

Roar Amdam

# **The Legitimizing Process of Regional Development Agencies**



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**MØREFORSKING  
VOLDA**

2005

<b>Forfatter</b>	Roar Amdam
<b>Ansvarleg utgjevar</b>	Høgskulen i Volda
<b>ISSN</b>	0805-8075
<b>Sats</b>	Roar Amdam
<b>Distribusjon</b>	<a href="http://www.hivolda.no/fou">http://www.hivolda.no/fou</a>

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## Abstract <sup>1</sup>

In this paper I discuss the research question to what extent planning contributes to the legitimacy of regional development agencies in Norway. The point of departure is that new regional policy is based on a governance regime, but in practice the new governance structure seems to exist in the shadow of the old governance structure. In fact regional planning and development work more and more seem to take the form of a two-parallel system; a government dominated and highly sectorised regional planning and governance based territorial planning that tries to foster collaboration. Regional development agencies are the key actors in the territorial planning, but they are often rather weak constructions that depend highly on the trust between the participants in the agencies, their willingness to collaborate, their commitment to the regional development work etc. I construct the model of a *political legitimating planning process* based on Habermas term political will-formatting process and my own research in the field of regional planning and development, in order to discuss the requirements that are needed in order to make these regional development agencies strong and legitimate regional development actors. My conclusion is a kind of dilemma. As a part of the governance regime, the regional development agencies need to be strong enough to influence their participants from the government regime, but is that possible in regional development agencies where the participants are free to leave.

## Government, governance and new public management

In the regional planning and development work, we often talk about a shift in regional policy-making and planning characterised by a new process of governing. Regional *governance structure* has been added to the regional *government structure*, but the governance structure seems to live in the shadow of the government structure (Jessop 1997), and the regional planning and development agencies as part of the governance structure are rather weak political institutions. From the research into regional planning and development processes we know that the shift of regime started in the 1970's. It was then the dominating accumulation regime with its emphasis on large-scale enterprises and mass production, was hit by economic stagnation and staff reductions in the large companies. Focus than was placed on a more flexible accumulation regime with great emphasis on innovation and growth in employment in small and medium-sized companies in clusters (Støhr 1990). This shift of regime has had consequences on our perspective on governing, planning, policy making, organisation etc. (Bukve and Amdam 2004).

The New Public Management (NPM) reforms have been a significant driving force in the transformation of public sector from government to governance. A dominating idea in the

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<sup>1</sup> A draft version of this paper was presented for the ISMR seminar Faroe Islands, Klaksvik and Vagur, August 2005

NPM reform wave is to separate politics from administrative and commercial functions, and to make public sector more like private sector. This vertical specialisation has often gone hand in hand with the horizontal specialisation. Here, functions that were traditionally organised together, such as policy advice, regulative tasks, ownership functions, control functions, and purchaser/provider functions, have now been separated into distinct units. Through this vertical and horizontal specialisation, the NPM-modernised state has become more *fragmented* than the traditional integrated state model (Olsen 1988, Christensen and Lægreid 2004:15). The new public management reforms have transformed the national state from mainly a *rationality-bounded state model* based on the parliamentary chain of governing, to a more fragmented and *supermarket state model* with the national state as a service provider (Christensen and Lægreid 2003). This implies a change in fundamental values from democracy and political-administrative control given by the political leaders through the election channel, to an emphasis on efficiency and quality, the people as consumers, users and clients. The supermarket state represent a one-dimensional economical view of the public sector, while the traditional state is more occupied with the complex balancing of a variety of legitimating considerations.

Christensen and Lægreid (2003:308) remind us that the rationality-bounded state model with trusted elected politicians with their mandate from the people, and its administrative staff with little freedom and accountability for results, but much responsibility for following rules, has been a successful and durable model of public administration. In the supermarket state model this ministerial responsibility is challenged by *contract-based* accountability which is needed because the logic is a fundamental mistrust. The NPM reforms seem to have transformed public sector organisations away from trust-based relationships to more market like mistrust-based transactions that needs detailed contracts between the actors.

## **Regional development agencies as network organisations**

There are three ideas behind regional development agencies (Talbot 2004):

1. Structural disaggregation and/or the creation of 'task specific' organisations.
2. Performance 'contracting' – some form of performance target setting, monitoring and reporting.
3. Deregulation (or more properly reregulation) of controls over personnel, finance and other management matters.

Regional development agencies normally are task specific organisations with a kind of contract with the national state, and with some political tools to implement their plans. In addition, they normally consist of different types of organisations from public, private and voluntary sector, and from different levels of government. In this context, I shall use the term *network organisations* as a collective term for partnership in regional planning and

development, which covers multi-levels and multi-sectors co-operations, i.e. governing bodies that are comprised of actors from the vertical and the horizontal power structures.

The multi-level term is used in EU's guidelines for the Structural Fund (Regulation (EEC) 2052/88). Here the term partnership is used and understood as the interaction between levels in the public sector. In this way partnership was given a multi-level interpretation and became a visible expression of how the principle of subsidiarity could be effectively put into practice (Bache and Olsen 2001). Gradually actors from private and voluntary sectors were stimulated to participate in the regional development process. Thus the principle of partnership was extended from the *vertical* co-operation between EU, the nation and the sub-national level to also include the *horizontal* co-operation between public, private and voluntary sectors. From this point of view, the term *multi-actor system* would be more appropriate with reference to the work of the Structural Fund than the multi-level perspective.

In this perspective it is usual to speak of closely or loosely linked systems according to the degree of integration. Closely linked multi-actor systems can almost be considered as an organisation in their own right and thus atypical for multi-actor systems. Such organisations may be institutionalised forms of earlier multi-actor systems. Loosely linked systems are typical of multi-actor systems, being systems that have a small degree of integration and which are therefore difficult to control from the top down.

Multi-actor systems applied to state organisation and administration seems to belong logically to what Olsen (1988) calls *the supermarket state* or the minimum state. Here the conditions for the state are the internal conflict about objectives and that the scope for action is limited by the surroundings. In relation to the other form of public sector organisation like e.g. the sovereign, rationality-bounded state, the supermarket state has several competing actors with the power to govern, or to be more exact, to influence the development of society. The state together with the other actors must therefore largely accommodate each other and the surroundings they have as an organisation. As actors, they must fight for acceptance and legitimacy, and the logical approach is to defend those areas over which one has legitimate power.

According to Friedmann (1987), the multi-actor system in regional planning can be seen as belonging to the *social mobilisation tradition* of planning theory. This tradition can be characterised by communicative logic by which new recognition and new action proliferate under mutual influence in the field of practice, and not as activity governed by objective and means based on causal links between cause and effect. Furthermore, the tradition is characterised by what he calls radical political ideology, and thereby emphasises the will to change existing power structures and allow new political institutions to take over. In planning methods the multi-actor system reveals itself in the form of radical and transactive planning.

These are methods whereby social transformation through internal mobilisation and external support are key concepts in a process of empowerment (Friedmann 1992).

Regional development agencies operate initially in environments which are typical for trust-based transactions. However, problems can arise when the participating organisations from the supermarket state and public and private sector, shall form powerful network organisations based on trust. The NPM and the fragmentation seem to have made public sector organisations more self occupied and their participation in regional development network organisations more strategic. In this way the governance structure that are needed in regional development, becomes dependent on the different organisations from the government structure, and the different voluntary and private sector organisations. As a consequence of the NPM reforms the national state's power in governing the development of the society has become somewhat limited, and the fragmentation implies that there will be actors with a large degree of autonomy over the areas for which they are responsible, and with enough power to prevent the implementation of a more general will.

In this context the regional development agencies can be regarded as network organisations made up by organisations that are quite different, but which each contributes to the network with their own speciality. The collaborating organisations in the network, can have a large degree of independence, and that they can disappear from the network, either of their own free will or because the partners choose to exclude them. Network organisations are therefore complex and dissolvable. They are dissolvable in the sense that the participating organisations can be replaced and the network itself can be completely disbanded. Network organisations may be motivated on the basis of mutual usefulness and common values, and be formalised through agreements. The legitimacy of such an organisation will come from both within and without, and here we meet a number of paradoxes in the interface between the more informal network organisations and the more institutionalised organisations of which they are comprised.

When it comes to legitimacy from within, it will on the basis of self-interest generally be logical for the collaborating organisations, not to transfer more power than is in their interests at any time. Power in network organisations must therefore be based on the degree to which a sense of common values exists, or the degree to which a sense of community in strategic, tactic and operative activity the network organisation manages to build up over a period of time. In the case of legitimacy from without, it is important to stress the fact that network organisations will be involved in a continual competition with other network organisations, and they will challenge the power that lies in the vertical and horizontal power structures in the society. It will therefore be vital for the legitimacy of network organisations that the collaborating organisations act in the networks with powers of attorney that are well supported in their organisations. In total the legitimacy of network organisations is to all

extent and purpose dependent on the productivity and efficiency they can demonstrate, and to what degree the actual process empowers them as political actors, and justifies their existence.

## **Network community governance and empowerment**

Stoker (2004:27) now talks about the *network community governance* as an emerging new form of management. He concludes his discussion that network community governance marks a break from traditional public administration and New Public Management in its vision of the role of local government and its understanding of the context for governing and the core process of governance. In the network community governance the overarching goal is greater effectiveness in tackling the problem that public sector most care about, no one sector has the monopoly on public sector ethos and relationships are maintained through shared values.

Network community governance in regional planning and development is to be understood as *interactive governance* based on partnership between actors across government levels and government sectors (Veggeland 2000). This means that the partnerships become a political arena in the intersection between vertical and horizontal power, and between functional and territorial logic, but not in such a way that one dominates the other. If the power imbalance becomes a pattern, the losing actors in the network organisations will respond by withdrawing, and the multi-dimensional policy will fall apart. Here we find one of the greatest challenges facing regional planning in the new regional policy. This challenge is at the very core of the modernisation of society, and is associated with the comprehensive and serious criticism that in the modern society the vertical and instrumental logic *dominates* the horizontal and communicative logic.

Here I will especially draw attention to Friedmann's (1992) important contribution on *empowerment*. He joins the criticism of the modernisation of society and adds that a relative strengthening is taking place of the instrumental logic that now permeates private enterprises and public sector administration. He believes that this has a negative effect on the communicative common sense, which in the main is kept alive in the democratic governing bodies and in the civil society. Developing this thesis still further, he claims that the modernisation has led to an increased emphasis on instrumental rationality and the promoting of self-interest, with less emphasis being placed on a fellowship that forms morals and on collective interests. Friedmann believes the key to further development now is to strengthen the relations between the social power in the civil society and the political power in the democratically elected governing bodies. Furthermore, he maintains that politics should lead to the formation of a moral fellowship and that political activity cannot therefore be reduced to the economic calculation of the utilitarian value and sociological determinism. But Friedmann himself is aware that the strengthening of relations between the civil society and the people's democratically elected representatives often meets strong opposition from the establishment. However, he believes along with Habermas and other critics of the system that

the way ahead now is to strengthen democracy in the form of *political will-formation processes* based on dialogues between participants in the public sphere where there is a balance of power and where the pressure to state one's reasons is present. Seen in relation to regional planning, this will involve strengthening planning's territorial dimension at the expense of the sector dimension. To put it another way, cross-sector co-ordination can only be achieved by creating a territorial counterbalance to the vertical and sector-based governance structure.

### **Regional planning as a legitimating process**

In several works, I have adapted Habermas' model of political will-formation to a model for regional planning and development by establishing links between the development variables in regional development processes and the planning tools that are relevant in regional planning. See Amdam (1997a), (1997b), (1997c), (2001a), (2001b), Amdam and Amdam (2000) and Amdam (2005). In this model there are five elements that are linked together, and where a dynamic process is dependent on all the elements.

### **Juridical discourse, institutional planning and legitimacy**

The *juridical discourses* concern the actual legitimacy and the consistency of the rules of law. It also includes the planning documents' normative effect in relation to other plans and to rules of law, norms, regulations and guidelines for governing society. For all political institutions, this is one of the fundamental dimensions because it really concerns the reason of their existence. For established institutions, this involves resisting the pressure from their surroundings for change in well-established structures, processes and cultures (Olsen 1988). For new political institutions, it involves obtaining power in practical politics and establishing a formal position in the system of governance. I call this process the institutional planning.

In the case of the network organisations, and which exist in the interface between actors from both the vertical and horizontal power structure, they are in the special situation of needing approval and legitimacy from both structures. That is, from the governing levels; municipality, county and state, and from the governing systems; voluntary, private and public sectors including democratically elected representatives. In practical planning in network organisations this means that the planning process must incorporate actors from both the horizontal and vertical structure, and that the planning documents must be formally considered in the appropriate organisations that belong to the two structures.

Essentially the institutional planning concerns the relations between the structural powers in the surroundings that create both opportunities and obstacles for the region as a political actor. The degree of emphasis on actors and structures in empirical and theoretical research varies. In my works, I emphasise the mutual relations between them in line with Giddens (1984) and others. In concrete terms, that means that the building up of an institutional capacity in a



region takes place in interaction with the region's surroundings. Therefore, the planning must attempt to bring to light structural forces in the surroundings and find out to what extent they represent opportunities or threats for the region. Furthermore, we must look at the power in the region's learning process and to what extent this transforms people's values, interests and actions. This means that actor-structure relations also become important for the other discourses in Habermas' model of political will-formation.

### **Moral discourses, strategic planning and mobilisation**

The *moral* discourse concerns norm conflicts and the choice of fundamental values. Implicit is also the choice of whose needs, interests and values are to be favoured. This activity may also be referred to as a consensus-building activity (Innes et al 1994, Healey 1997), and may involve developing a broad common understanding of development features and challenges, visions of what situation one desires and of strategies for achieving this situation. In other words, to agree on a political agenda (Lukes 1974), and build up a collective capacity for action. This is at the core of the strategic planning. In this context, perspectives and research on social movements are useful. This research shows that mobilisation can start with individuals and be expanded to become strong political powers. These movements can gradually lose their basis for existence because they have managed to put the issues they are fighting for on the political agenda, and thus made the desired solutions part of the production of the established governing system. In a learning perspective, such a change is to be regarded as in depth-learning. Persons and organisations that have learned at this level have internalised new values and adopted corresponding logical courses of action as part of their repertoire of actions (Bateson 1985).

If several people share the same values and act in a roughly similar fashion, this will form the foundation for a strong identity and a regional culture in the form of a moral collective that defines its duties and rights. However, in order to achieve this goal, open democratic arenas are necessary where people can meet both for the exchange of views and for political action. In order to build such moral-forming collectives it is important that the people participate as "whole" people who are concerned with the common good, and not as calculating experts in their field who are only intent on advancing their own interests. Therefore, strong and active civil societies and social networks are decisive arenas for building the moral collectives; see among others Putnam (1993). Moral collectives help to create the trust between people that is necessary to encourage them to take a stand for the collective without fear of being exploited by persons who are simply out to promote their own interests, without considering the consequences for the collectives they are a part of.

### **Ethical-political discourses, tactical planning and organisation**

The ethical-political discourse concerns the conflicts of interest that often are connected with the utilisation of resources. These conflicts are right at the core of the tactical planning whose

aim is to obtain and deploy resources among responsible actors. In relation to power dimensions, this involves having the authority to make decisions, or as the case may be to prevent decisions being taken (Lukes 1974). Therefore, organisation and co-ordination are central themes also in this type of planning, in particular in relation to partnership organisations in regional development work, because the implementation of the concrete measures normally must be carried out by the collaborating organisations in the network organisation, and not by the partnership itself. In this way, organising becomes a critical tool in taking the step from mobilisation to implementation.

In all regions, there will be a certain density of organisations and relations between them. Amin and Thrift (1995) have demonstrated that a large density of organisations is favourable for the region's relative power and dynamics. It is, for example, a well-known fact that societies dominated by one single enterprise, which thus has a small density of organisations, normally experience great problems when the situation demands readjustment and creativity because these enterprises have to reduce staff or close down. In many contexts, getting people to come forward as entrepreneurs and if necessary co-ordinate their efforts can be a big problem. Without a necessary supportive culture that allows room for experimentation and making mistakes, many will find it too much of a burden to come forward as entrepreneurs, whether in the field of business or in other activities.

### **Pragmatic discourses, operative planning and implementation**

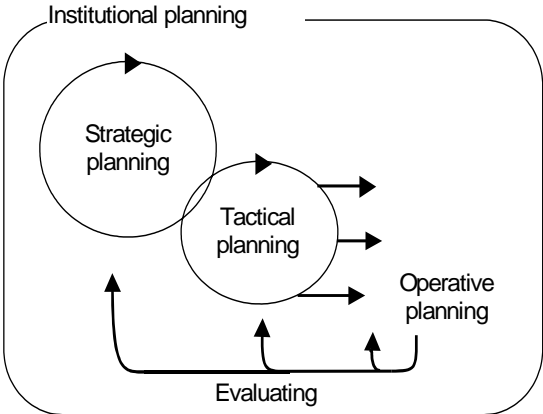
The *pragmatic* discourse concerns discussion of the facts and data, and is a discourse linked to instrumental rationality and the operative planning. In a power perspective this involves having the knowledge and other resources to implement what has been politically decided, but it also involves preventing the implementation of such decisions (Lukes 1974). In a communicative perspective, this means having knowledge with argumentative force. When it comes to the use of knowledge in the planning, the challenge is to combine it to form definite alternative courses of action that are appropriate to the situation or the problem one is facing. In political processes, however, it is often the case that the administration and other experts put forward such knowledge as objective truths, and in that way stifle the political debate (Offerdal 1992). This is particularly unfortunate since much of the relevant knowledge is based on values and is therefore not objective (Morgan and Smircich 1980).

### **Discourses, learning, monitoring and reporting**

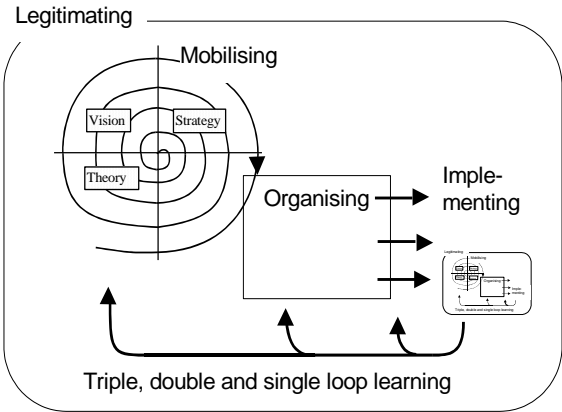
In relation to Habermas' model for political will-formation, it is unnecessary to include these elements, because they are indirectly parts in the process. However, since regional planning and development work is a continual process in which it is important to contribute to the various discourses. I consider monitoring and reporting as very important opportunities whereby to promote all the forms of discourse I have discussed above. Nevertheless, it is essential that the monitoring process, in addition to measuring measurable results, also sets

the stage for discourses at the other discourses and levels in the planning and development work, i.e. institutional, strategic, tactic and operative level. In my model I argue that these levels correspond to the much used terms in learning; meta-learning (how to learn), and triple, double and single loop learning which is learning at strategic, tactical and operative level. Such a process can contribute to the reviewing and updating of the planning documents, and to the legitimisation of the region as a political actor.

**Figure 1: Tools in the process of planning**



**Figure 2: Variables in the process of planning**



## **Regional planning in Norway as legitimating processes**

The partnership principle and network organising has gained significance in the work with the EU structural funds, and it is very easy to find traces of it in Norwegian regional policy. We most recently have had several government White Papers which determine that the 19 county municipalities are the actual regions in the context of regional planning and development work, and that their county planning is to play a key role in the regional development work. Here partnership between the levels of government, and between public, private and voluntary sectors, is recommended as the key solution to promote regional development. Each county municipality has been given the responsibility for drawing up a twelve-year strategic plan which are revised each four year, and they shall set up a four-year regional development programme (RDP), which are revised on a yearly basis with more precise spending plans. Innovation Norway, which is a national industrial development agency, higher education institutions and private/business sector are their partners in this RDP-process.

Nevertheless, this does not prevent most of the 433 municipalities in the country from taking part in voluntary inter-municipal co-operation on regional planning and development work, in addition to them working with regional development at the municipal level (Weigård 1992, Sanda 2000). Moreover, the state is creating larger administrative regions (part country) to accommodate their production, and counties co-operate across their borders when it comes to planning and development work, inter-regional etc. There is then no coherent concept of regions in the Norwegian context.

Here I will draw attention to Falleth and Stokke's (2000) survey of municipal planning which confirms our impression that municipal and county planning now more and more takes the form of a two-parallel system (Amdam 2001b, 2002 and 2004). The one part is regional planning, which in the main is planning and development work that is restricted to the service areas that are the responsibility of municipalities and county municipalities. In effect, this is planning and development work in municipalities and counties as organisations, a form of activity planning that has many common features between public, private and voluntary sectors. To the extent that these organisations refer to this form of planning as regional planning, I would characterise it as a sector-dominated and perverted form of regional planning. The other part is the real regional planning, but it is carried out to a large extent across municipalities and counties and is concerned with themes like industrial development, transport, communications, land use planning and co-operation in the production of services. It is typical for this planning that it, in addition to involve municipalities and counties, also attempts to involve other public authorities, as well as private and voluntary sectors, in forms of partnership in planning and implementation. The actual regional planning would thus appear to take place largely in network organisations based on co-operation between different organisations from public, private and voluntary sectors, and from the various levels of government.

One consequence of this is the state gradually, and in general, has restricted its regional planning to those sectors where the public sector is in control. In Norwegian practice, this means that formal political institutions like municipalities and county municipalities give priority to the sector planning of their own activities such as health, welfare and education. While new informal political institutions at the inter-municipal and inter-county levels start to appear and are given responsibility for the territorial planning associated with industrial development, competence development, communications, land use planning etc. These are processes that are known from other countries, cf. among others Zoete (2000) which talks about an informal level in regional planning.

### **Legitimate regional development organisations – a real challenge**

The network perspective allows us to view the two-parallel system of regional planning as logical adaptation to the situation. It becomes logical that the territorial regional planning which in general emphasises regional development and innovation, in the main is carried out in network organisations based on the public, private and voluntary sectors. Moreover, that the sector-based regional planning, which in general in public sector is a planning of welfare services, is carried out within the domains of the organisations. This planning is becoming more out put oriented and thus more similar to private sector planning. The territorial regional planning, which are occupied with the fragmentation of the government structure and increasing out come problems, is now facing a great challenge to get organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to participate in the one or more network organisations that the territorial regional planning tries to establish.

In this context the county municipalities as the main regional development actor in Norway now have a double role:

- On the one hand, the role is to carry out planning and development work within the field welfare state production which the organisation has responsibility. The national level has taken on a very strong role in this production and decides to a large extent the level of legitimacy the county municipalities shall have in this field of production. See table 1.
- On the one hand, the other role is to be a regional developer and network builder both vertically and horizontally. This means that the county municipalities must be accepted and enjoy legitimacy both from above and below, and that it must define its role and function in relation to other formal and informal levels of government. In order to achieve co-action in these networks, the process needs to be a complete legitimating process. See table 2.

**Table 1: Sectoral regional planning**

<b>Legitimizing political process</b>	<b>Planning for the region as provider of welfare state services</b>
<b>Legitimacy and institutional planning</b>	Unimportant, because the national state decides to what extent the region is a efficient service provider
<b>Mobilising and strategic planning</b>	Unimportant, because the national state are setting the agenda, pointing out the areas of efforts, defining level of service etc
<b>Organising and tactical planning</b>	Important with internal long term and annual budget for each sector unit
<b>Implementing and operative planning</b>	Important with action plan for each sector unit, and plans for each project
<b>Evaluating and learning</b>	Normally limited to the operative and tactical level of planning

**Table 2: Territorial regional planning**

<b>Legitimizing political process</b>	<b>Regional planning for the territory as a social mobilising society</b>
<b>Legitimizing and institutional planning</b>	Important for regions to stand up as powerful regional development actors and to get acceptance from the national state
<b>Mobilising and strategic planning</b>	Important to integrate people in the regional community, set at political agenda and give a direction to the development work
<b>Organising and tactical planning</b>	Important to coordinate actors in the horizontal and vertical power structure, and to set up common action programs
<b>Implementing and operative planning</b>	Important to set up partnership contracts between actors from public, private and voluntary sector and from different levels of governing
<b>Evaluating and learning</b>	Important to learn on all the levels of the legitimating process

My empiric data from the regional planning in Norway reveal a situation with many public actors who enjoy strong formal power, who have in effect over time adjusted to each other in the partnerships. In general there exists a situation in which the power is evenly shared, but with possibilities for the lines of conflict to become more apparent in certain issues. This makes it possible to establish and maintain network organisations for planning and development work, but overall, these have so far little breadth when it comes to horizontal and vertical partnerships. The participants are mainly from public sector. However the main

problem in the legitimating process is not the regional planning as an activity in the regions, but the lack of acceptance and legitimacy from the national level.

In my country there is often raised doubt about to what extent the present counties have suitable limitations to be able to function as a legitimate regional actor. My research shows that it would appear to be easier to establish broad horizontal partnerships at the municipal and inter-municipal levels than it is at higher administrative levels. The county authorities ought therefore to assess whether or not these levels can be encouraged to play a more active role on the regional planning and development process.

## Conclusion

It is my belief that the discussion above shows that the model of a legitimating planning process is useful in so far as it is descriptive of the situation in which regional development work now has to be carried out, i.e. regional development with many actors with power each in their own area. The county municipalities as regional development agencies, in the main enjoy little power and legitimacy. In my assessment, the causes of the weak legitimacy are to be explained by a failure at several levels of the process of legitimising policy, especially the national state's reluctant acceptance and legitimising of the county municipalities and their work as regional development agencies. Unfortunately, we are here facing a dilemma; the national state has the main key to strengthen the county municipalities' regional development role as network builder, but so far the national state has become more sectorised and fragmented, and has not shown any particular interest in empowering the county municipalities as regional development actors.

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