and adaptation to the new software.

I also had the opportunity to work alongside researchers to collect relevant spatial data and produce thematic maps for Nordregio publications, including the flagship State of the Nordic Region report and the VASAB Long Term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region. In some cases, this involved working with pre-collected data to produce maps while in others I was given the responsibility of identifying useful spatial datasets and generating ideas for GIS analyses and maps which would be informative and relevant to the research.

While the majority of my responsibilities were GIS-based, the flexibility of the internship allowed me to experience other aspects of the research environment such as providing support with literature searches, report writing, and presenting results to others within the organisation. I was also invited to external events where I had the opportunity to work alongside professionals outside of Nordregio. For example, I attended multiple workshops for the VASAB-LTP project, where I worked with research partners and stakeholders across Europe to draft a long-term spatial vision for the Baltic Sea Region in 2040.

Reflection

As an intern at Nordregio, I was treated as an integral part of the team and played a meaningful role in all of the projects I was assigned. While at times challenging, I found this to be immensely valuable to my professional and academic development. Throughout my internship I was challenged to apply my critical thinking and problem-solving skills to a wide variety of tasks and had many opportunities to experience the day-to-day aspects of a research environment.

While there was a consistent focus on using and developing my GIS skills, I was also able to spend some time developing other scientific skills such as literature reviews, data collection, reporting, and presentation of findings. I worked both independently and collaboratively, with many opportunities to work as part of a team with colleagues and external partners on projects. For example, I met with the VASAB-LTP team every week to discuss our progress with the project, provide input on the GIS aspects of the work, and determine next steps.

Overall, I was very satisfied with my internship experience. Over the course of the internship, I had many opportunities to apply my knowledge and GIS skills to real-world problems, and I was able to gain invaluable experience working in an international research environment. I am immensely grateful to have had this opportunity and can confidently say that the skills and experience I have gained will be useful to me for the rest of my career.