

Jørgen Amdam

Commune structure in Norway
Alternatives for local and regional political organisation
and their consequences



HØGSKULEN I VOLDA



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Abstract

The local and administrative structure in Norway is under debate. In a national project financed and organised by the KS (The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities) and KRD (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development), every commune have to consider if they should continue on their own, a marriage with a neighbour or maybe an even bigger structure – a “regional marriage”. The national project has produced reports etc. as basic for these discussions and we have been involved in this activity both on national and regional basis.

But the local political/administrative structure does not exist in a vacuum. The regional structure, the future of the counties, is also under debate. Two principal alternatives have been proposed: 1) a two layer system with only communes as political level under the state and 2) regions on sub-national level – a three layer system with decentralisation from national to regional level. The first model get strong support from conservative parties, the second is proposed by “The district commission” and KS among others.

Changes on regional level will have strong influence on the commune structure. We believe that the political strength of communes will be even smaller then today if the state governs 400 communes, an amalgamation to maybe 60 to 100 may be needed to empower the local level against the fragmented state. Also a reduction from 18 counties to maybe 7 regions can also increase the pressure.

In this paper I will present possible alternatives and consequences based on our studies in Møre and Romsdal and also discuss challenges regarding the total regional and local structure in Norway.

Introduction

In Norway, as well as the other Nordic countries, we are discussing how to make changes in the sub-national political and administrative structure. We have direct election of politicians to 434 communes and 18 counties and a population of 4,5 mill. The last major change of local political structure was made in the 1960-ies, a reduction from app. 900 to 450 communes. The county structure has been unchanged for over 100 years (Selstad 2003), but with directly elected council from 1974.

From the 1960-ies urbanisation, better communications, internationalisation, the build up of the welfare state, new political ideas like New Public Management etc. have changed the political and territorial landscape into a situation that Tor Selstad (2003) describes as on table 1, a discrepancy between functional and political regions. While most communes in the 1960-ies contained a common job- and housing market, new roads, cars, urbanisation and acceptance of longer travel distance from home to job have lead to a structure of 161 residential and labour market regions see map 1. 65 of these have such a difficult geography that they are just single communes, most often with a population below 5000 inhabitants and low population density (Juvkam 2002). Similarly our few metropolitan regions have a special situation regarding structure. Even so there are about 90 residential and labour market regions in Norway with an average population of 30.000 inhabitants divided on 2 to 10 communes. Typical arguments from politicians and researchers that would like to reduce the number of communes are that (Amdam et al 2004):

1. Small communes (below 5000 inhabitants) is not capable of efficient welfare production
2. It is not possible to develop sustainable and self developing residential and labour market regions because of the lack of empowered political authorities on this level.

On county level we have the same type of arguments. The challenge is that the metropolitan and bigger urban regions does not correspond well with the old county structure (Amdam 2005). There is also a growing need to coordinate activities on a level below the state but above counties. In 2002 the responsibility for hospitals was transferred from the counties to 5 state owned regional health companies. The state road authorities have been reorganised from an organisation in every county to 3 regional companies etc.

Regions and regional levels (functional)	Political and administrative levels
Global	(Conventions, organs)
	EU
Meta-regions	(Transnational regions)
	State
K-regions	(Cooperating Counties)
	County
Labour- and residential regions	(Cooperating Communes)
	Commune
Local community	(Community organisations in rural and urban areas)

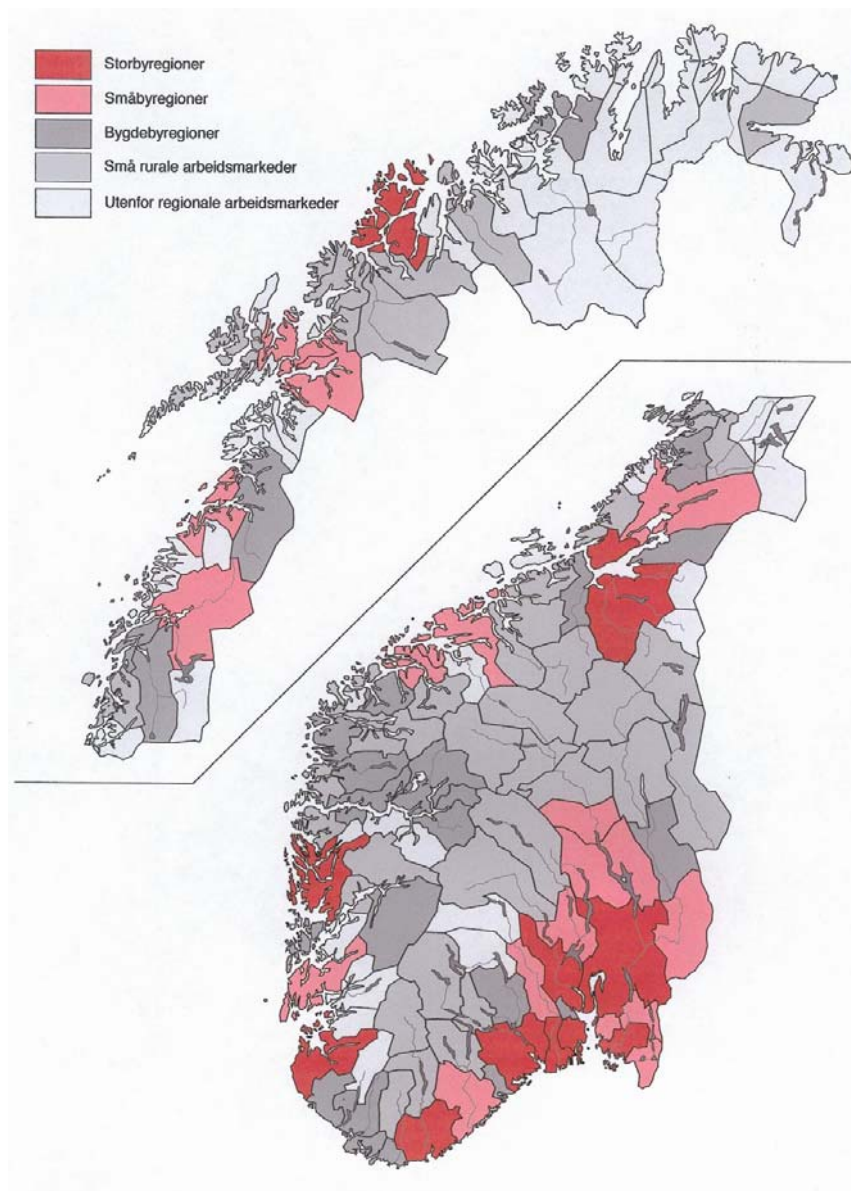
Table 1. Functional and political regions. Source: Selstad 2003.

While the strategy from the 1970-ies was to use counties and communes as territorial borders for all kind of public activities, have we the last 10 years seen territorial reorganisation and centralisation of state activities to levels between state and county and county and commune. As illustrated in table 1 the need of coordination on labour and residential region level and on K-region level (communication and knowledge, university regions) can be seen as the driving force behind these changes, but the problem is that each state sector has their own borders and territories with inter-sector coordination challenges. In effect we have public activities and administrations on 5 levels below the state level as shown on table 1. Communes and counties are supposed to coordinate all kind of public activities in their territory, which is very difficult in this situation. A further challenge is that especially counties have lost legitimacy as a political authority, and two of the major political parties have in their program to eliminate the county commune and the directly elected county council.

The focus here is both local and regional development and planning – the role of the communes and counties as” leading partners” and responsible planners and the role that communes and counties have as important welfare producers in Norway. Structural changes like these will certainly have influence on such activities and the role of local and regional politicians and administrators.

What alternative changes is possible and what can be the consequences for local and regional development and planning as well as welfare production, is a typical question we get from local and regional politicians and administrators today.

In this paper I will discuss some of the challenges and alternatives we can see regarding these questions, and also discuss what types of consequences must be regarded as important in this type of planning processes with possible political conflicts between state, regional and local levels (Amdam et al 2003, 2005 a, b).



Map 1. Labour and residential regions in Norway 2002. Deep red is the most urban regions. (Juvkam 2002, Selstad 2003)

Challenges on local and regional level

While the trend alternative can have some consequences, they are small compared to the two other alternatives. In this paper I will focus on changes on local and regional level. The reason is my experience from research initiated by communes and the national organisation of communes (KS) that would like to know more regarding what alternatives are possible seen from “bottom up” and their consequences, especially for inhabitants and the commune as an organisation (KS 2003, Amdam et al 2003, 2004, Amdam 2003b). To do so we have found that we have to concentrate on the development of the community as well as the role of the commune as the main welfare producer for local inhabitants. This can be illustrated as on figure 1.

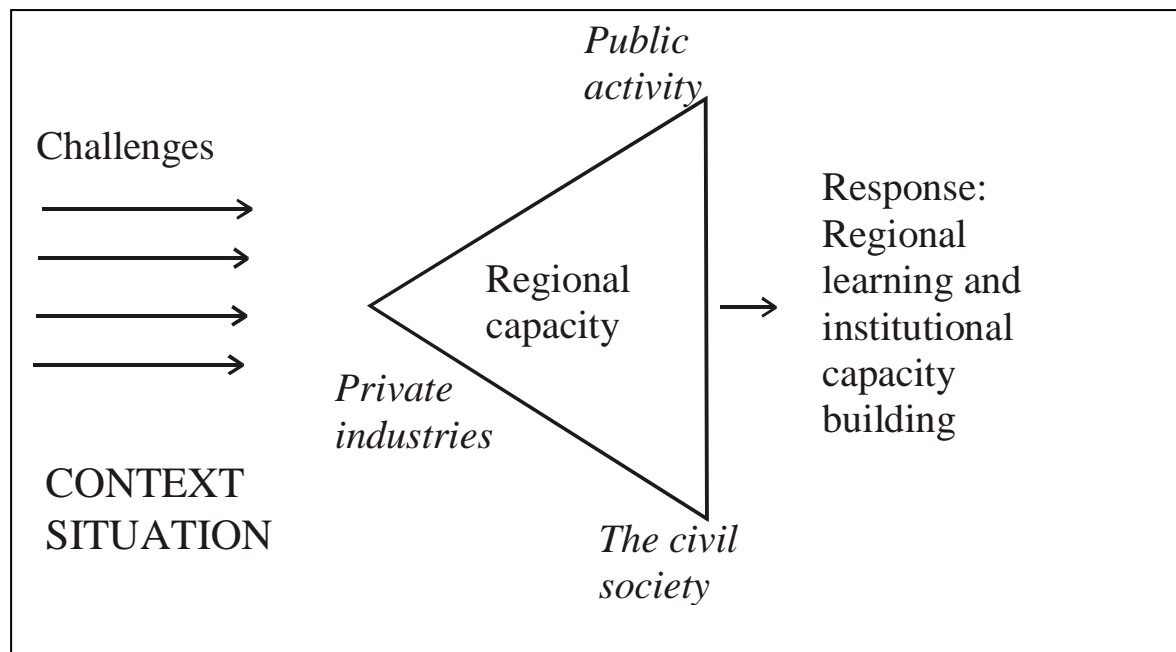


Figure 1. Challenges and capacity

A local or a regional community have a specific context and situation and challenges from both other part of the world and from itself (see figure 1) that varies from community to community. How inhabitants, companies, organisations etc. reacts to challenges – how they cooperate and compete, to a great extent influence the capacity they have to develop efficient responses to challenges (Amdam 2000, 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. My focus in this paper is public activity on local and regional level, but also cooperation with the private sectors and public activity on national level.

If we look at the responsibilities today between the commune (and county) as a community and as a political and administrative organisation, these can be divided into three groups as on figure 2 (Amdam and Veggeland 1998):

- **Public administration and allocation of rights.** The commune gives building permits etc. to inhabitants and companies according to national laws and local and regional plans, but also gives economic support to inhabitants and families that fell outside the national welfare or labour insurance systems – “help for self help” which

was one of the first responsibilities the new political commune took in the 1840-ies (Teigen 1999, 2000).

- **Public production of services** like education, kindergartens, hospitals and care of old and handicapped people etc. The modern welfare state is more a welfare commune than a state since most of these activities are organised and produced by the commune, with state economic support and according to state regulations.
- **Development of the “good society”**. Politically this have been the most important activity on local and regional level since we got a local political system in the 1840-ies and until approximately 1960 when most of the rebuilding after the war was over and we started building our welfare state.

A change of commune structure can have some but usually small consequences on the administration of rights and welfare state activities, maybe to the better for inhabitants and companies situated in small communes today because of higher qualifications and a more professional administration. In most communes such activities are small compared to welfare and service activities and production and challenges regarding development of the society. In this paper I will focus on production and development activities.

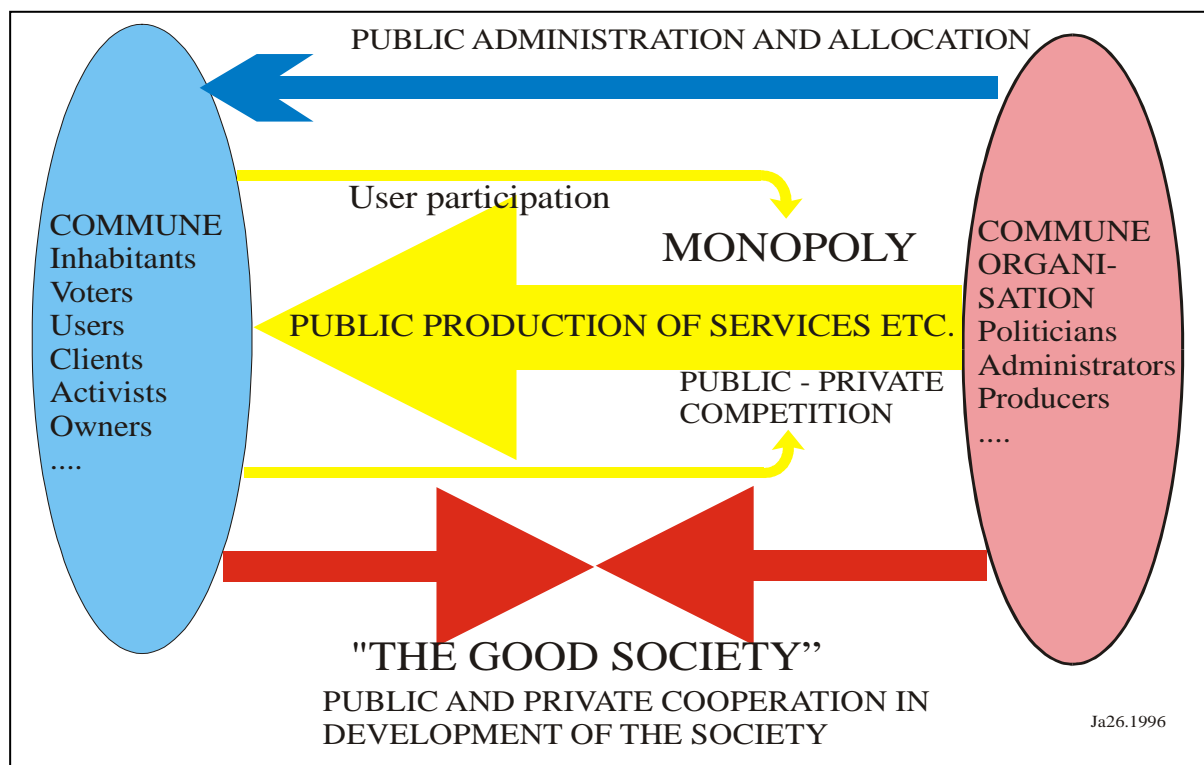


Figure 2 Different kind of “cooperation” between public organisations and communities

Welfare production

Related to figure 1, production of welfare services is mainly connected to the line between public activity and the civil society. Individuals and families are the main receivers of this production and changes will influence inhabitants and “voters” directly as many of these are employed by the commune to produce services (app 10% of inhabitants are full or part time employees in this production and app 50% are receivers (mainly children and old and

handicapped inhabitants). We have to focus on these groups as well as the changes to understand consequences.

As shown by Myrvold and Thorsen (2003) and others (KS 2003) there are small if any economy of scale for kindergartens and primary schools in communes bigger than 3000 inhabitants. For home based care and homes for old people there is almost no economy of scale at all, and the same for hospitals for old people with more than 30 to 40 patients. In small, rural communes with an aging population this is often the number when they have 3 – 4.000 inhabitants. These activities can be named basic welfare production activities and typically takes 75 to 80 % of the commune budget. So why merge communes that are over this size?

One reason is that small communes very often do not have what central politicians and administrators believe is an optimal and efficient production structure. In stead of one school, one kindergarten, one hospital for old people etc. there are many of them spread to different local communities that fight politically to preserve them and in some occasions establish private schools if the public school are closed. These institutions are important for local inhabitants for their identity, to have common institutions and activities in a small remote community etc. and local politicians accept this even if it costs more than a more centralised structure. So to reduce cost the commune has to be merged so that the bigger and stronger unit can fight more efficient against local interests. What is interesting is that alternative solutions very seldom are accepted. Why not accept local kindergarten and schools if local inhabitants themselves are willing to cover extra costs? Why not let parents take control over schools in partnership with the commune where they by contract are bound to national standards etc.? This will be at least as cost efficient as a centralisation and even increase local activities and identity.

Another reason is activities with proved economy of scale like administration, culture and sport facilities, health care, technical infrastructure and activities that need specialisation (KS 2003). The Norwegian concept is the “general commune” i.e. that all communes have the same responsibilities and activities regardless of scale. Small and remote communes have difficulties in recruiting specialists like doctors, planners, technicians, administrators etc. Some cooperation with neighbour communes is possible and is functioning (Sanda 2000), but often only on a project and single functional basis. Since research have shown that merged and big communes produce such services more efficient and often to a higher quality than small communes (KS 2003), this is the main arguments for merging of communes in spite of the situation that this usually concerns only 20% of budget and the possible cost reduction often is no more than 10 to 20% (Amdam et al 2004).

From my point of view what actually should be the situation is a new local and regional structure regarding welfare production as shown in table 2. Why not have a local political council with mandate from local inhabitants that are responsible for production of local services in partnership with local actors as well as other public organisations? This can even stimulate local identity and social relations. Why not a political council for the residential and labour market region that is responsible for welfare production that has economy of scale to this level? It is rather typical that cities and towns have divided their territory into smaller local units with responsibilities as the local level on table 2 and most often with indirectly or directly elected councils.

Territory	Welfare production	Development and planning
Regional level – job and housing markets > 5000 inhabitants (Region commune)	Administrative systems Secondary education Health care Homes and hospitals for inhabitants with big handicaps Technical infrastructure Culture and sport activities and facilities Education and retraining of employees	Regional development and planning of the region as an integrated entity Activities and support to industries and entrepreneurs Nature and environment preservation and use Influence on national politics concerning the region Regional partnerships and projects for development
Local level – basic living space < 5000 inhabitants (Basis commune)	Kindergartens Primary schools Home care and homes for old people Hospitals for old people Other local public services like library, information access etc.	Development of the local community – identity and relation building activities regarding culture, sport, hobbies, environment etc. Partnerships for local projects and activities

Table 2 Activities and regional level

Development and planning

Local and regional development and planning is focused on all activities in a commune or region, inhabitants as well as private companies and NGO's. Typically local politics before 1960 was to organise and implement improvements in infrastructure, organisations and institutions, but most often new self-going and stakeholder owned organisations were made responsible for continuous activities like a cooperative bank, diary, shop etc. – development of what we would call today “partnerships” and “collaborations” based on social networks and territorial “belonging” (Friedmann 1992, Healey 1997). The commune and county were arenas for development of common visions and initiatives – “meaning-making-processes” based on negotiation and cooperation – which we today tries to “reproduce” in strategic and mobilising communicative planning processes (Amdam and Amdam 2000).

It is my opinion that this part of local political activity to a large extent has been neglected in Norway because the challenges local and regional politicians face regarding allocation of too small means to different welfare production “on contract from the state”. In stead of being entrepreneurial and conflict solving, most of local politics have perverted to conflict treatment since such allocation conflicts, where resources are to small to get “win – win” situations, are never solved. Actually we have seen a new focus on society development in merged communes like Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad (Amdam et al 2003, Amdam 2003b), specially regarding the challenges of their territory as integrated residential and labour markets.

As shown on table 2 development responsibilities can be divided between a local and a regional level. The responsibility of the local commune is local development and planning, to stimulate and initiate an active local community that activate inhabitants, organisations and companies and create well functioning local networks, arenas and communities. An

integration of local public production and local development activities where the kindergarten and school is arenas for activities and engagement would be a lot easier if the local community have the “control” over employees and buildings themselves. This is in fact the situation in many small communes today where the amounts of activities as well as political engagement in actions etc. are higher then in bigger communes (KS 2003).

A commune for the total residential and labour market can be a more efficient partner for private companies and public/state organisations as well as for coordination of land use activities, infrastructure, localisation of shops and other activities, communications etc. (Amdam et al 2003).

Maybe what we need is a restructuring of the commune structure where we both decentralise and centralise to maybe 1000 local communes responsible for local production and development and 50 to 100 regional communes responsible for regional production and development? Even if the structure is not changed fundamentally or in a different way then proposed here, the arguments above shows that we need cooperation and partnerships on local as well as regional level to meet challenges and to be more efficient in public welfare production.

Alternative commune structures

As shown above challenges regarding both welfare production and community development are concentrated on two local levels:

- a) **The local community** usually a school and kindergarten district maybe with some private services like a local shop, maybe also homes for old people – and families with their homes, needs and activities that have to be coordinated in a well functioning community. In rural areas there are still economic activities like farming, forestry, fishing etc. but increasingly most of incomes to local communities come from outside work (commuting etc.) and public transfers due to the welfare system. Due to geography some of these communities can have distinct borders like a small fjord valley in Western Norway and/or strong tradition of cooperation like in some parish.
- b) **The regional community** usually defined as a common labour and housing market around a centre and where economic activities like work, commuting, malls, transport system, infrastructure etc. define the boundaries of such functional regions.

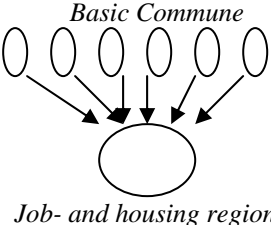
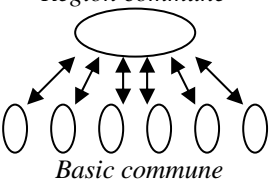
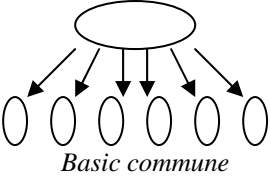
As shown above political/administrative structures are often connected to a time when most of travels were by foot or boat, while borders of both local and especially regional communities are dynamic due to changes in transport systems and infrastructure. Changes regarding local communities are often connected to growth or reduction of population. Growth can lead to establishment of new local service centres, new local communication structures and “splitting up”. Reduction of population can make it difficult to keep local organisations and activities going and to an amalgamation of communities. Better communication between small communities can have the same effect.

If a major goal is to have as strong as possible correlation between real local and regional community structure and political/administrative organisation then this structure also have to be dynamic and flexible. But to build long lasting relations and policy a stable structure is needed. One strategy is to try to plan a possible future structure. What communicative and infrastructure changes can happen in the future (coming 30 years?) and what functional

regions will be the result? Why not create a political/administrative structure that is corresponding to that structure, this will create a better stability in that time period. This is often not used as the major argument in the political debate today, but it is my view that this is one of the main arguments for major changes as shown by Selstad (2004). To get this stability communes should include the possible commuting area in the future as well as area that are “ownerless”, that is are outside commuting areas of bigger centres. Dependent of principles this will give a new commune structure with between 40 and 100 big communes (Amdam 2004, Selstad 2003, 2004). Changes like this will give new challenges. Most of these political/administrative organisations will in Norway have a concentrated core where most of the population work and live and a big and sparsely populated periphery often outside commuting distance. Due to distances welfare production has to be decentralised and somehow organised locally. As we already have seen in the bigger towns in Norway this can lead to the establishment of local public coordinating organisations often with their own politically elected board. So why amalgamate local communes into big units and then afterwards re-establish them?

In stead of trying to answer this rhetoric question I will try to describe three alternative strategies based on table 3 and that try to include in these strategies the fact that we need political/administrative coordination both on local (basis commune) and regional job and housing market level, see figure 3.

Figure 3. Three alternative models for integration of "basic" and "region" communes

Model:	"Basic commune"	"Region commune"
<p>A. Bottom up: Basic commune in power</p>  <p><i>Job- and housing region</i></p>	<p>Direct election to basic commune parliament Responsible for welfare production and community development on local and regional level. Economic responsibility</p> <p>(As now but maybe more basic communes?)</p>	<p>Indirect government and election Production and development activities organised cooperatively by communes as “projects” or “cooperative-commune” Bounded economic responsibility by mandate from communes.</p> <p>(Under-commune)</p>
<p>B. Both basic- and region communes</p>  <p><i>Basic commune</i></p>	<p>Direct election to basic commune parliament Responsible for welfare production and community development only on local level. Economic responsibility – taxes, state transfers</p>	<p>Direct election to regional parliament Responsible for welfare production and planning and development on regional level. Economic responsibility – taxes, state transfers</p>
<p>C. Top down: Region in power</p>  <p><i>Basic commune</i></p>	<p>Indirect government and election Bounded responsibility for local production and development according to delegation from the region commune.</p> <p>The region commune is responsible for economy</p>	<p>Direct election to regional parliament Responsible for welfare production and community development on local and regional level. Economic responsibility for local and regional public activities</p> <p>(Over commune)</p>

Model A can be called the basic commune alternative or “Bottom-up” organisation. Norway is divided into local units with approximately 3000 (1000–5000) inhabitants which themselves take care of basic welfare production and local development and cooperate with other communes and/or counties to solve regional production and development challenges. This is a “generalist-model” since all communes have the same responsibilities, also for activities that is difficult for them to do themselves, they must develop a flexible strategy of cooperation and/or specialisation where they buy services from each other, from other public organisations or from private. To realise this model Norway must be “reorganised” territorially both in urban and rural areas into maybe 1000 basic communes, this will especially have consequences for bigger existing communes. Since communes will be more equal in population and economic power than today, one can hope that cooperation will be easier.

This model is a utopia; the most realistic model is a “hybrid” model with small and big communes in regions that have to cooperate to solve regional challenges. This is the situation in most regions today and this form of cooperation between small and big is often problematic because of dominance from the big centre commune (Amdam et al 2003, Sanda 2000). Without major changes from the state, this “hybrid” alternative is the most realistic development – the “trend” alternative.

Model B can be called a local-regional power-sharing model. Norway is divided into both basic and regional communes with direct political election and clear division of responsibilities and power. In this model the territory of a region commune can also include basic communes that are not a part of the job- and housing region, because the basic commune is a “free” public organisation that can put forward local interests directly in conflict with other communes and the region commune. The region commune must be responsible for welfare production with clear economy of scale on this level and regional development and planning like regional infrastructure and communications, major land use planning etc. With clear political and economic power, this can be done more efficient than through cooperation as in model A. There will of course be power struggle between the local and regional level both politically and administrative and also regarding who shall be responsible for what and cooperation have to be developed. Because advanced production, planning and development need specialised knowledge and competence, the region commune will quickly be the major actor regarding regional development and planning, while the basic commune will be the major actor regarding daily welfare production and public services.

This model is robust both regarding welfare production and development and is flexible both territorially and regarding internal organisation on local and regional level. The model can also easily be adapted to different alternatives regarding public organisation on sub-national level. The county-commune model we have today is in principle built on this organisational model, but the territorial organisation is very different since the county borders are not well adapted to the centre-periphery reality in Norway today (Selstad 2004).

Model C can be called an “Over-commune” model. The region commune is the main political and administrative actor with total responsibility for regional and local production and development, but with maybe some delegation to the basic level and that can differ from region to region. The region commune decides themselves if they will have basic communes and their responsibilities. Especially the interests of the periphery that are not integrated in the common job- and housing market can easily be overrun.

This model is a rational and simple model seen from state level with a lot fewer local/regional political actors than today. The model can easily be combined with a two layer system (state-commune) or with a model with big sub-national regions be it 5, 7 or 9.

Possible changes of sub-national political structure

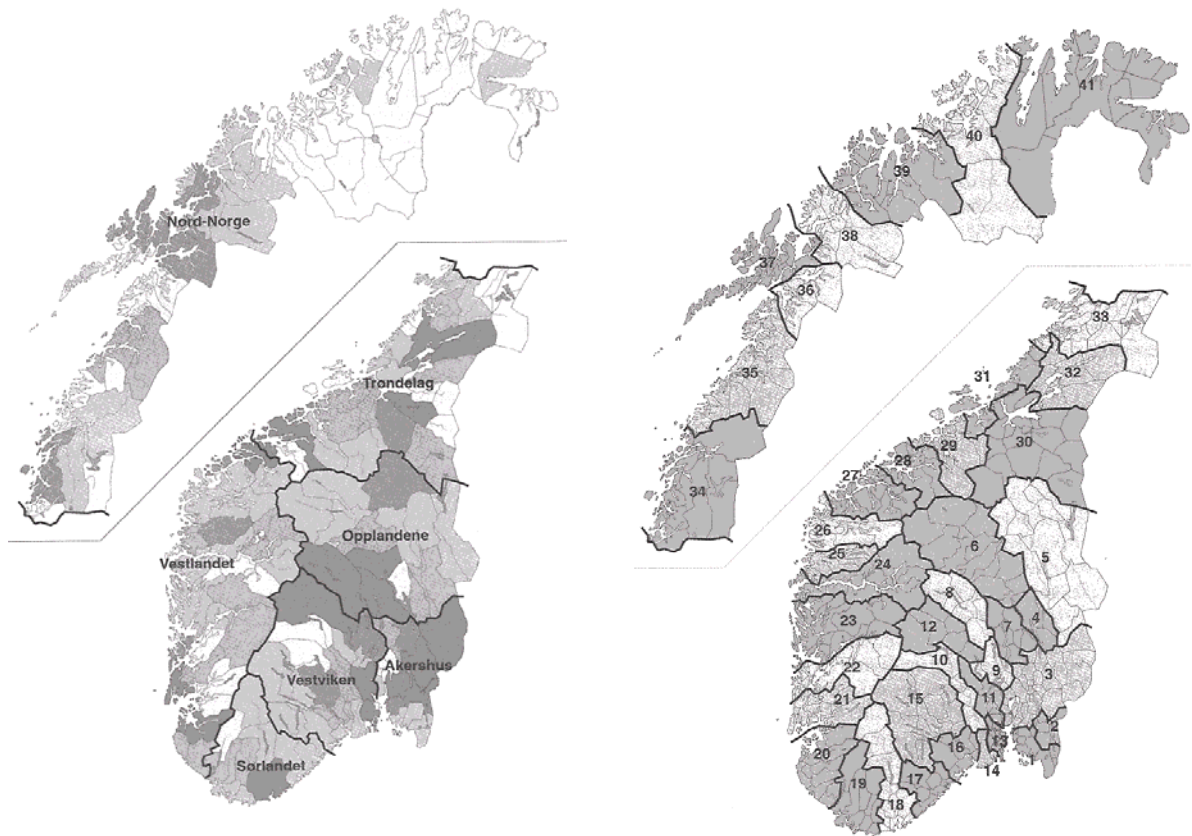
It is likely that the county structure is changed before the commune structure (Amdam et al 2004, Selstad 2003), maybe after the national election in 2007 and before the local election in 2009. Three alternatives are discussed, see table 3. Without any radical changes in politics it is likely that some counties are merged, so that we have maybe 14 counties in 2010 with approximately the same responsibilities as today – mainly secondary education and regional development and planning. But this will not “solve” the problem regarding coordination of state and other activities on sub-national level.

In Denmark the government has proposed to create 5 new political regions mainly responsible for hospitals and regional development, and to abandon the counties. The strategy is also to merge communes so that they have at least 30.000 inhabitants. This alternative is also discussed in Norway (Selstad 2003), to create maybe 7 regions (Landsdeler – sub national regions) that can take over responsibilities from the counties regarding education and regional development, maybe even the state owned hospital companies, universities, regional colleges, road building and communications etc. that will mean a real decentralisation from the state. This is also supported in principle by the “Rural community commission” (Bygdeutvalget 2004). But a change like this will also increase the pressure to reduce the number of communes and most likely to organise them according to the territories of functional regions (residential and labour market regions) (Amdam 2004). This will mean that the 65 communes that are not part of bigger residential and labour markets will still be on their own and need special treatment regarding economics and responsibilities.

A third alternative is to abandon the county as a political unit and have a 2-level model with only communes as regional political units. It is of course possible to still have 300 – 400 communes, but the political power of communes will then certainly be small compared to the sector state. Most likely the number of communes has to be reduced tremendously, maybe to 41 regions that each have a city or town of some proportion, as illustrated by Selstad (2003) (see the right side of map 2).

Political structure between state and commune (County level)	Possible commune structure
County – trend Further development and merging of Counties – new responsibilities Possibly 14 counties in 2010	Trend model – ca. 300 communes in 2010, high variation in population, partnerships to coordinate development and production on residential and labour region level. Model A.
Sub-national regions with direct election of council (Landsdel) 7 regions with delegated power from state regarding communications, universities, health, regional development ...	Communes organised according to residential and labour regions. Possibly ca. 160 communes. Each “Landsdel” have between 15 and 30 communes. Model B, but also model C is possible.
2-level model Only the state and communes have direct election of politicians.	Communes organised around bigger cities and towns. Between 40 and 50. Model C, but also model B is possible.

Table 3 Alternatives for sub-national political structure (Amdam 2004)



Figur 17. Norge inndelt i 41 regioner.¹⁶

7 Regions (Landsdeler)

41 Regions (Fogderi)

Map 2 Two alternatives for regional structure in Norway (Selstad 2003)

Map 2. Norway organised as 7 or 41 regions.

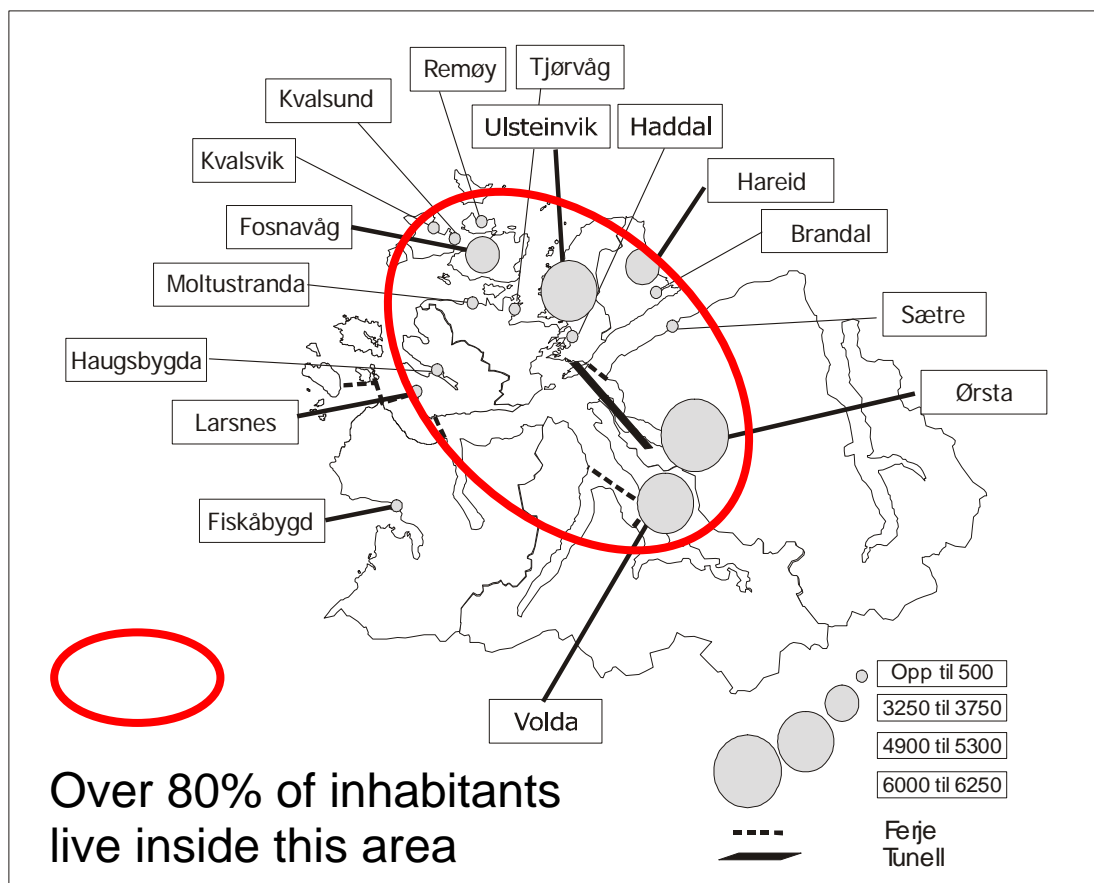
The challenges above can be met passively by communes; they adapt to whatever the state decides should be the structure, or they can themselves take the initiative. The challenges are different in a) metropolitan areas, b) the residential and labour market region that have more than one commune and c) the 65 isolated remote communes. It is reasonable to believe that the pressure for change will be highest in group b, but here there are also differences between functional regions with a dominating centre and regions that have many competing small centres (Amdam et al 2003). In the first case the merging in the Fredrikstad and Sarpsborg areas shows that this can be successful if the involved area has a high social integration due to centralisation of jobs, education, services, leisure activities and voluntary organisations. In areas with no dominating centres the challenges regarding a successful change are a lot higher since the competition between centres have to be faced and models for political and administrative structure that are acceptable for all communes has to be developed. I will try to illustrate this by examples from Møre and Romsdal county.

The case of Søre Sunnmøre

As shown on map 4 Søre Sunnmøre has 7 communes and a population of 45.000 inhabitants. The centre structure is also shown on map 3, there is no dominating centre. One reason is that the area is divided in three residential and labour markets due to problematic communications. In the near future (2007) a new tunnel under the fjord will connect the eastern and western part of the area into one residential and labour market, all communes except Vanylven to the south-west. This will give new challenges and possibilities as well as an increased pressure from the state to change the commune structure.

Three communes in the region have less than 5000 inhabitants and have already a strong pressure from the state that the important state economic transfers will be reduced if they do not merge with a neighbour. Likely changes if they do not take an initiative themselves are that the number of communes in the western part will be reduced from 4 to 2 with app. 11.000 inhabitants each. In the east the distance between the two centres Ørsta and Volda is only 10 km and with a strong integration and this can also lead to a voluntary merging of these two communes with 10.000 and 8.000 inhabitants. Vanylven with 4000 inhabitants is in fact one of the 65 isolated communes and the new tunnel will not influence on this situation.

Today this area has some cooperation regarding production and has also a regional council (Regionråd) of mayors and chief administrators to discuss and develop policy if all can agree. This council has discussed these challenges and have got economic support from the state to make a study of possibilities regarding cooperation and/or merging, a study that I have been responsible for (Amdam et al 2004). We have described 6 main alternatives and compared the major consequences related to production and development locally and regionally, see table 4 that shows that the alternative 1 + 7 is more positive than other alternatives compared with "trend". In this alternative the 7 communes establish and give power to a regional commune for the total region and responsibilities are divided according to table 2 above. This is an adaptation of model B on figure 3, the communes themselves establish a regional political power by giving power to a new directly elected council. In stead of the existing 7 communes, some of the bigger one can be split to maybe 10 to 14 basic communes.



Map 4 Søre Sunnmøre, commune borders and centre structure.

Table 4. Alternative and consequences compared to the trend-alternative (Amdam et al 2004)

Consequences on Alternative	Communal production	Local development and politics	Regional development and politics	Total evaluation
3 communes Consequences for "Ytre Søre" (4 => 1)	Neutral to weak positive	Negative	Strong positive	Neutral to weak positive
Consequences for Ørsta/Volda (2 => 1)	Weak positive to positive	Positive	Strong positive	Strong positive
1 big commune Rivalry	Neutral to weak negative	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Cooperation	Weak positive to positive	Positive	Very strong positive	Positive
1 + 7 – Model B Rivalry	Neutral to weak negative	Positive	Positive	Weak positive
Cooperation	Positive	Positive	Very strong positive	Strong positive
Borgund – commune for Sunnmøre	Weak negative	Negative	Neutral	Negative
Cooperation between 7	Neutral to weak negative	Neutral	Negative	Weak negative

Table 5 Alternative commune structures and possible national strategies (Amdam et al 2004)

Alternative in 2010	Total evaluation of alternatives compared with Trend	Trend – 14 counties and 300 communes	“Landsdel” – 7 regions and 160 communes	2 political levels, state and 40 – 50 communes
Trend – 5 communes	0	Possible and realistic	Not possible	Not possible
3 communes	+	Possible and realistic	Possible	Not possible
1 commune	+	Possible	Possible	Possible and realistic
1 + 7 communes	+++	Possible and realistic	Possible and realistic	Possible and realistic
“Borgund” – 150.000 inh.	--	Not possible	Possible	Possible and realistic
7 communes cooperating	-	Possible and realistic	Not possible	Not possible

Due to the law system we have today that implies that model B is not possible without a change of law, the model will introduce these major changes:

- Direct election of both regional and local commune (7) councils and a division of power according to the basic – region commune model (B)
- The region commune will formally have the responsibility according to our law system, local communes are part of and have their formal power from the region commune – this construction is one formal organisation from the outside.
- Partnership agreements and power sharing principles will give the basic commune as much power as possible and full responsibility for primary welfare production. An economic model divides economics between local and regional level.
- Freedoms under responsibility – if the basic commune does not act according to agreements and economics the region commune have to take command.

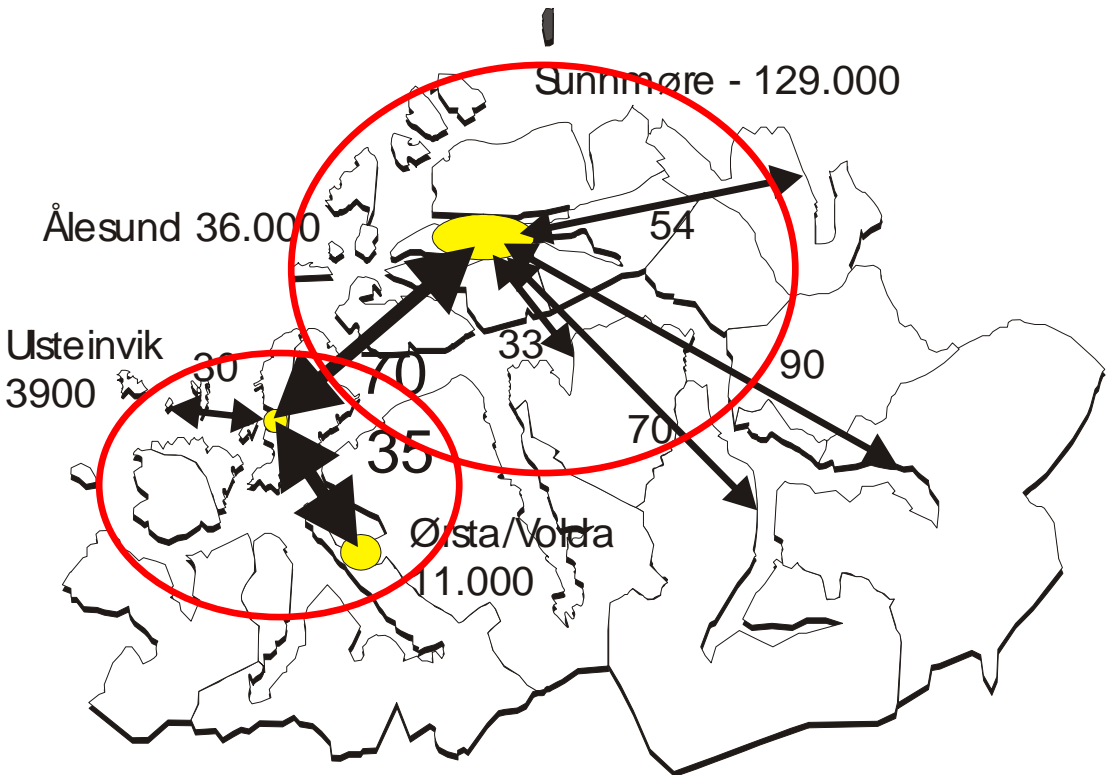
But alternatives not only have to be positive seen isolated in the local situation, they also have to be adaptable to possible national strategies, see table 5. According to our evaluation the alternative 1 + 7 not only have the most positive consequences, but is also adaptable to the three main strategies for national change of county and commune structure. We have therefore advised the regional council to select this alternative for further studies (Amdam et al 2004).

The concern model

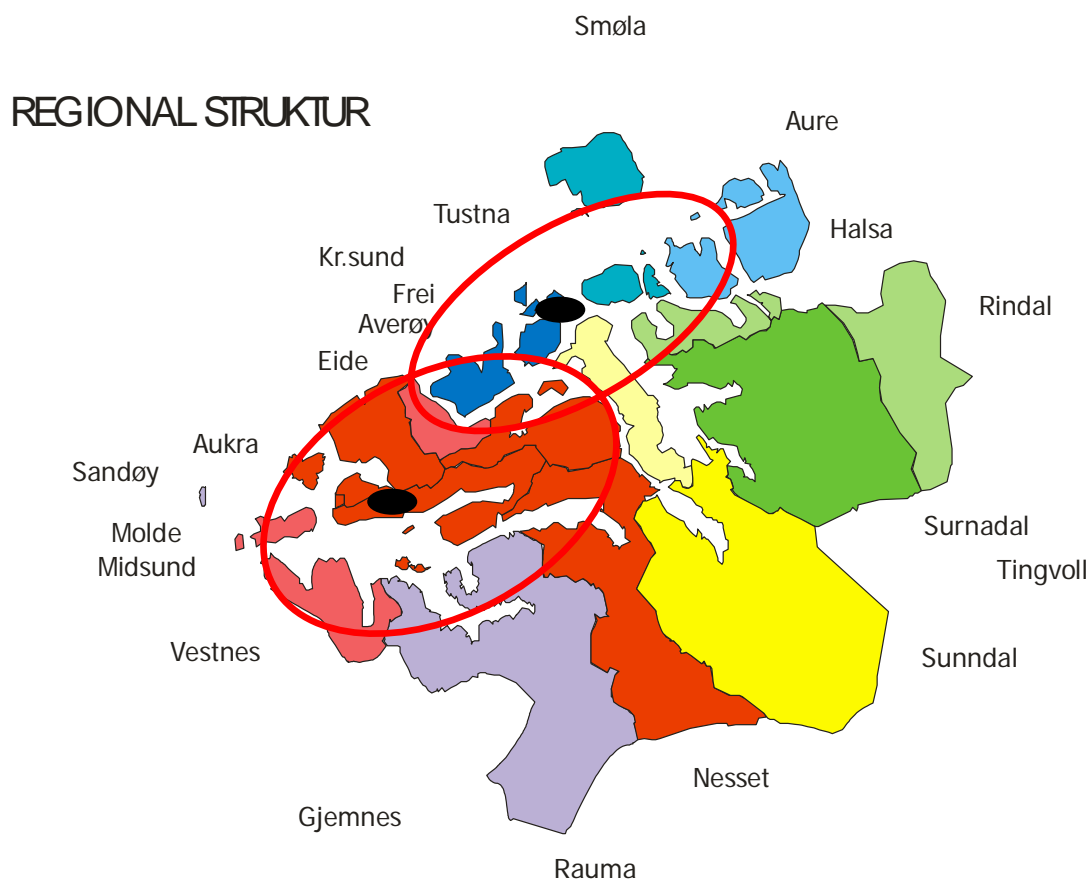
In 2004 (Amdam et al 2005 a, b) we have studied the commune structure of the rest of Møre and Romsdal county and the basic-region commune model have been developed further based on principles from flexible organisations or concern; economic and juridical free organisations with common leadership as implied by model B above. While Søre Sunnmøre have a typical polycentric structure, the rest of the county can be divided into three regions each dominated by a small town, a typical example is Nordre Sunnmøre with Ålesund as the dominating centre, see map 5.

The regional structure of Romsdal and Nordmøre is shown on map 6, this area with app. 120.000 inhabitants is divided into 5 job and housing markets but dominated by Molde (60.000 in the region) and Kristiansund (25.000) the two small towns (Amdam et al 2005 a). Still this structure make change of the commune structure a lot more complicated then in an area with a clear centre and a job and housing region that include most of the area. Even if reduced 5 regional communes, 3 of them will have a population under 12.000 inhabitants. The regional structure of Sunnmøre will be simpler when Eiksundsambandet is opened in 2007, but still 5 communes with less then 5000 inhabitants each is outside the two central job- and housing area, see map 5 (Amdam et al 2005 b). Communes outside the functional region around a centre will usually have other interests then inhabitants in the core, a new commune structure that try to integrate all will have a lot of internal conflict as shown by Amdam et al (2003).

Map 5. Job- and housing markets in Sunnmøre after the Eiksund tunnel.



Map 6. Regional structure in Romsdal and Nørðmøre



Future changes from the top can make it necessary to create new structures like 2 or 6 region communes in Møre and Romsdal county. How then to organise a structure with a lot of internal conflicts and interests. In our discussion with politicians and administrators we found that the model we presented as the best for Søre Sunnmøre easily could be adapted to these challenges. With a strong local power over activities important for every day life – a basic commune structure that included app. 80% of the activities of the commune today as basis, the region commune could be a flexible organisation easily adaptable to challenges in different regions.

A typical commune today is organised according to functional principles as illustrated on figure 4, left. There is no organisational connection between local communities and results units like schools. Result units might be localised in a community, but local inhabitants have small influence on the activity politically or economically. According to our commune law initiatives must be raised politically and be handled by the administrative leader, his staff and the leader of the result unit. In small communes this is usually no problem because local networks include most politicians and employees as well as inhabitants and are used to introduce or hinder change. Especially in big communes this organisational structure have created a lot of tension and lead to the establishment of local political boards or “action groups” that often have some small means to promote cooperation between the community and results units responsible for production in the area. Very often the strongest voice against bigger communes is the experience that distance from people to leaders will increase and also that services will not be under local control and can easily be closed down and centralised.

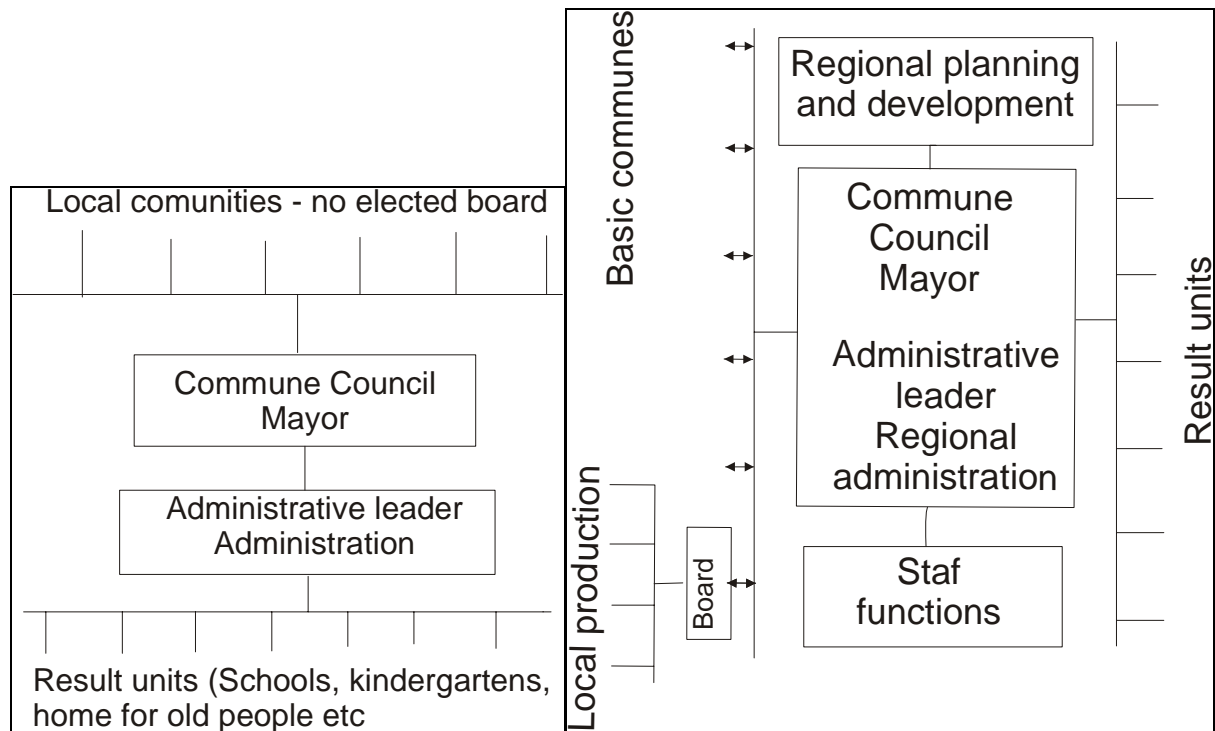


Figure 4. Functional and flexible commune organisation.

Figure 4, right, tries to illustrate a flexible commune organisation. The core is the political and administrative leadership. But responsibilities and production are delegated both to territorial/political units as well as functional result units according to what is the most efficient politically and/or economically. A typical flexible or concern commune responsible for a rather big territory will establish basic communes with direct election of the local commune council; give these councils responsibilities for primary welfare production and a round sum budget appropriate for expected production and activities. The local council and its administration (usually the leaders of schools, kindergartens etc.) is responsible both to local inhabitants and to the region commune, but is also free to get extra income to activities and local development. Local responsibilities can even differ between basic communes according to size, staff qualifications, experience etc. On the other hand activities that are for the whole region like renovation, land surveying etc. can be organised as result units on regional level. In reality this will mean that the flexible or concern commune is:

- A network of juridical free units that have
- The same owners (inhabitants)
- Common interests, visions and goals
- Common strategic political and administrative leadership
- Division of responsibilities – specialisation

To establish such an organisation voluntarily a better result must be documented than what is possible by other alternatives and inhabitants, politicians, employees etc must develop trust to each other, to the model and to the region. But also clear contracts are needed that tells what is the governing principles at what happens if par example a local community do not work according to agreed principles or will “break out” of the common organisation.

A model like this will work best if participants fully agree on the model, on the principles and trust each other. Power delegated can easily also be used to work against what is defined as common interests on regional level, since local interests can be different from regional. The model itself is not a solution but an instrument that can help. As shown on table 4 there is little reason to believe that this model is a lot better than a functional and power centralised model as shown on figure 5 left, it here is a lot of internal conflicts and rivalry.

How to introduce change?

A bottom up strategy for this type of change needs coordinated initiatives on two levels, the local level or processes in each involved commune and the regional level. One reason is that changes have to be accepted by inhabitants in each commune by voting and also employees can easily sabotage a change if they do not accept it. There is also a long process with a lot of challenges from development of a common vision for change to the actual detailed implementation of changes, see figure 4. I will use this figure to illustrate challenges and by using cases I have studied (Amdam et al 2004, 2005 a, b).

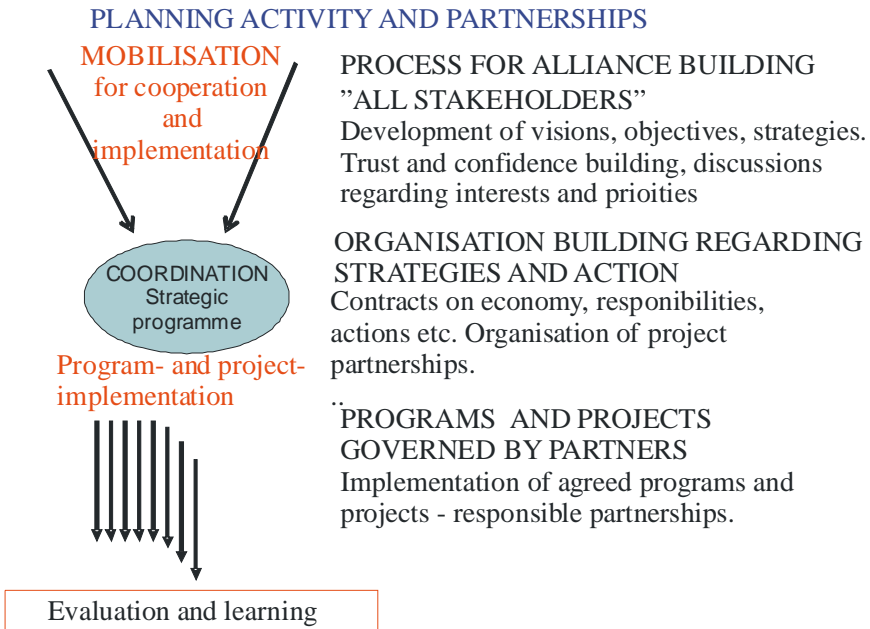


Figure 5 Change of commune structure as a strategic planning process

An expert advice is only the first stage in a long process that is needed for a voluntary merging of communes. For example in Søre Sunnmøre the process is aborted at once if majors and chief administrators is of another opinion that us since they have the power to abort the process (and this have happened to some extent). If they agree on this alternative or another one, this has to be accepted by all seven commune councils. If so the next stage will be to go into more detail – to study all 7 organisations and make concrete recommendations for change, localisation of activities etc. then a new process in all 7 commune councils and a secret vote involving all inhabitants in each of the 7 communes asking if they accept the proposed change. If a positive result, one can continue by making a concrete program for change with a lot of projects for planning and implementing the changes in detail, see figure 5. Throughout the process all stakeholders must also be willing to accept that other stakeholders have power over the process and that reasonable arguments have to be

considered and accepted. As other communicative planning processes this process are in fact learning processes on all stages and to function the partners must build trust and confidence both to the process and to other participants. Manipulation will certainly lead to a breakdown of the bottom up process (Amdam and Amdam 2000, Amdam 2000).

Mobilisation – strategic planning

The first stage in a bottom up process must be mobilisation of stakeholders. An understanding that “something must be done” has to be developed among especially “opinion makers”, but also common people. If the proposed alternative is not seen as interesting or as an answer to their opinions of challenges, there will be no mobilisation for the change and even maybe a mobilisation against it. Based on experience from other processes (KS 2003) there will always be someone that is against change or that believe that the proposed change will be negative for them as individuals or groups.

Without a mobilisation for change including leading politicians and other stakeholders as well as common people, proposals have no possibilities of being implemented due to the step vice planning and decision process where agreement from a majority in all existing commune councils as well as from inhabitants are needed. Somehow a majority have to be certain that a concrete alternative is better than what can happen without the proposal. A mobilisation takes time, common knowledge and arguments has to be developed accepted through open debate (Amdam and Amdam 2000). Local and regional newspapers, radio, TV, local organisations, industries etc should be involved in the debate. It is maybe most efficient if inhabitants can reach the same conclusions as experts on their own by group debates etc. maybe even using communicative methods (Amdam and Amdam 2000).

Ideally the inhabitants in all 7 communes should develop the same visions, objectives and strategies regarding change. To do so one need regional processes that develops knowledge, trust and confidence in the strategy and of the necessity for change (Amdam 2000, 2003).

Members of commune councils in small communes have very strong relations with inhabitants from their part of the commune. It is advisable to start the process by maximum involvement of all politicians in the region, together with major stakeholders. A plan for the process of getting acceptance has to be developed and implemented by the regional council and commune councils – not for manipulation of opinions, but by planning concrete activities and debates that involve people and is realistic regarding the content of the proposal as well as outcomes. Negative outcomes have to be registered and compensated – it is rather typical that processes of voluntary merging of communes are most successful in areas where a majority of positive outcomes is well documented and understood.

But also common trust and respect have to be developed, a common identity if possible. If there is mistrust among leaders, politicians, administrators or local communities, no common understanding of the need for structure change (low pressure for change from the state) and also small possibilities that a communicative learning process can lead to a mobilisation for change, it is better to abolish the process at this stage.

Organisation – tactical planning

It is possible to engage and mobilise people in and for major changes and still be unsuccessful. One stage is the strategic discussion of principles, the next more concrete stage also have a lot of challenges. For example the alternative 1 + 7 will at first have small consequences for basic production of welfare services like primary schools and home care and

in local development, but propose a merging of 7 administrations engaged in economics, culture, infrastructure etc. Should these administrations be relocated to a new administrative office in the centre of the region or split up so that each of the basic communes has activities? Even small changes can be problematic if inhabitants, politicians or administrators feel that this is wrong or is more positive for some areas than others. The most efficient solution seen from the outside and the most efficient and acceptable solution for a majority of inhabitants in each of the 7 communes is often not the same.

Somehow the administrative or coordinative planning process have to develop compromises through negotiations with employees and their organisations, political interests, business interests, local interests etc. and find acceptable solutions to all operative changes.

Without a strong common view regarding change and a clear vision of what changes are needed and acceptable, solutions that are good and rightful for a clear majority and acceptable for the minority, the operative planning can easily end in conflicts regarding details and an abortion of the process.

Implementation

The implementation process need clear objectives and visions of what shall be the future, the implementation planning shall tell how to do to change from the structure today to the decided future. This can be seen as a “technical” process but can easily give new conflicts or awakening of old. This process will have direct consciences for employees as well as their network of “users”. As well as regarding strategic and tactical decisions, the implementation need open communication and agreeable arguments – as well as in the stages above different important stakeholders must have equal power and all must be willing to accept reasonable arguments – if negative consequences are compensated.

Conclusions

In this paper I have examined challenges regarding changes in the commune and county structure in Norway, both what alternatives are possible and what are their consequences illustrated by cases and also what communicative planning processes are needed for a change lead “from below”. In our studies in Møre and Romsdal County we found that a flexible regional organisation with basic communes responsible for basic welfare production would give the best result if trust and cooperation could be developed. What is needed is an open, mobilising process where changes on strategic, tactic and implementation level are discusses and developed through open debate and where trust and confidence as well as common identity evolve as a result of a common understanding of the situation and challenges, solutions that as a totality are better than the possible situation without changes and initiatives from below and at the same time is acceptable both for majorities and minorities in all communes. What is needed is an open communicative and confidence building process (Amdam 1995b, 2000, 2003a).

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