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Spatial planning in rural areas

Experience from the Norwegian Regional Development
Research Programme 1998-2004

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Abstract

The spatial structure is changing all over rural Europe due to migration, rationalisation in agriculture and manufacturing industries and changes in social institutions, as well as changes in politics at the national and European level. Rural Europe is not a uniform structure; the situation and challenges differ between north and south, east and west as well as within nations due to localisation, landscape, climate, etc. In spite of these local, regional and national differences in situation and challenges, there are also a lot of common challenges resulting from mega trends, international policy, EU policy, etc.

Spatial planning in rural areas must adapt to the specific situation and challenges in each area and respond by developing adequate visions, strategies and tasks that have the full support of local inhabitants, organisations and authorities as well as other important actors. At the same time, planning and development activities in rural areas must face the international trends and challenges and learn how to cooperate and empower one another in facing these common challenges.

In this paper I will comment the four basic questions in this track using examples primary from Norway and based on results from the national Regional Research Programme¹.

1. What is meant by rural areas?
2. What are the situation and challenges in different rural areas?
3. How can rural capacity be strengthened to meet challenges and develop appropriate responses?
4. What planning theories, methods, systems, strategies, etc. are most relevant for rural spatial planning in different areas?

What is meant by rural areas?

The theme of this track is spatial planning in rural areas, but only a few of the papers are related to planning challenges that I, a Norwegian living in the northern rural periphery of Europe, would have focused on as central in my region. In Norway rural areas are often characterised by low population density, net out migration, low income, remote localisation, dependency on agriculture and fisheries, “traditional” lifestyle etc. But in fact most rural areas in Norway are not today dependent of traditional work, public and private services as well as manufacturing is a lot more important. The lifestyle differs not much from urban areas regarding indicators like income, marriage, divorce, child per woman etc. Rural areas can be dominated by traditional land use (agriculture, forestry, fisheries) but most of the inhabitants are no longer directly dependent of the land and/or the sea. New activities like energy production, fish-farming, tourism, second homes, golf, preservation of nature etc. are competing and often winning over traditional land use. New houses are alike both in urban and rural areas, but they are maybe cheaper in rural areas. Some remote rural areas even have population growth. So what are rural and what urban areas?

The definition of rural areas, the perception of rural and also what is meant by spatial planning in rural areas will differ between nations, dependent of structures like urban-rural connections, population density, communications, landscape, administrative and political structures, institutions etc. Looking at thematic maps over Europe there is of course a strong connection between population density and urban structure, but is rural only connected to low population density? The northern rural peripheries have higher GDP per inhabitant than urban

areas in Portugal, Spain, Greece and East Europe (Selstad 2004). Some of these urban areas, and even more rural areas surrounding them, have maybe the same challenges regarding economic development, migration, social conditions, etc. as rural areas in nations with high GDP. Communications and an area's distance from the national or international urban core are of course important, but again rural is also dependent on regional as well as national and international structures. If we are focusing on economic power and communications, most of Europe outside the central triangle is peripheral and maybe even have typical "rural" challenges.

A possibility is to try to define rural in a regional context as shown on figure 1. Except maybe in regions with high population density, a region defined as a common labour and housing market often have an urban core and a rural periphery. But there are maybe a lot of differences between the "rural" zone heavily influenced by commuting to the core, the zone outside daily commuting but still heavily influenced due to dependency of the core for services, communications, week commuting to work etc., and areas that are so remote from the core that they are self reliant on most common activities – the "super-rural" areas on figure 1. Most of the papers in this track are related to urban-rural challenges and that is of course also to be expected since most rural areas in Europe are commuting areas or heavily influenced by a regional urban core or metropolitan areas maybe inside 3 hours of travel. The "super-rural" areas are the real periphery of Europe, mountain regions, islands and regions in the northern periphery. But still, the spatial localisation relative to urban cores does not tell us what are the real situation and the real challenges in a specific rural area, because this is dependent of both internal and external conditions. Urban areas in peripheral regions can have most of the same situation and challenges as the surrounding rural areas.

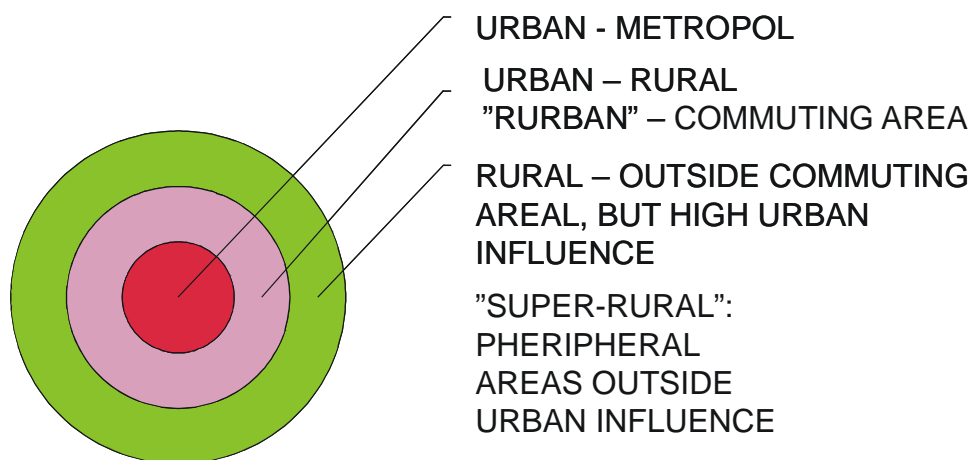


Fig. 1. Urban-Rural structure.

On figure 2 is shown labour market regions in Norwayⁱⁱ and they are classified in three groups (Selstad 2004):

- City regions – regions with an urban core (city) of more then 50.000 inhabitants,
- Small city regions – urban core have between 15.000 and 50.000 inhabitants
- Rural regions – urban core less then 15.000 inhabitants

By this definition regions with a small core are defined as "all rural area" even the centre area – *rural regions*. These rural regions are even divided into more groups in Norway (Selstad 2004); regions with a) an urban core of 5 -15.000, b) 1 – 5.000 and c) less then 1.000

inhabitants. One also have to include in “rural” areas in the periphery of city and small city regions as shown on figure 1 and 2, most of this area would be heavily influenced by the core - *urban-rural areas*.

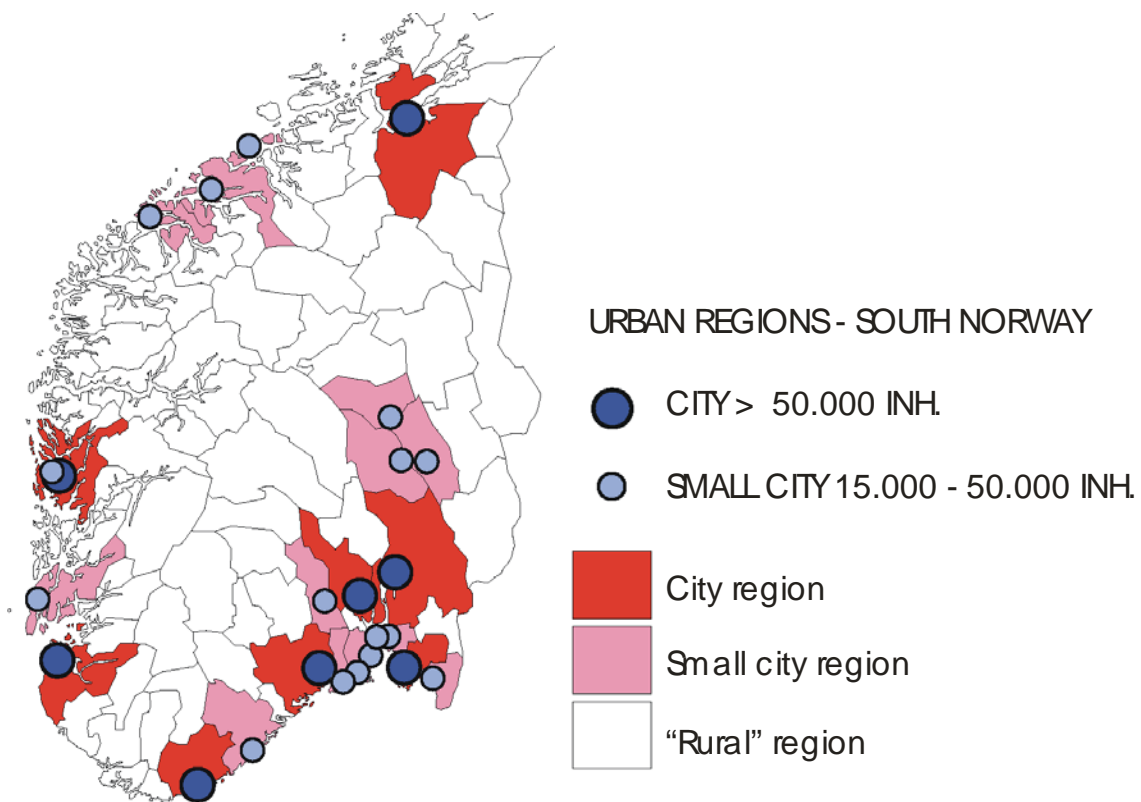


Fig. 2. Urban regions in South-Norway. Source: Selstad (2004).

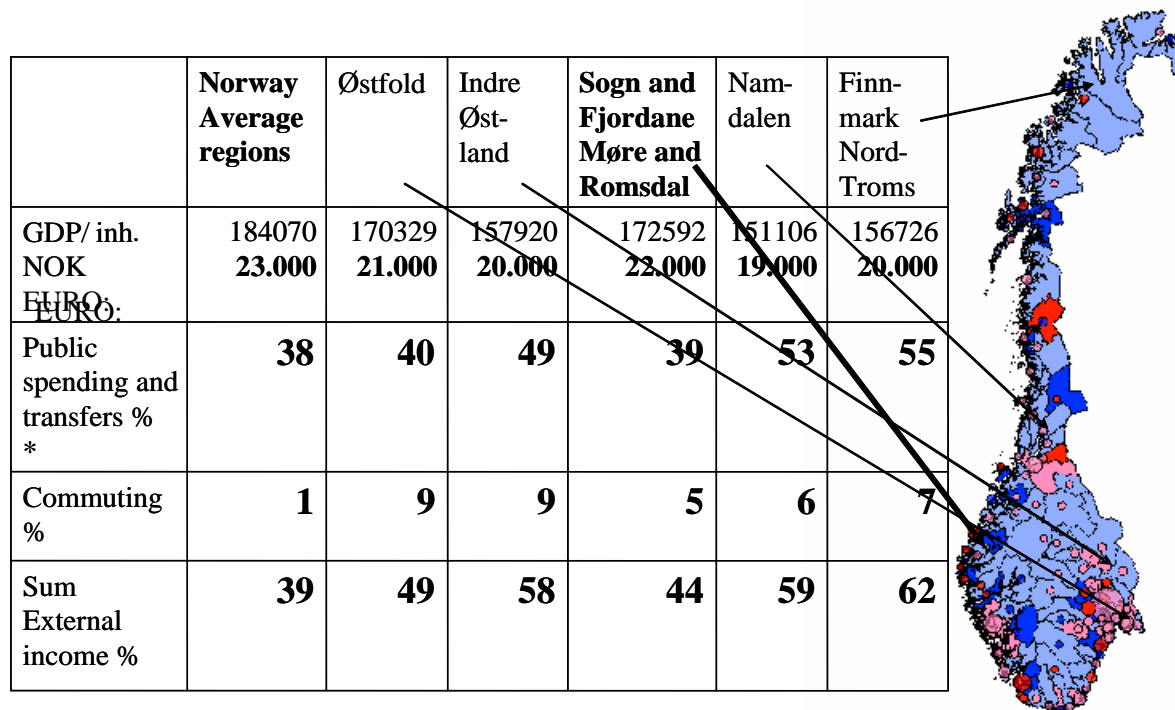
What are the situation and challenges in different rural areas?

Which challenges are local/regional and which are common to most rural areas in Europe? How are the situation and challenges related to private industries, public activities, the civil society (social, institutional capital), the natural environment, infrastructure and the economy? How do spatial planning and planning systems (not) function in different situations – what challenges do we face as planners?

These questions were formulated in the invitation to the track. Since the structure and situation of rural areas differs a lot, I believe that it can be difficult to find major challenges that are common for both the urban-rural areas dominated by urban cores and super-rural areas in peripheral Europe and other places all over the World. But I also think that rural areas dominated by urban cores may have a lot in common, as well as more peripheral rural areas. Maybe one of the outcomes of this track is a better understanding of the (common) situation and (common) challenges in different types of rural areas? The situations and challenges are dependent of nature, economic development, people and how the communities function as a totality. I will try to illustrate some of these using Norway as an example and especially the findings from the Norwegian Regional development research programme that focused on rural areas (Amdam et al 2004, Amdam R. and Bukve 2004, Arbo and Gammelsæter 2004, Berg et al 2004, Onsager and Selstad 2004). The major findings can be summed up as:

- Strong and increasing urban – rural polarisation, urban areas have in general higher growth of population, jobs, people with high education etc.
- High variation in situation and challenges in and between rural regions that should be in approximately the same situation regarding natural conditions, communications etc.
- Traditions and culture is important – each rural region have its own history inside the macro history – the ability to adapt and change differs
- Institutions and norms – civility and equality is important
- Industrial clusters and knowledge – entrepreneurial culture and values differs, some regions have industries with low dependence to the region (divergent), other have strong local and regional ties and networks (convergent) and usually have a better situation
- Some regions have a low local dependency – public activity and the public welfare transfer system is most important for income

Fig. 3. Regional income (2000) in some regions in Norway. Source: Selstad and Onsager (2004)



* Public spending, economic support to business (agriculture), public insurance

On figure 3 is illustrated the economic dependency of the study regions in the research programme. In general the GDP per inhabitant was app. 23.000 EURO in 2000, and 38% of this income to an average region was from public spending (salaries etc) and transfers (economic support to business - agriculture mainly and public incurrence). 1 % of the incomes come from inhabitants working in other regions (Onsager and Selstad 2004).

Two of our study regions were localised near the metropolitan area of Oslo. Østfold was a manufacturing region (wood, shipbuilding) with the typical challenges of these regions

(Nilsson 1997). From a “self reliant” region with rural structure except a few small “manufacturing towns”, it is now increasingly integrated into the urban core due to better communications and urban growth. Public spending is average, but 9 % of the income to the region is from commuting to Oslo. Indre Østland is a “forest region” with what is often seen as “a typical rural situation”, very low population density, old inhabitants, net migration, job reduction, few modern jobs, low income etc. 49% of the regional income is from public spending and transfers, 9% from commuting mainly to Oslo (week) and only 42% from own production. But due to the welfare system in Norway regional GDP is only 15% lower than national average.

Sogn and Fjordane (S&F), Møre and Romsdal (M&R) are localised on the northern part of the west coast of Norway. The whole County of Sogn and Fjordane is a rural area related to figure 2 above, it has no urban area bigger than 15.000 inhabitants. Møre and Romsdal have three small cities. This area is also mainly rural but traditionally fisheries and agriculture have been integrated in a seasonal adaptation and where fishermen usually had to follow the fish for a long distance. But while app. 50% of employment were related to traditional work in 1950, only 5% have these jobs today and mainly in the most remote areas (18% the highest). In spite of low urbanisation, long distances to urban areas, difficult internal communications due to fjords and mountains etc. the GDP are almost on national average and only 39% of the income are from public spending and another 6% from “commuting” but this is mainly “long distance commuting” due to fisheries and oil related activity in Norway but also all over the world. The region has one of the major international clusters related to building of special ships for fisheries and oil supply boats. Fisheries in Norway are today dominated by the region.

Both Namdal and Finnmark/Nord-Troms used to be rich rural regions due to natural resources (fisheries, minerals, forestry) but are today lagging behind and increasingly dependent of public spending and long distance commuting. Namdalen is near the urban core of Trondheim but outside daily commuting distance and have a lot in common with Indre Østland regarding situation and challenges. Finnmark and Nord-Troms are the most peripheral and northernmost part of Norway with extreme natural conditions, low population density but also easy access to natural resources (fish, minerals, tourism ...) and now gas and oil.

Inside these regions we also find communities and local labour markets that differs a lot from the regional situation, success stories in the not so well doing regions and failures in the better off rural regions. This tells us that it is dangerous to generalise, we need proper knowledge of the actual situation and challenges of each rural region and area. And we need planning tools and strategies that are adapted to the specific situation in each area. New challenges related to new activities like fish farming, gas- and oil activity etc. also creates new challenges regarding land and sea use and socio-economic development.

Why have some rural regions more positive development then regions in approximately the same situation regarding localisation relative to urban areas, access to natural resources and economic structure and policy? Why is manufacturing industries surviving in North-western Norway but closing down in other areas? As we found in our study there are no easy explanations, but as shown by Putnam (1993) there is a strong connection between institutions and norms in the civil society and performance One example is that western Norway had no “landlords”, the combination of farming and fisheries for family survival lead to a culture with high equality (Wicken 1997), while other not so well doing regions had a higher level of

class conflict and hierarchy. Culture and traditions regarding equality, cooperation, trust, partnerships and problem solving have a positive influence on the capability for change and development (Onsager and Selstad 2004). Our opinions and experience of a place is often more important for what we are doing than “objective” facts – we need to know how people think (Berg et al 2004). Mental pictures as a) “The traditional rural area compared to the modern city” or b) “The idyllic rural area compared to the dirty city” have a strong influence on our decisions, and especially young people have a tendency to focus on picture a.

How can rural capacity be strengthened to meet challenges and develop appropriate responses?

On figure 4 rural capacity or capability is organised according to the three groups of important stakeholders in a rural community; private industries, public activity and the civil society.

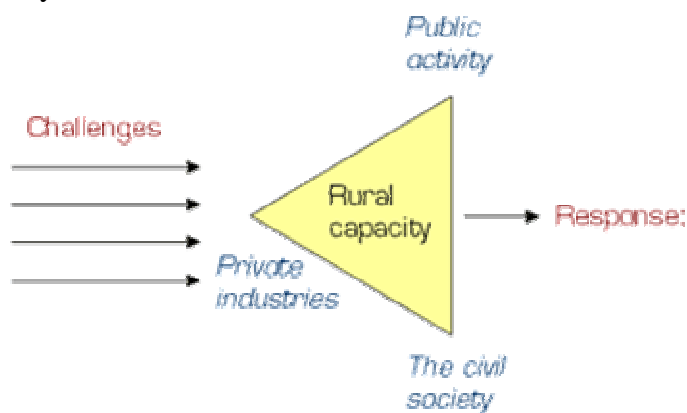


Fig. 4. Rural capacity and stakeholders.

Governance, partnerships, confidence and trust building, communicative planning, etc. are some of the new process-related developments in spatial planning and rural development (Healey 1997, Healey et al 1999), but we also need to learn more about how substantial means like infrastructure, new products, land use, landscape and environmental preservation, tourism, etc. influence rural changes and the future. In particular, what examples can be presented that combine participation, development and implementation of new substantial strategies – and what can be learned from these?

Built on Amdam (2003) we have used the model on figure 4 as basis for our study in Norway. 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 4) 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 4 I have for practical reasons divided the community into three groups of major internal and external stakeholders (Friedmann 1992); public activity (both political and administrative), private industries and the civil society.

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 (Asheim 1996, Asheim and Isaksen 1997). 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 (Cooke et al 1997, Lagendijk & Cornford 2000, Maskell et al 1998, Storper 1997). In Norway a proactive municipal or county is often seen as an important “partner” for development of industries, especially regarding the need for land, infrastructure, buildings, housing for employees etc. (Teigen 2000).

Rural development policy has mainly focused on development of natural resources (agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism etc.) and economic support (Amdam R. et al 1995). Rural areas that have focused on such development is increasingly dependent of public spending and transfers in Norway due to rationalisation and national and international competition. Built on among others Nilsson (1997) I have on figure 5 I have tried to divide rural regions in two groups; traditional and flexible and also to compare them with corresponding urban areas.

The challenges of the **traditional** rural region are to a high extent comparable with the problems and challenges of urban manufacturing regions (Nilsson 1997). Focus is on mass production of goods and services (tourism) based on natural resources and with focus on prices, economic costs, transactions etc. and “more and better” (Onsager and Selstad 2004). Both in urban and rural areas this kind of regions have challenges meeting competition from other regions often in other parts of the world. Nilsson (1997) is of the opinion that it takes generations to change attitude and strategy in this kind of regions socially dominated by hierarchy and inequality (Putnam 1993). It is often easiest to “import new industries” then to change how the community functions.

Typical for diversified urban regions and **flexible** rural regions is a focus on knowledge and abilities and dynamic learning processes that integrate new knowledge in production of traditional goods and services and use old and new knowledge to develop new activities and markets. These regions have a strong local based growth capacity (Onsager and Selstad 2004) and have also adapted from focus on production to focus on services and the “upper” and most competent part of clusters and production chains. Inhabitants as well as industries and private and public organisations, have a strong “loyalty” to the area and the community and are willing to change to continue living locally and to increase life quality.

Fig. 5. Types of urban and rural regions.

Urban-Rural Focus	URBAN CONCENTRATION	RURAL STRUCTURE
MANUFACTURING (Focus on economic capital)	Big scale manufacturing regions	“Traditional” rural areas - production based on land and nature – agriculture, fisheries, mining, mass tourism ...
KNOWLEDGE (Focus on social capital)	Diversified metropolitan regions	“Flexible” rural areas – diversified, focus on life quality for inhabitants

An important task in rural capacity building is to increase the social capital. Healey et al (1999) define this task as influencing the three dimensions of institutional capital; knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capability. A region with a high local openness combined with strong local capacity is usually coping better than regions with strong local capacity but a local closure strategy or a region with high local openness but weak local capacity. Traditional rural regions typically have a combination of local closure (strategic focus on traditional activities) and weak local capacity due to class struggle and internal conflicts, while flexible rural regions is both open and have high local capacity – a common strategy for development that include all important local shareholders.

What planning theories, methods, systems, strategies, etc. are most relevant for rural spatial planning in different areas?

Rural Europe is highly diverse in terms of culture and traditions as well as in terms of the natural environment, and the diversity between rural and urban areas might well be increasing. Can participative spatial planning methods developed in the Nordic countries easily be “transplanted” to the former eastern bloc countries? Can village lifestyle and zoning planning principles easily be transplanted to sparsely populated areas? Can methods and experience developed in urban areas be relevant for rural areas? How can planning theories and methods be adapted to different situations and challenges and natural as well as cultural differences? What and how can we learn from each other?

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.

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, 2003). The challenges for communicative regional planning are 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 and processes that can clear up these relationships (Innes et al 1994, Sager 1994)?

Rural development is a typical governance activity where public authorities like the municipals and counties have only a small influence on individual decisions regarding migration, commuting, business development etc. To develop institutional capital public planning processes must include all important stakeholders, businesses as well as non governmental organisations with basis in the civil society. 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 in Norway (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 the municipal's role in local and especially regional development. 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 in Norway today, in spite of being responsible for land use and comprehensive spatial planning. Traditional "government" forms of spatial planning are of course important to regulate land use, development of infrastructure etc. but to build institutional capacity more collaborative and communicative planning methods must be developed and used.

Patsy Healey (1992:142) has formulated the challenges of communicative planning as "making sense together while living differently". This also applies to diversified rural areas that include a lot of new types of un-traditional stakeholders and as shown in the Norwegian examples are more "urban" than "rural" regarding social complexity (Berg et al 2004). 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.

From a situation where most rural areas had common political communities and arenas, we have today a strong fragmentation and specialisation of both public and private organisations

on local and regional level in rural areas in Norway (Tranøy and Østerud 2001). This lack of policy communities and arenas is maybe a bigger challenge in some rural areas than access to natural resources and economic means – the inability to develop common visions, strategies and tasks – talk and trust?

Conclusions

Spatial planning in rural areas is the theme of this track. I have tried to show that rural areas is not a homogeneous entity, the situation and challenges differs a lot between areas heavily influenced by the urban core and remote areas. Traditional coping strategies based on natural resources and traditional industries is often not as efficient as strategies that also include development of institutional capital and that tries to diversify industries, integrate new types of stakeholders and inhabitants and that focus on communicative planning processes that tries to develop common visions, strategies, tasks and learning (Amdam and Amdam 2000).

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ⁱ The national Regional Research Programme in the period 1998 – 2004 in Norway was organised according to the model described in the invitation to this track: Thematic studies: a) Private industries. Framework conditions for industrial development and their consequences for regional development. b) Civil Society. Mobility, communication and provision of services – functional regions. c) Public policy and planning for regional development – consequences, comparison, co-ordination and the system of planning and administration and regional development. d) Area studies: South-Eastern Norway, Interior Eastern Norway, North-Western Norway, Central Norway, Northern Norway. Comprehensive and integrated studies based on the model and with emphasis on spatial capacity building. Network building – PhD-programme and specific networks for area studies and each of the thematic studies. Synthesis (2003/4) – publication of 4 books, one for each network (Amdam and Bukve 2004, Arbo and Gammelsæter 2004, Berg et al 2004, Onsager and Selstad 2004) . Regional research in this context was concentrating on rural and peripheral areas, but also the relations between central urban areas and rural areas. In this paper I will describe this program with focus on the 5 area studies, all peripheral and mainly rural areas and results from these. Some of the results that will be elaborated are: - The spatial polarisation between core and periphery is increasing in Norway. In the post-industrial society most new jobs and enterprises, mostly in services, are created in the biggest regions, while small, peripheral regions are lagging behind. - Regions defined as spatial integrated job and housing markets have their own specific situation and challenges. The typical finding in all 5 study areas is richness in variation of structure, situation and challenges that need area specified strategies for capacity building and development. - History and culture is important for understanding spatial capacity for development. The 5 areas have many and different experience both on macro and micro level and have developed different strategies for adaptation and change.

ⁱⁱ Labour market and housing regions (Arbeid og Bustad – AB-region) are defined as including the area of municipalities which centre have a travel distance less then 45 minutes one way to the urban core of the region (Juvkam 2002).