

Notat 10/2003

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Notat 10/2003
ISSN 0805-8075

Høgskulen i Volda Møreforskning Volda

2003

Forfattar: Jørgen Amdam, Høgskulen i Volda/Møreforsking Volda
Ansvarlege utgivarar: Møreforsking Volda/Høgskulen i Volda
Sats: Jørgen Amdam
Trykk: Møreforsking Volda
Opplag: 25
Distribusjon: Haugen Bok, 6100 Volda
Tlf.: 70 07 45 00 Faks: 70 07 45 50
e-post: ekspress@haugenbok.no

SfS Bok Volda, pb. 278, 6101 Volda
Tlf.: 70 07 53 85 Faks: 70 07 53 86
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COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE – CHALLENGES REGARDING PARTICIPATION AND NETWORK BUILDING. ¹

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Abstract

The municipalities have the last 50 years been an instrument for the Norwegian state in building the welfare state. During this period a division has evolved between regional and local strategic planning, and national welfare implementation planning that often have no connection to local and regional strategies at all. The Norwegian parliament has decided a new role for the county as the major public regional development organisation. On municipal level Norway have 435 municipalities but also 161 labour and housing regions, 65 of these consists of only one municipality. There is an ongoing political debate on national level to reduce the number of municipalities and to develop a two tier system without a “political county”. What can the consequences be from such a restructuring for local and regional development planning and collaboration?

Built on communicative and collaborative planning theories (Healey 1997, Sager 1994) and the Norwegian model for regional communicative strategic planning (Amdam and Amdam 2000), I focus on the consequences that a change of municipal structure can have on:

- a. Partnership structures and capability for regional development
- b. Mobilisation and participative processes regarding regional development planning

The capability to respond to regional challenges is a lot higher in regional municipalities than in regions where municipalities try to cooperate and coordinate their development activities in regional public partnerships – challenges and crisis must be a lot higher before one reacts commonly. But it is difficult to generalise from findings in central and urban regions to regions with a different geographical structure and history. One has no guarantee that a restructuring to one municipality in peripheral regions automatically will give a higher capability. If there is little trust between communities, interest groups etc. and no common understanding, visions and identity are developed, but different groups compete with no consensus developing, it will be very difficult for the new big municipality to reach political agreements for regional development and to collaborate with partners within and outside the region.

¹ PAPER TIL AESOP - ACSP Joint Conference Leuven Belgia 9 – 12 Juli 2003
Track: The network society 1-7: Local Networks and Mobilisation power

Introduction

Due to our geography Norway have 161 labour and housing regions (LH-regions with commuting time under 45 min. one way from municipal centres to the central place), 65 of these consist of only one municipal (Juvkam 2002). If we also exclude the biggest regions like Oslo and Bergen, we have 80 LH-regions who consist of from 2 to 10 municipals and a population between 5.000 and 100.000.

Concentrate on two of these regions. One is in the east part of Norway near our capital Oslo; it has a dominating town centre where most of inhabitants work, it is densely populated with 50 – 70.000 inhabitants and 300 – 400 km² land area. The region was made one municipal in the beginning of the 1990-ies. We have studied Fredrikstad and Sarpsborg as examples, see map 1.

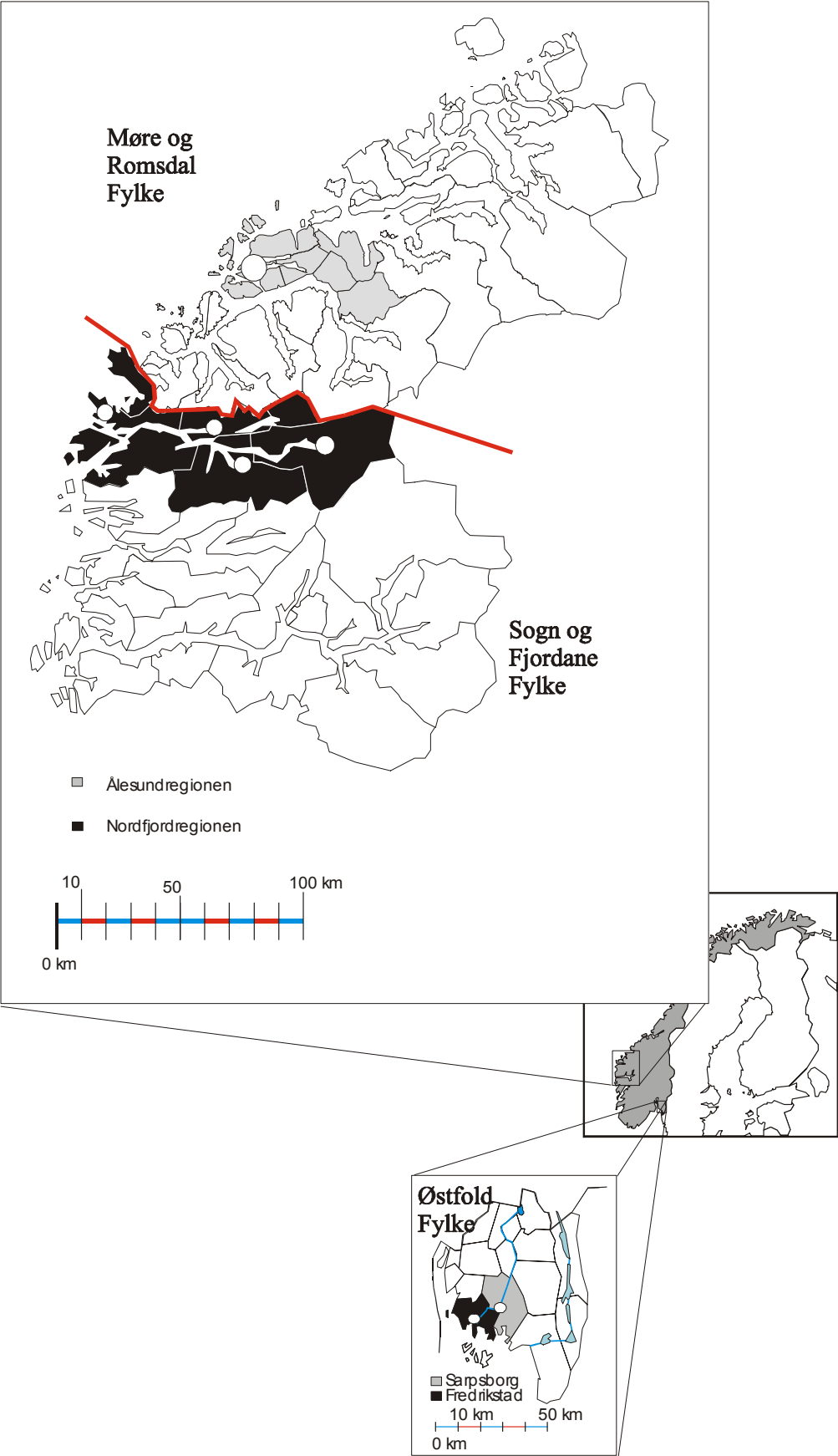
The other region is located in the North or North-West of Norway. Communication investments have given as results a line structure along a fjord where inhabitants from 7 communes can reach the centre of the municipal “in the middle” inside 45 minutes of travel time one way, but not from the inner to the outer part, see map 1. 33.000 inhabitants are spread over a land area of 4000 km². Due to common challenges in industries, communications, environment, public service provision etc, the 7 municipals have established an inter-municipal partnership and is cooperating on activates where they can reach common agreement on policy and implementation. But the region has no dominating centre, only 4 competing small towns with a population of 3-5000. The town “in the middle” is dominated by state and county owned public services like hospital etc. while the other three is more dependent of tourism, agriculture, fishery and shipbuilding. Due to this structure there is a lot of localisation conflicts connected to cooperation and regional development. Nordfjord is an example of such a polycentric small town region that are typical in some peripheral areas. We have also studied Ålesund with a dominating town (40.000 inhabitants) and 6 surrounding municipals with a total population of 30.000 within commuting distance – but spread over a land area of 2200 km², see map 1.

What happens regarding regional and local development – comprehensive development and collaborative planning of industries, public activities and the civil society – in regions like Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad that have been restructured by the state against the opinion of the population? Can the same happen in regions like Ålesund or Nordfjord? (We have no examples in Norway of voluntary or commanded establishment of these types of regional municipals in sparsely populated areas). What factors regarding local and regional development can be influenced and how? This is some of the questions raised in this study (Amdam et al 2003). We have approximately 80 LH-regions in Norway in a situation somehow between Sarpsborg and Nordfjord, some are actually smaller in population. We also have an ongoing political debate concerning a reduction of municipals from over 400 to maybe 100. What can be the consequences regarding community and regional development and planning, collaboration and network building (Healey 1997)? It is of course difficult or impossible to generalise from 4 to 80 regions, but we believe that if we can point to factors influenced, these should be taken into consideration in analyses of consequences in concrete studies.

In this article we will focus on the consequences that a change of municipal structure can have on:

- a. Partnership structures and capability for regional development
- b. Mobilisation and participative processes regarding regional development planning

Map 1. The 4 LH-regions studied



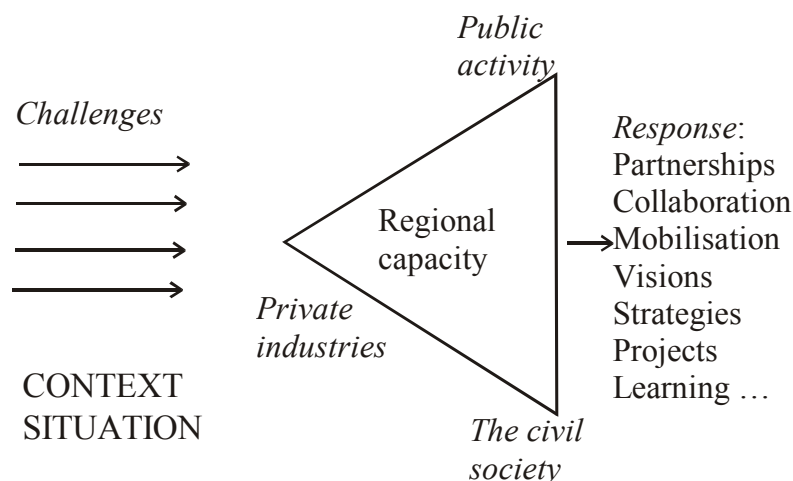
Partnerships in communicative regional development and planning

It is with good reason that Michael Storper (1997) points to talk and trust as the two most important strategies for breaking out of institutional chains in complex communities and organisations. But dialogue and creating trust require continual and long-term relationships between actors, with e.g. the development of mutual and balanced dependency (Amdam 2000). The challenges for communicative regional planning is of course: How can one establish far-reaching and essential dialogues between actors and gradually build up trust between them, when to begin with, there are no relationships, arenas or processes that make this natural? And if the distrust between actors is strong: How does one arrange for conversations that can clear up these relationships?

In this study we have to establish what kind of public and public-private partnerships and cooperation that exist in our study regions. What is the difference between the “nodal” and already restructured region exemplified with Sarpsborg and the “polycentric” region under pressure for municipal restructuring exemplified with Nordfjord?

Built on Amdam (2003) we have used the model on figure 1 as basis for this part of our study. A local or a regional community (be it a functional labour and housing region or an administrative region) have a specific context and situation, and challenges from both other part of the world and from itself (see figure 1) which varies from community to community. How inhabitants, companies, organisations etc. reacts to challenges – how they co-operate and compete, to a great extend influence the capacity they have to develop efficient responses to challenges (Amdam 2000, 2003, Bennet and McCoshan 1993, Healey et. al. 1999, Putnam 1993, Stöhr 1990). On figure 1 I have for practical reasons divided the community into three groups: public activity (both political and administrative), private industries and the civil society.

Figure 1. Structure and process regarding challenges for regional development



The capability of a region to meet challenges is particularly dependent on how the various actors manage to produce and exploit competitive knowledge (Diez 2000). At the same time, challenges must be answered with strategies and measures that the whole community involves itself in and which are adapted to suit the situation and meet the challenges in the region in question (Stöhr 1990). For example, the establishment and development of regional innovation systems requires certain conditions to be met. There needs to be an active business and industry with a high degree of co-location and co-operation, plus an active co-operation between various actors and organisations with competence in the field of developing and dispersing knowledge (Lagendijk & Cornford 2000, Storper 1997). In Norway a proactive municipal is often seen as an important “partner” for development of industries, especially regarding the need for land, infrastructure, buildings, housing for employees etc. (Amdam 1998).

Today we see that theories and methods developed to improve participation and collaboration in local and regional planning and politics in a modern community (Amdam 1992, 1995a, b, 1996 a, b, 1998, 2000) is driving ideas on the way from “top-down” government to participative governance on different levels. Communicative and collaborative theories and methods have made post-modern governance and planning possible, on the other hand these theories and methods are imperative to make governance of a complex and fragmented society possible as Patsy Healey (1997) states. In her book “Collaborative planning”, Patsy Healey (1997:206) writes:

*“The systems of **governance** of a society or community refer to the processes through which collective affairs are managed. Governance involves the articulation of rules of behaviour with respect to the collective affairs of a political community; and of principles for allocating resources among community members.”*

Regional development is a typical governance activity where public authorities like the municipals have only a small influence on individual decisions regarding migration, commuting, business development etc. From their formal establishment almost 200 years ago, municipals have been very important actors in local development initiatives and activities and the establishment of cooperative movements and industries (Teigen 1999) and practiced a local form of governance where the responsibility for production was taken by small local businesses, cooperative or voluntary organisations. The up building of the welfare state, or welfare municipal since this level is responsible for most of the welfare production to inhabitants, have somehow reduced its role in local and especially regional development. To make the task as a welfare producer possible, the state restructured our municipals in the 1960-ies both territorially and regarding responsibilities, which have lead to a up building of administration and employees in production. While some peripheral municipals have worked well regarding local development of industries and the civil society due to crises like high out-migration, this have had low priority in most municipals until now. Ongoing urbanisation and centralisation as well as communication changes have lead to a higher political focus on local and regional development activities.

The municipal structure is in most part of Norway not well adapted to these changes and challenges. In a labour and housing region there is a need for a commonly accepted and coordinated development strategy. If such a region is politically and administratively divided into different municipals, there is often a competition between these to get hold of or rid of activities (0-sum game). Especially in regions dominated by a central town municipal, the surrounding municipals can easily be “free-riders” regarding culture activity, jobs, public services etc. There is a need for cooperation between municipals and in most of Norway municipals have established regional partnerships (Sanda 2000). These usually function only as consensus organisations. The lack of positive experience from such partnerships have lead to a discussion that to be effective both as welfare producers and as partners in regional development, the municipals in LH-regions should be amalgamated into one.

In our study (Amdam et al 2003) we have looked at the differences between already restructured regions like Sarpsborg and regions that might be restructured like Nordfjord. We see Sarpsborg and Nordfjord as examples of the span of difference between nodal and polycentric LH-regions in Norway. Built on figure 1 we have studied how a restructuring influence private industries, the civil society as well as public activities. We have also looked on how a restructuring influence land use and environment. In table 1 our findings are summed up comparing the central nodal region and the peripheral polycentric region.

In our study we have shown that changes in municipal structure have a clear influence on the regions capability to influence local and regional development (Amdam et al 2003). This capability is to a great extent influenced by the geographical structure in the region and the level of social integration, trust and cooperation. We have found major differences between the two “type-regions” mentioned above.

The functional and densely populated region (like Sarpsborg). This type of region is characterised by having a dominating core that most of inhabitants relate to for work, services, communication and localisation of housing. A region like this has challenges regarding use of land, localisation of private and public activities, preservation of nature and recreation areas, communications etc and also

regarding development of industries, culture activities, activities for youths etc. To a high degree neighbour municipalities inside the commuting region was “free riders” on the central municipal, before the restructuring. The establishment of a “regional” municipal have solved such challenges as well as challenges like possible over establishment of shopping centres, too much land allocated to industries etc. due to competition between municipalities inside the region. Years before the actual “joining”, the community have been more and more social integrated and most inhabitants accepted the decision in Parliament in spite of voting against it in a referendum. The comparatively low level of conflicts between different communities has lead to a situation where challenges for the whole region have been focused in politics, planning and development activities. Industries and NGO’s can relate to one political and administrative body instead of 4. Political leaders have mandate to negotiate “deals” with hotel companies, manufacturing companies, shopping centres etc. that have given new activities to a town and region that before the restructuring was rather depressed due to reduction in pulp and timber industries. Activities like cultural festivals, sport facilities, hotel etc have been established that without a doubt would not have existed without the integration. Our informants are of the opinion that they can compete a lot better with other regions nationally and internationally and they have developed a new and proud identity and visions of a positive future. But we have no guarantees that this will happen in other regions. In the neighbour municipal of Fredrikstad that were made one municipal from 5 in the beginning of the 1990-ies, there is still a lot of geographical based conflicts especially with inhabitants in one of the former municipalities that are not well integrated with the centre. This reduces the ability to “speak with one voice” and to develop a common understanding of challenges and vision for change.

The polycentric and sparsely populated region (like Nordfjord). This region has four equal small towns and even more villages and communities. Mountains and fjords gives a clear distance to neighbour communities and from old very strong local identity and competition with neighbour communities. It cost a lot to provide both private and public services in a region like this, and some believe that joining all 7 municipalities into one will reduce public spendings. In our study we focus on what can happen regarding local and regional development if the 7 municipalities in the region is joined into one. This will mean that industries can relate to one political and administrative body instead of 7, and this can be felt as positive for companies that have activities or work force living in most of the area. The municipal council can take major votes instead of being dependent of negotiations in a public partnership based on consensus, and this give the ability to plan and implement actions more effectively on regional level. The problem is that even after restructuring the conflict level between towns and local communities can be so high that it paralyses regional development activities since both political and administrative leaders will have problems getting a clear mandate for development initiatives and private-public partnerships and cooperation. A reduced focus on community development and development of small industries is also a possibility. We are certain that a restructuring in it self will not solve conflicts and increase the capability to meet challenges if there are no trust between communities and interest groups. One reason is of course that a region of this type has no common labour, housing and service market and very few common arenas for political debate. The region even has four different local newspapers, one for each small town and its surroundings. In a study financed by the state six themes for inter-municipal production was identified, but the municipalities have only agreed to implement one of these since most of the activities had to be localised in the central town to be cost efficient compared to the situation today. We believe that the possibility that the small town in the middle certainly will get more public activities due to a restructuring is a barrier for change in itself (Amdam et al 2003).

Table 1. Consequences from municipal restructuring in different types of regions

Factor	Nodal regions (example Sarpsborg)	Polycentric regions (example Nordfjord)
Land use and environment	Better planning and use of nature and land is possible. Land allocated for industries etc have been reallocated to recreation, agriculture and natural land use. Better coordinated land use and infrastructure planning in the region, a centre that function better for the whole region, coordinated communication systems, control of shopping centres etc.	Small common land use and infrastructure conflict between municipals, mostly connected to localisation of public activities like hospitals, schools, communication lines etc decided by county and state authorities. Establishment of a regional municipal can empower the region, but also a reduction of power because of internal conflicts between local communities and small towns.
Development of industries and private business	Establishment of a regional municipal can give higher focus on challenges for private business in the region and a more active cooperation especially with bigger companies, but also a lower focus on challenges for local, small businesses. A higher degree of steering of the localisation of private and public activities etc is possible. An organisational increase of public competence is possible, so that businesses have “someone competent to talk to”.	Establishment of a regional municipal can give a positive effect for companies that have activities in and employees from most of the municipals in the region. If development of business is given priority in the new municipal, this can give an increase of competence and capacity regarding private-public cooperation, and a common political and administrative arena for planning and development. Regional development can function more efficient then before, but localisation conflicts can be as important as before.
Development of the civil society – cooperation with voluntary organisations and community work on local and regional level	The regional municipal can give priority to local community work (as we have seen in Fredrikstad), but one has no guarantee for this consequence. A centralisation of activities and a local power reduction can also happen. The new municipal have higher capacity for bigger cultural activities, more focused strategies for important groups like youths and a reduction of “free-riders”. Among possible consequences are: It can be more difficult to navigate in a bigger bureaucracy. Less direct contact with local voluntary organisations A lack of local political debate and representation	While local communities and municipals is almost identical today, the establishment of a regional municipal can lead to a centralisation of public and private functions and less focus on community work. This can mean a reduction of community work and activities in especially resource and competence weak local communities. If municipal cost reduction is an important reason for the change, this can give closure of local schools, kindergartens etc. If one can avoid localisation conflicts, the change can increase public and public-private cultural and other activities that need a regional “market”.
Knowledge and competence in the municipal organisation and in the region	Can give an increase of specialisation and competence in the municipal organisation. Less dependent of outside knowledge and to a higher degree an equal partner for county, state, business and other actors regarding competence as well as economic resources. Can be a proactive actor regarding higher education, research and innovation in the region. But increased municipal competence is not automatically assessable for businesses or voluntary organisations, households etc – especially “one-timers” can have bigger problems since the number of politicians will be reduced.	Establishment of a regional municipal can give the same effects as in a nodal region, but can also be destroyed by local conflicts. A regional municipal will usually be more efficient then a municipal partnership in development of regional and organisational competences and to give better access to specialised knowledge. Local tacit knowledge in the public organisations can be reduced due to centralisation.

Mobilisation and collaborative planning in regional municipal and regional municipal partnerships

Above I have tried to compare consequences of the establishment of regional municipals in both nodal (LH-regions dominated by a town) and polycentric (a region with competing small towns) regions. The possibility to get positive consequences for regional and local development is uncertain in the polycentric region. Is a regional partnership between municipals a better solution in this kind of regions regarding building of regional capability to meet challenges? To study this we have concentrated on the possibilities for mobilisation and partnership building using a model for collaborative planning developed by Amdam (2000), see figure 2. Instead of a line or a diagram with a finite start and end, what we call the strategic and communicative planning or development process (Amdam and Amdam 2000) is drawn as a spiral with an increasing “radius”. The planning process might have a specific start or initiative, but also a history and a context, which are important for further development. Successful processes most often start with small ambitions and, as participants learn to trust each other, more ambitious goals are formulated and new participants are engaged in the process. The ideal is of course a steadily increasing process as drawn on figure 2 that sometime in the future will create a “learning and planning society” (Friedmann 1973), also called a collaborative planning process by Patsy Healey (1997). But if conflicts are not reduced or solved through cooperation and negotiations, the “radius” of the spiral demonstrating the level of trust and involvement can be reduced (Amdam 2000).

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

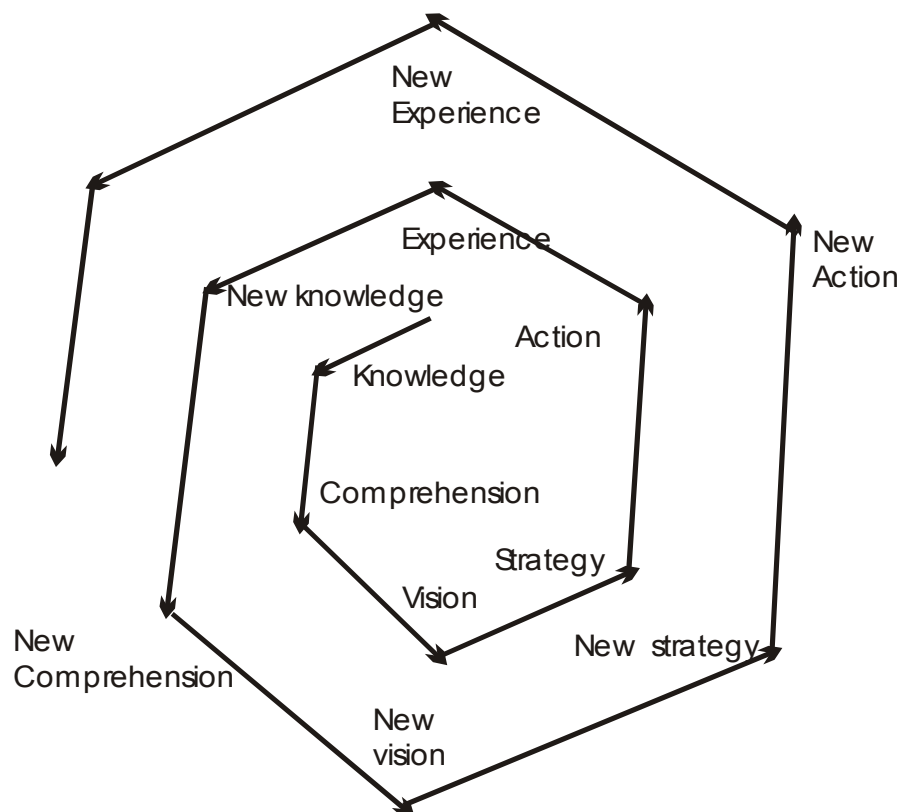


Figure 2. The development process as a learning spiral.

If we look at a “loop” in the process as illustrated on figure 2, the stages in the learning, mobilisation, trust and partnership building process can be divided into activities. A process like this can build institutional capital (Healey et al 1999), stronger networks and relations and capability for response. In our study we have shown that both the establishment of a big regional municipal and increased municipal cooperation in a partnership can increase knowledge and public-private cooperation, but

under equal conditions we believe that a regional municipal is more efficient for regional development and planning than a consensus based partnership (Amdam et al 2003). To study this we have used the model in figure 2 to compare development processes in the four regions we have studied. Two of these regions (Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad) were restructured into regional municipals, while Nordfjord and Ålesund has regional partnerships between 7 and 10 municipals.

a. *Mobilisation presupposes knowledge.* An important part of capability building is to spread knowledge about conditions and challenges, with a special emphasis on today's faults, strengths, opportunities and threats. In particular, threats can have a very uniting force, if these are felt to threaten the existence of the community or the organisations, as they are known today. If information is produced which shows that if the present change is allowed to continue, it will result in depopulation, a gradual reduction of the community and its organisations, etc. this will lay the foundations for a common understanding of the fact that something must be done. For example, a dramatic decline in the numbers of farmers, fishermen, industrial enterprises, young people and the working population will threaten everyone who is dependent on a vigorous community. Businesses, municipal activities, voluntary organisations etc. will be diminished instead of developing, if they cannot co-operate to reverse the trend or manage in co-operation to develop new tasks and find new areas of activity.

In our interviews we found small differences regarding knowledge about the regional situation between different actors (partners) in our 4 regions.

b. *Mobilisation requires acceptance of the facts.* Knowledge alone is not enough. The facts must be accepted, it must be recognised that this concerns us and that it concerns me. While the development of knowledge can be done analytically, such an acceptance of the facts must be created through active processes where all the participants themselves discover that this applies to them (Healey 1997). There is, for example, little understanding of crisis in many societies today in spite of considerable unemployment, because this affects weak groups like those without much formal education. These do not have the strength and are not organised for mobilisation. Acceptance involves getting **everyone** to understand that the crisis will also affect him or her. This again make it necessary to run an extensive education program to convey information about the **crisis** and its effects, combined with active processes where the participants together and, preferably integrated with those from other co-operating organisations, learn to accept the consequences for themselves and their organisation. Only when such an acceptance has been built, have the foundations been laid for a participation and mobilisation strategy in the development process.

We have found that our informants in Fredrikstad and Sarpsborg have a common understanding of regional specific challenges and we have also found examples of joint partnerships for development both inside between these two neighbour regions. In the partnership regions we found that the understanding of regional challenges differs between municipals and are heavily influenced by local challenges, only a few informants "think regional". The consequence is that these regions have a long way to go before they are able to mobilise together and to build a better regional capability to meet challenges. At least in these two regions the development partnership between municipals does not function properly as a collaborative arena for development of common understanding and acceptance of challenges.

c. *Mobilisation requires common/joint visions.* Knowledge and acceptance are not enough, the path ahead must also be mapped out. When the facts have been accepted, it is important to work on describing how conditions ought to be and what the future should be like. In private industry this is known as a business idea. In public planning we refer to long-term guidelines or objectives. I prefer to call such uniting pictures of the future a **vision**. The best is if all the members "discover" the vision themselves, that the vision are built up from the areas of priority that the members themselves have identified (see point b). What is primarily required is that everyone becomes conscious of this

common vision. Ideally it must be imprinted in everyone's consciousness, as many as possible must believe in it and spontaneously act so as to fulfil it.

In Sarpsborg and to some extent in Fredrikstad they have developed common visions and to some degree common regional based identity. There are, of course, still interest conflicts but the regional municipal have achieved to develop a high degree of common identity and a positive vision for the future. This is not the situation in the two partnership regions, each municipal have their own and competing vision. The challenge for regional development is a lack of common visions that is related to the regional challenges and this makes it very difficult to plan and implement common strategies if there are interest conflicts. The regional capability to meet challenges as a collaborating unit is very small except maybe regarding common crisis of some magnitude and when the municipals have identical interests.

d. *Mobilisation requires strategies.* The next step is to translate the vision into plans of action or strategies. What is necessary in order to make the vision a reality? This will be partly-plans for each of the co-operating organisations or communities, partly-plans that integrate/cut across all them. The first group of strategies should be left to the appropriate organisation/community itself after having arrived together at what must be done and what responsibility this particular organisation/community has towards the common cause/fellowship. If necessary, guidelines for these partial processes concerning possible products can be jointly established, should a co-ordinated strategic plan be desirable.

Great emphasis must be placed on the challenges that are inter-organisational - which break down the barriers between them. After such areas of priority have been identified, mandates for the work must be agreed upon and great effort should be put into the makeup of the inter-organisational working groups. These not only have to find solutions, they must also provide opportunities where the learning in the organisations or communities is to take place. Similarly it must be stressed that such working groups must work openly and present their interim results in hearings, etc., so that the results "belongs" to everyone. The worst that can happen is that these groups "dig themselves in" with their work and attach prestige to the solutions they arrive at. Of vital importance in this sort of processes is the use of creative methods.

In the two restructured municipals we found regional strategies for land use, environment, development of industries and to some extent strategies for development of the "regional" civil society and common identity. As expected there were still some conflicts related to details and actions, but a lot better then compared to the partnership regions. In both Ålesund and Nordfjord the partnerships have tried to develop strategic plans for regional development but with small success except regarding specific challenges related to communications, environment conflicts with the state etc. where all municipals have common interests.

e. *Mobilisation requires common priorities, programs and projects - actions.* In an active process of involvement with these strategies, a whole host of ideas and courses of action will be suggested. It is not possible to put all of these into effect and the partners need to develop trust-based negotiation processes that can solve priority conflicts. On the question of joint projects and the need for financing from several sources, agreement must be made on the contribution of each partner, where relative benefit should be an important criterion for the size of the contribution. If regulations etc. prevent the participation of some of the parties who would benefit from doing so, then "larger" agreements should be established where this is compensated for in other areas so that all the parties involved find it acceptable. In all project work there is a great danger of misunderstandings that can cause unnecessary conflicts. One must make sure that agreements are drawn up between the parties, which in the clearest possible terms describe what is to be done, by whom and when, how and why - note down what there is agreement on and where disagreements exist - and how agreement is to be reached.

The basic knowledge, acceptance of the facts, the vision and the main strategies must be combined in a long-term development program that clearly shows what one is heading for and how the responsibility

is shared between the parties in a fair and honest way. Such development programs can be prepared for an organisation, a local community, for the commune as a community and an organisation, for regional co-operation etc. These programs must be revised systematically on the basis of new knowledge, new goals, new strategies, new partners etc.

Typical in all four regions is a lack of concrete private-public cooperation that includes more than a specific project or initiative, but in Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad they have developed a near cooperation with major companies that have some of the characteristic of private-public development plans. The coordination of municipal activities and actions on regional level is a lot better in these regions than in Ålesund and Nordfjord, where most of public planning and coordination is municipal. They have some cooperation and coordination but mostly related to “win-win” situations like coordination of insurance, buying of material etc. where they easily can show a “profit” from cooperation.

f. *Evaluation and learning.* In practical use of learning orientated planning methods and processes, as well as discussion and evaluation is often the most important stage in the learning circle. Too often we concentrate on what is functioning well and forget our faults. Or we concentrate on faults and forget our strengths. But recognising faults as well as strengths are the most important stage in learning processes and the fundamental for improvement and confidence building. A learning process like this in an organisation or a community usually tries to include all members, especially the inhabitants or members who have specific interests related to the project or action. Since conflicts are normal phenomena in an organisation or a community, the planning learning process is usually slow moving. It tries to introduce change gradually and to build up understanding, trust and confidence related to participants and partners and common visions, strategies and actions. The evaluation process is an important activity for producing new knowledge and new goals for further planning and action, a new “loop”, see figure 2.

Our findings above clearly show that the regional municipal partnerships in Nordfjord and Ålesund do not work as common arenas for evaluation and learning. Only a few major politicians and administrators are involved and they does not mobilise their own organisations except in special situations and to an even lesser degree do they involve representatives and important actors in business and the civil society in individual municipals and the region. The regional municipals are not perfect organisations for mobilisation, evaluation and learning and especially as an arena for point private-public partnerships, but they function a lot better than the partnerships in the two other regions.

Regional structure and communicative planning and partnership in practice

As shown above the capability to respond to regional challenges is a lot higher in regional municipals than in regions where municipals tries to cooperate and coordinate their development activities in regional public partnerships – challenges and crisis must be a lot higher before one react commonly. But it is difficult to generalise from findings in Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad to regions with a different geographical structure (see map 1) and history. One has no guarantee that a restructuring to one municipal in Nordfjord or Ålesund automatically will give a higher capability. If there are little trust between communities, interest groups etc. and no common understanding, visions and identity are developed, but different groups compete with no consensus developing, it will be very difficult for the new big municipal to reach political agreements for regional development and to collaborate with partners within and outside the region.

I am of the opinion based on this and other studies that an important consequence of municipal restructuring according to LH-regions, is the establishment of common political and administrative arenas for the region. The focus will, due to these organisational changes be more on regional matters than in a compromise and consensus based organisation with almost no economic means and political power. To preserve the municipal structure and at the same time build regional capability for development in a region like Nordfjord, one need a stronger political and administrative power on regional level that have authority and legitimacy to develop and implement regional development strategies and collaborate with other public and private partners. One example is the municipal

partnership in Setesdal that in cooperation with the county have their own fund for regional development, but also this organisation have a lot of problems regarding local political ownership (Amdam and Tangen 1997).

Conclusions –challenges regarding collaborative planning and partnerships

Are these results strong arguments for a reduction of municipals in Norway? We cannot give such an advice. First, we have only studied local and regional development, not production of public services or other activities the municipal is responsible for. Secondly, we have found that positive consequences are dependent of a high degree of regional integration before the establishment of a “regional municipal”. We believe that if there is a lack of trust and cooperation between communities in a region, a commanded joining together “from the top” can lead to a increased conflict level and a pacification of development and planning activities – a lack of common vision and strategies that can promote coordination of development activities.

Patsy Healey (1992:142) has formulated the challenges of communicative planning as “making sense together while living differently”. In their discussion regarding planning, governance and spatial strategies in three regions in Britain, Vigar et al (2000: 245) use the concepts of policy communities and policy arenas to organise accounts of the practice of governance: *“Policy communities are conceived as clusters of stakeholders who share common frames of references and substantive issues of concern. Policy arenas are the places where issues of concern are discussed. As such, they constitute the institutional sites which act as nodal points for stakeholders, or provide a locus for the activities of policy communities in developing and disseminating policy.”*

What we see is that in the nodal and densely populated regions like Sarpsborg people and actors are both “making sense and living together”. The restructuring of the municipal structure has strengthened the territorial identity and capability. We believe that both the numbers of policy communities and policy arenas have been reduced and this makes collaboration and participation in development processes a lot easier then before the restructuring.

In Fredrikstad the integration process (making sense together) was not so developed as in Sarpsborg, and the restructuring have lead to strong resistance from some communities and even political groups that is elected on basis of programs for reestablishment of a former municipal. But even in Fredrikstad most of inhabitants and organisations have accepted the new big municipal and especially the policy to decentralise welfare production and the establishment of 23 local committees to promote local development initiatives. The number of political communities and arenas is reduced, but not as much as in Sarpsborg.

In Nordfjord inhabitants and municipals are in reality “making sense and living separately” or in markets, territories, communities and arenas that are not integrated for the whole region. The lack of a dominating and “coordinating” core is a challenge, since this region have a lot of common challenges due to its peripheral localisation, sparse population, communication challenges, employment based on old style production etc. But on the other hand, challenges differs also a lot from the coast dependent of fisheries, fish farming and shipbuilding to the inner fjords dependent of agriculture and tourism. The need for cooperation regarding intra-regional “details” is in reality lower then in an urban and concentrated region. On then other hand the need to empower the region related to competition with other regions and in national policy is a lot higher then in a centrally located region like Sarpsborg. The establishment of a regional municipal partnership actually increase the number of political arenas and since this arena have small economic and decision power, it does not involve important actors like the business and civil society, it has a long way to go to be a political arena of importance. To be so the municipal must reduce their own power by transferring responsibilities that are important for regional development to this partnership, and this is very unlikely.

The restructuring to one regional municipal will reduce the number of formal political arenas tremendously (from 7 to 1), but not the number of political communities. Be believe that it will take time before for example political parties will function as one unit in stead of 7, each trying to promote local interests inside their own party group. A restructuring can even increase the number of informal

local and regional political arenas so as to build territorial alliances for example against the weak core. Instead of “playing and living together”, they will even more then before “play against each other and live separately”. In such a situation a weak consensus based partnership can be better then a big municipal or no formal cooperation at all –only case to case alliance building and cooperation. A regional partnership can all in all be “better then nothing” regarding trust building and collaboration.

A region like Ålesund is somehow in between these two situations. Except the core, the region is sparsely populated, but the periphery is year-by-year more dependent of the core regarding work, services etc. There is from old a strong miss-trust between the surrounding small municipals and the core municipal that “cooperate only when needed”, but also a growing realisation that collaboration is necessary. Over time the number of political communities will be reduced due to integration processes and we believe that this over time will make it a lot easier to reduce the number of formal political arenas. But a state commanded restructuring could give a setback for such processes.

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