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Communicative planning in rural areas

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Content

COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

Traditionally rural areas in Norway have been homogeneous, dominated by families connected to agriculture, fisheries and other primary production and also well organized with common organizations, arenas and communicative processes. Communes in rural areas was small (500 – 5000 inhabitants) and with high political legitimacy.

The up-building of the welfare state and economic growth has changed rural areas and rural communities. Families that get a majority of income from primary production are a minority in most communes. Income from public services, manufacturing industries, commuting to urban centers, the oil industry, pensions and welfare insurance as well as in- and out-migration has fragmented interests and social life in most communes. Merging of communes into bigger units to be more efficient welfare providers have increased these challenges – there are no longer common organizations, arenas or networks that include all inhabitant in common civil society based decision-making processes in most rural communities.

For years we have tried to develop and implement communicative planning processes and models to reduce rural political and social fragmentation and with some success. The method in this paper is to present such processes and, built on evaluations and other material, to try to conclude on further development of such approaches.

The first part of the paper will examine the challenges in rural areas in Norway and other equal countries and, by help of international research, to try to identify major challenges that are relevant regarding communicative and collaborative planning and decision-making processes.

In the second part I will describe communicative planning models used in Norway related to international planning theory and models. These approaches are mostly connected to community and commune development and development of industries/jobs. I will shortly describe experience and results connected to processes (planning approach).

In the final part I will conclude by describing how the use of communicative planning models in rural areas can be improved regarding:

- Mobilization and participation of inhabitants and other important stakeholders in vision-making, development of strategies, implementation and learning.
- Organization and implementation of strategies and tasks
- Implementation
- Evaluation and learning as important processes to create new and increased mobilization and participation
- Institutional development
- Organization of public communicative processes

1. SITUATION, CHALLENGES AND CAPABILITY IN RURAL AREAS IN THE WELFARE STATE

Governance, partnerships, confidence and trust building, communicative planning, etc. are some of the new process-related developments in spatial planning and rural development (Healey 1997, Healey et al 1999, Amdam 2000). Built on Amdam (2003) we have used the model on figure 1 as basis for our study in Norway. A local or a regional community (be it a functional labour and housing region or an administrative region) have a specific context and situation, and challenges from both other part of the world and from itself which varies from community to community. How inhabitants, companies, organisations etc. reacts to challenges – how they co-operate and compete, to a great extend influence the capacity they have to develop efficient responses to challenges (Amdam 2000, 2003, Bennet and McCoshan 1993, Healey et. al. 1999, Putnam 1993, Stöhr 1990). On figure 1 I have for practical reasons divided the community into three groups of major internal and external stakeholders (Friedmann 1992); public activity (both political and administrative), private industries and the civil society (Amdam 2003).
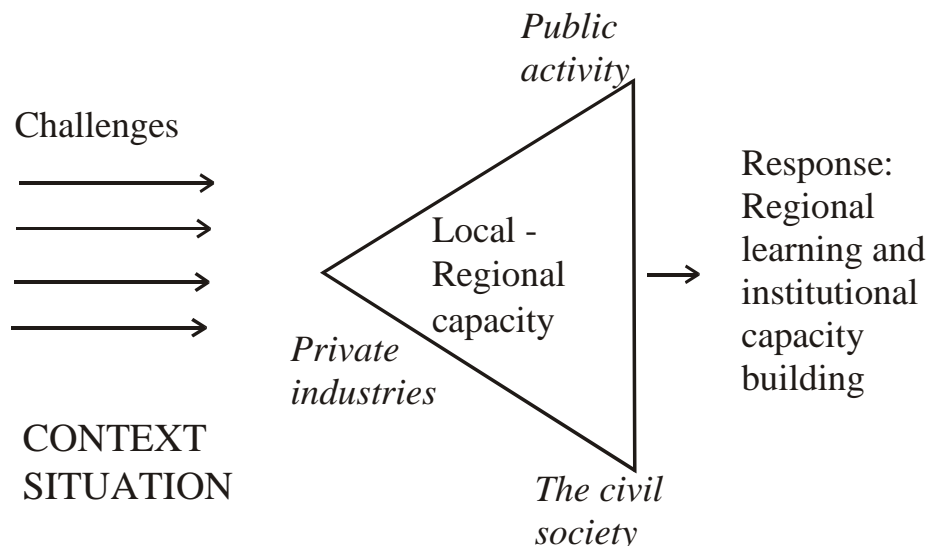
Fig. 1. Rural capacity and stakeholders

Looking on details regarding population and employment structure and change after the Second World War in Norway (as well as in other parts of Scandinavia) some general characteristics is dominant (Onsager and Selstad 2004, Amdam 2006):

- The South is growing while the North is declining.
- The Coast is growing while the fjord and mountain areas is declining
- Urban areas is growing and rural areas is declining

The changes in employment and industries in rural areas can be illustrated as on figure 2. Sogn and Fjordane County is representative for peripheral regions in the South of Norway, the only county without a town over 15.000 inhabitants and a population of 110.000. From 1946 to 2001 the county has lost almost 20.000 jobs in primary production, comparable to the total growth of jobs in other industries, see figure 2. Compared to more "urban" counties like Rogaland, that county was a lot more modernised and in spite of loosing the same number of jobs in primary production the growth of other industries (especially oil and gas) and services have been from a total of 65.000 to 140.000 in the same period.

Sysselsetting Sogn og Fjordane
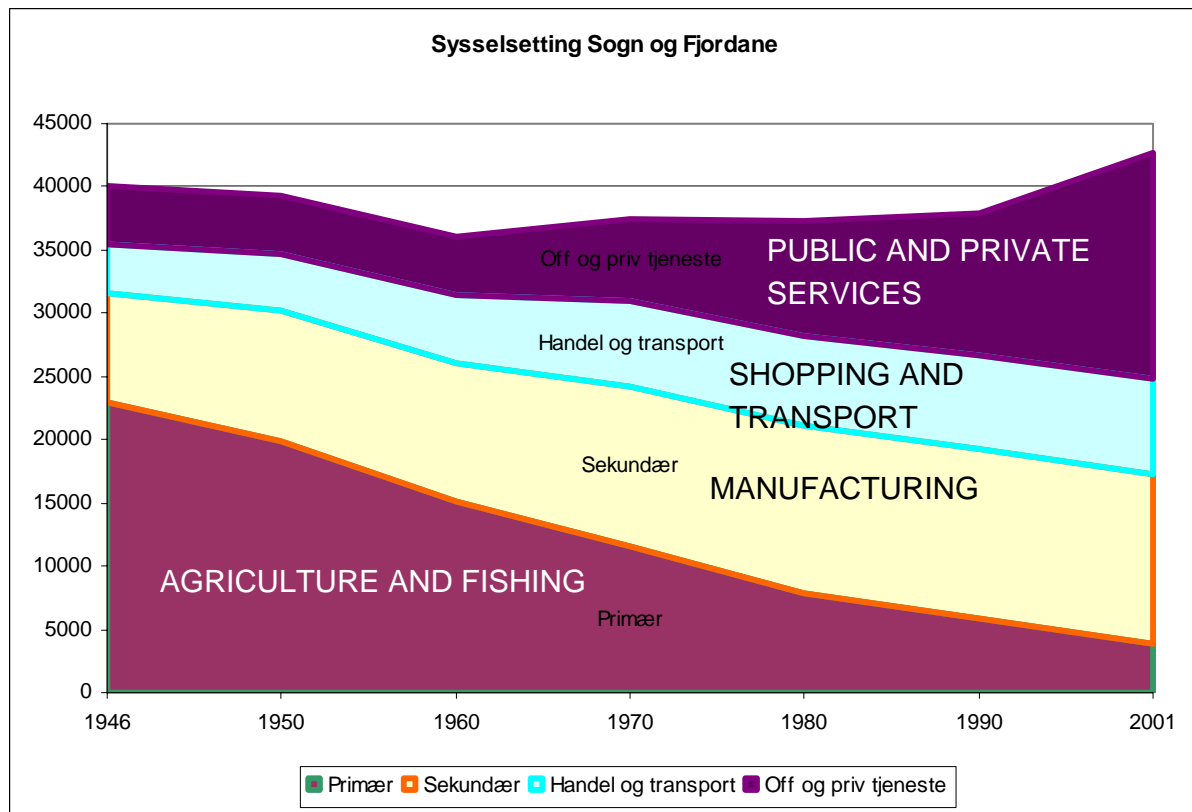
THE RURAL COUNTY SOGN OG FJORDANE - EMPLOYMENT

Figure 2. Employment by industries, Sogn and Fjordane County (Amdam 2005)

Employment in rural areas are dominated by public services (29% in S&F in 1998), manufacturing industries and other secondary production (29% in S&F), agriculture and fisheries (11% in S&F), consumer related private services (23% in S&F) and very few in business related services (only 7% in S&F, compared to over 26% in the capitol Oslo) (Amdam 2005). Due mainly to the economic transfers of the welfare state, better communications and general economic growth the employment structure are less different between urban and rural areas today then in the 1950-ies. Public employment are approximately on the same level all over Norway, but a higher proportion of public services in rural regions are services to old and young inhabitants compared to more advanced jobs in urban areas. Since the population increase in the urban areas and is reduced in the rural regions, this will over time give a corresponding change in public services. In marginal rural areas closures of both public and private services are an ongoing process. While rural areas used to have their major incomes from local activities, external income is over 60% from regional, national even international commuting activities (fisheries, oil, gas ..) as well as various types of state income transfer, in declining rural areas (Onsager and Selstad 2004, Amdam 2005).

The effects on self employment and development are challenging. Small milieu, lot of different jobs and in different locations, time consuming travel, young people emigrating or at education in towns etc. has fragmented and pacified relatively homogenous self employing and self developing communities. Both tacit and formal local knowledge are declining as well as the number of "local development pathfinders" and "local role models" (Amdam 2003, 2005).

Population structure as well as the functions of the *civil society* is an increasing challenge. In most rural areas the amount of old people increase, while the part of young people especially women decrease. Out migration is high from most small, remote communities especially because the lacks of jobs that correspond with the education young people take. For some young women education is also an "escape route" (Berg et al 2004). This change together with major international social trends (Putnam 2000) also change the civil society, like the reduction of local integrating organisations and activities that are important for social entrepreneurship and "dugnad". Social isolation and fragmentation is growing even in small rural communities where "all used to now all people and also what they were doing – even before themselves". The result is that tacit and formal knowledge regarding each other and social activities, as well as social ties and the ability to mobilise according to common values and interests, are reduced in a lot of rural communities compared to a generation back. Knowledge of how to cooperate to empower and to act must be relearned – in spite of the strong "dugnadstradisjon" we have in Norway.

The *Commune* as a political and administrative organisation is very important for most rural communities, often the only common social and collective arena that are left in modern "rurban" welfare oriented rural communities. The commune have taken over most of the welfare functions of the civil society like heath and social care, education, kindergarten, homes and care to old people etc. As a public welfare producer mostly based on state transfers often over 50% of local women and 20% of the labour force are employed by the commune. Since state transfers are based on population characteristic combined with increasing political priority to urban areas where the voters are, rural communes have to reduce spending and typically decentralised small scale activities are the first to go. The ideological influence from New Public Management (Fimreite and Selle 2006) has also lead to growing mistrust between state and local authorities and increased detail regulation of welfare production. The local political and administrative focus on the challenges regarding the commune as a welfare provider on command from the state has reduced the focus on community development.

The capability of a community to meet challenges is particularly dependent on how the various actors manage to produce and exploit competitive knowledge (Diez 2000). At the same time, challenges must be answered with strategies and measures that the whole community involves itself in and which are adapted to suit the situation and meet the challenges in the region in question (Stöhr 1990). For example, the establishment and development of regional innovation systems requires certain conditions to be met (Asheim 1996, Asheim and Isaksen 1997). There needs to be an active business and industry with a high degree of co-location and co-operation, plus an active co-operation between various actors and organisations with competence in the field of developing and dispersing knowledge (Cooke et al 1997, Lagendijk & Cornford 2000, Maskell et al 1998, Storper 1997). In Norway a proactive commune or county is often seen as an important "partner" for development of industries, especially regarding the need for land, infrastructure, buildings, housing for employees, services etc. (Teigen 2000).

Rural development policy has mainly focused on development of natural recourses (agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism etc.) and economic support (Amdam R. et al 1995). Rural areas that have focused on such development is increasingly dependent of public spending and transfers in Norway due to rationalisation and national and international competition (Onsager and Selstad 2004). Built on among others Nilsson (1997) I have on figure 3 I have tried to divide rural regions in two groups; traditional and flexible and also to compare them with corresponding urban areas.

The challenges of the **traditional** rural region are to a high extent comparable with the problems and challenges of urban manufacturing regions (Nilsson 1997). Focus is on mass

production of goods and services (tourism) based on natural resources and with focus on prices, economic costs, transactions etc. and "more and better" (Onsager and Selstad 2004). Both in urban and rural areas this kind of regions have challenges meeting competition from other regions often in other parts of the world. Nilsson (1997) is of the opinion that it takes generations to change attitude and strategy in this kind of regions socially dominated by hierarchy and inequality (Putnam 1993). It is often easiest to "import new industries" then to change how the community functions, if the traditions for change, cooperation and learning are low. Rural regions that are doing fairly well regarding traditional production like the clusters of shipbuilding and fisheries in the North-West area in Norway typically have a long tradition of social equality, cooperation and adapt to international competition by flexible specialisation and knowledge intensive development of new products and markets (Asheim and Isaksen 1997, Gammelsæter 2004, Wicken 1997).

Typical for diversified urban regions and **flexible** rural regions is a focus on knowledge and abilities and dynamic learning processes that integrate new knowledge in production of traditional goods and services and use old and new knowledge to develop new products, activities and markets. These regions have a strong local based growth capacity (Onsager and Selstad 2004) and have also adapted from focus on production to focus on services and the "upper" and most competent part of clusters and production chains. Inhabitants as well as industries and private and public organisations, have a strong "loyalty" to the area and the community and are willing to change to continue living locally and to increase life quality. Strong local identity combined with nearness to urban centres is often a characteristic like Jæren, the dynamic rural part of Rogaland County (Asheim and Isaksen 1997). But even remote local communities like Stryn are doing well due to diversified and flexible production and strong focus on quality of life and identity (Amdam 2005). Diversification and flexibility can be a challenge for development if the milieu is too small and fragmented. In small and remote communities strategies to increase "flexibility" or "quality of life" need a strong basis in local production and inhabitants and even external recruitment and support to be successful.

Fig. 3. Types of urban and rural regions

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

In both types of rural communities fragmentation is a challenge as shown above. Like in Haram (Tangen and Amdam 2002) where the successful growth of local industries lead to them being bought by national and international companies and where new leaders were recruited from the outside. A lack of local networks and arenas was a hindrance for solving common challenges like recruitment of skilled workers and education. Initiatives from the commune lead to major changes in private-public cooperation, cross-company partnerships and local development.

An important task in rural capacity building is therefore to increase social relations and the social capital (Putnam 1993, 2000). Healey et al (1999) define this task as influencing the three dimensions of institutional capital; knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capability. A region or community with a high local openness combined with strong local capacity is usually coping better then regions with strong local capacity but a local closure strategy or a region with high local openness but weak local capacity. Traditional rural regions typically have a combination of local closure (strategic focus on traditional activities) and weak local capacity due to class struggle and internal conflicts, while flexible rural regions is both open and have high local capacity – a common strategy for development that include all important local stakeholders.

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

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

It is with good reason that Michael Storper (1997) points to talk and trust as the two most important strategies for breaking out of institutional chains in complex communities and organisations. But dialogue and creating trust require continual and long-term relationships between actors, with e.g. the development of mutual and balanced dependency (Amdam 2000, 2003*)*. The challenges for communicative local planning are of course: How can one establish far-reaching and essential dialogues between actors and gradually build up trust between them, when to begin with, there are no relationships, arenas or processes that make this natural? And if the distrust between actors is strong: How does one arrange for conversations and processes that can clear up these relationships (Innes at al 1994, Sager 1994)?

Rural development is a typical governance activity where public authorities like the commune and counties have only a small influence on individual decisions regarding migration, commuting, business development etc. To develop institutional capital public planning processes must include all important stakeholders, businesses as well as non governmental organisations with basis in the civil society. From their formal establishment almost 200 years ago, communes have been very important actors in local development initiatives and activities and the establishment of cooperative movements and industries in Norway (Teigen 1999) and practiced a local form of governance where the responsibility for production was taken by small local businesses, cooperative or voluntary organisations. The up building of the welfare state, or welfare commune since this level is responsible for most of the welfare production to inhabitants, have somehow reduced the communes role in local and regional development. While some peripheral communes have worked well regarding local development of industries and the civil society due to crises like high out-migration, this have had low priority in most communes in Norway today, in spite of being responsible for land use and comprehensive spatial planning. Traditional "government" forms of spatial planning are of course important to regulate land use, development of infrastructure etc. but to build institutional capacity more collaborative and communicative planning methods must be developed and used (Amdam 2001a).

Patsy Healey (1997) has formulated the challenges of communicative planning as "*making sense together while living differently*". This also applies to diversified rural areas that include a lot of new types of un-traditional inhabitants and stakeholders and as shown in the Norwegian examples are more "urban" then "rural" regarding social complexity (Berg et al 2004). In their discussion regarding planning, governance and spatial strategies in three regions in Britain, Vigar et al (2000: 245) use the concepts of policy communities and policy arenas to organise accounts of the practice of governance: "*Policy communities are conceived as clusters of stakeholders who share common frames of references and substantive issues of concern. Policy arenas are the places where issues of concern are discussed. As such, they constitute the institutional sites which act as nodal points for stakeholders, or provide a locus for the activities of policy communities in developing and disseminating policy*."

From a situation where most rural areas had common political communities and arenas, we have today a strong fragmentation and specialisation of both public and private organisations on local and regional level in rural areas in Norway (Tranøy and Østerud 2001). This lack of policy communities and arenas is maybe a bigger challenge in some rural areas then access to natural resources and economic means – the inability to develop and implement common visions, strategies and tasks.
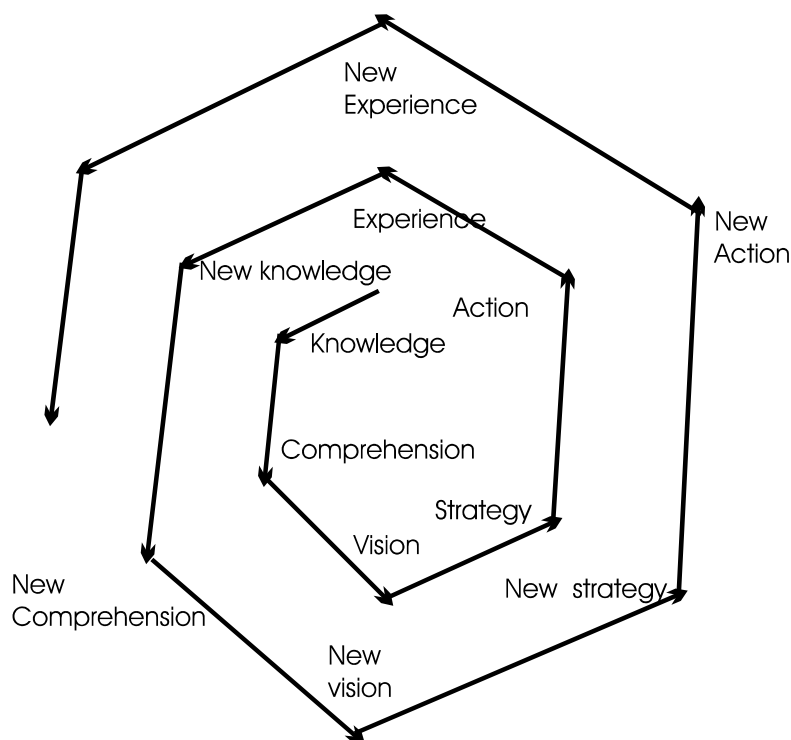
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Figure 4. The development process as a learning spiral

2. THE COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING PROCESS

In this part I will concentrate on the possibilities for mobilisation and partnership building and thereby strengthening political communities and policy arenas, using a model for collaborative planning developed by Amdam (1997, 2000), see figure 4. Instead of a line or a diagram with a finite start and end, what we call the strategic and communicative planning or development process (Amdam and Amdam 2000) is drawn as a spiral with an increasing "radius" if successful. The planning process might have a specific start or initiative, but also a

history and a context, which are important for further development. Successful processes most often start with small ambitions and, as participants learn to trust each other, more ambitious goals are formulated and new participants are engaged in the process. The ideal is of course a steadily increasing process as drawn on figure 4 that sometime in the future will create a "learning and planning society" (Friedmann 1973), also called a collaborative planning process by Patsy Healey (1997). But if conflicts are not reduced or solved through cooperation and negotiations, the "radius" of the spiral demonstrating trust and involvement can be reduced (Amdam 2000). If we look at a "loop" in the process as illustrated on figure 4, the stages in the learning, mobilisation, trust and partnership building process can be divided into activities (Amdam and Amdam 2000). A process like this can build institutional capital (Healey et al 1999), stronger networks and relations and capability for response.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The basic knowledge, acceptance of the facts, the vision and the main strategies must be combined in a long-term development program that clearly shows what one is heading for and how the responsibility is shared between the parties in a fair and honest way. Such development programs can be prepared for an organisation, a local community, for the commune as a community and an organisation, for regional co-operation etc. These programs must be revised systematically on the basis of new knowledge, new goals, new strategies, new partners etc.

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

activity for producing new knowledge and new goals for further planning and action, a new "loop", see figure 4.

In a well functioning community there will be going on a lot of such processes in companies, organisations, on political arenas, action groups etc. Some of them are successful and expanding; other initiatives lack participants and proper arenas etc. and are declining and some are isolated projects with little mobilising and learning capability. But a lot of competing projects and activities can be as problematic as a lack of activities, how can it be possible to both stimulate and coordinate such processes in fragmented communities? We have found that the commune both has the local legitimacy and ability as part of the commune planning process if this is organised according to communicative planning principles (Amdam and Amdam 2000, Amdam 1997, 2000). All communes in Norway are by law responsible for strategic and comprehensive planning for the total society as well as land use and planning of the production of welfare and public services. This planning can be organised as an internal political and administrative plan producing process, but if organised with high participation and mobilisation of important stakeholders our experience is that this can lead to new processes and initiatives as well as better integration and coordination.

Commune planning and development is an "everlasting process" but for practical reasons the process must be organised as a project as can be illustrated on figure 5. The commune council is elected every 4th year in Norway. The commune should revise strategic plans at least once each political period and our experience is that a coordination of strategic planning as a basic for the political debate before the local election stimulate the strengthening of the political community and the commune council as a policy arena. The first part of the process called mobilisation on figure 5 and that include point a, b and c above should be organised and implemented in good time before the election, as well as the implementation of strategies and tasks that all agree on. The organisation and implementation of controversial policies and tasks must have priority after the election and by that giving the commune council the mandate and legitimacy to decide, to participate in partnerships etc.
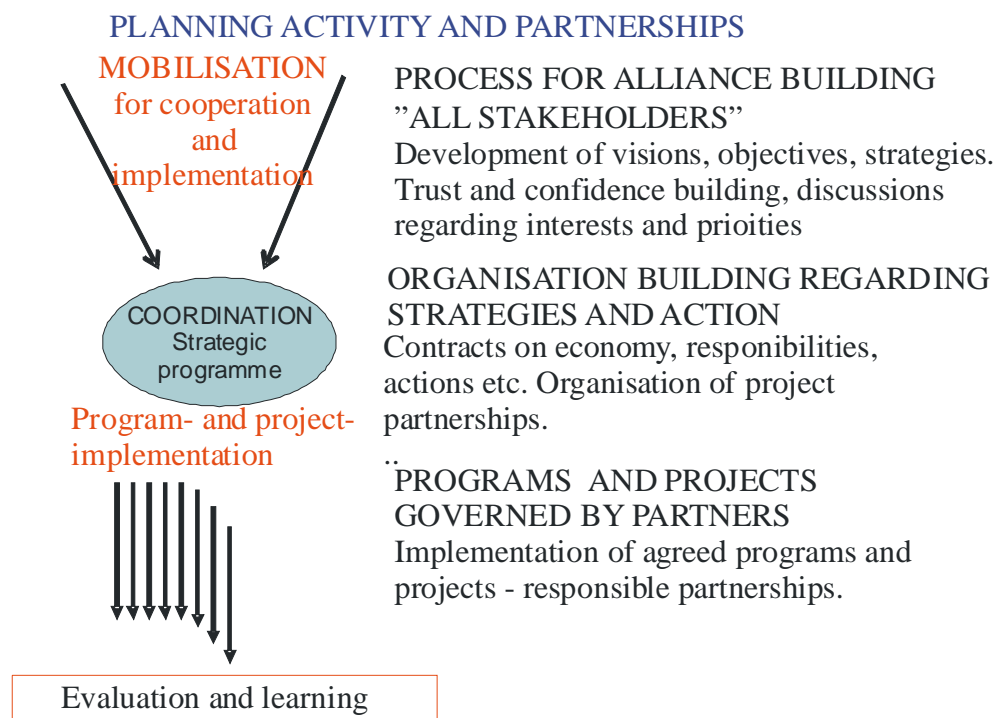

PLANNING ACTIVITY AND PARTNERSHIPS

MOBILISATION for cooperation and implementation

PROCESS FOR ALLIANCE BUILDING "ALL STAKEHOLDERS"
Development of visions, objectives, strategies. Trust and confidence building, discussions regarding interests and priorities

COORDINATION Strategic programme

ORGANISATION BUILDING REGARDING STRATEGIES AND ACTION
Contracts on economy, responsibilities, actions etc. Organisation of project partnerships.

Program- and project-implementation

PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS GOVERNED BY PARTNERS
Implementation of agreed programs and projects - responsible partnerships.

Evaluation and learning

Figure 5 Local strategic planning processes

One step towards a joint vision and mobilization for development is to assemble all the important actors to discuss the future of the commune. We have therefore developed a process with combination of mass meeting and work groups, where these groups work their way through suggestions for the long-term plan - in communes a joint production of the strategic commune plan. Essential to this approach are work books that all groups have to fill in and present, which form the basis for processing the material (Amdam and Amdam 1990, 2000).

The mass meetings are the keys to this context. They open each work phase. At the mass meetings we try to assemble all the key people who have or should have influence on the subject in question, and representatives of interests seen in the context of participation. At these meetings they receive a short briefing on the subject to be discussed. Then the assembly is split into groups of six to eight people. The mass meeting can be wound up in one afternoon/evening using the work book illustrated on figure 6. The group begins by finding (using brainstorm with an idea producing open phase and a closing phase) and ranking the five most important faults, then strengths, opportunities and threats. In between, the groups are assembled to see how similar their reasoning is. Finally each group has to rank in order of priority the five most important areas of priority based on the initial work.

We have yet to experience an unsuccessful mass meeting using this design. At most of the mass meetings there have been from 50 to 150 participants and from six to 18 groups in action. The method of combining brainstorming and giving priority to strengths and weaknesses, threats and possibilities in groups with presentation in plenary sessions, has in every case proved to be a socially uniting process. The meeting has acted as a common social arena in which to discuss the present and the future. Most of the participants have experienced a great degree of agreement and that the groups arrive at roughly the same understanding of the situation. If there is strong personal conflict or very dominating persons these individuals should be placed in specific groups so as not to destroy processes for common people.
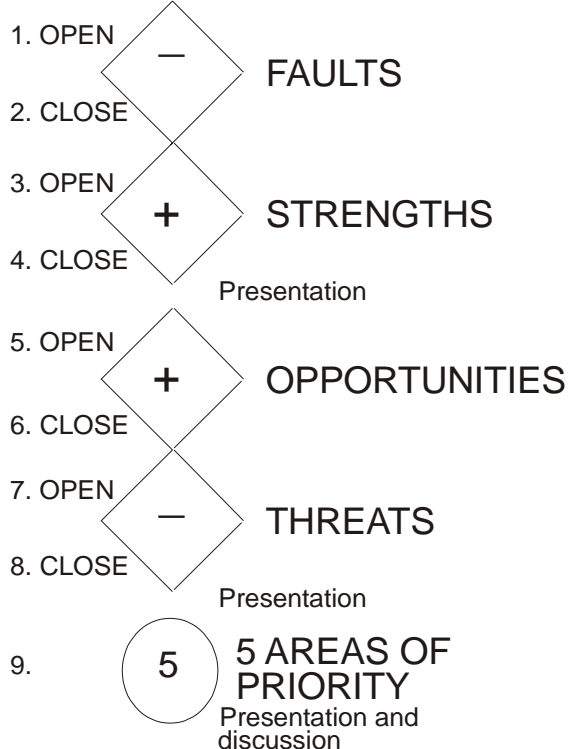
WORK BOOK 1.

Figure 6. Work book for SOFT analysis

When the process is over, the plenary session most often reveals that there is broad agreement that the commune/organization must concentrate its future development work on four to seven areas of priority. Another phenomenon is that the majority of the participants thought the work was interesting and enjoyable, and while there was not enough time they felt they needed the pressure of time. They expressed great satisfaction at the fact that they had finally started to talk about the real challenges facing them. We believe that this is due to the fact that the participants themselves decide the agenda when each group starts with a brainstorming session, where they suggest matters that concern them. The consequent debate and priorities are a result of this initial process.

We have experimented by providing in advance detailed and scant information respectively on what the experts believe the situation to be and what challenges they are facing. This does not seem to make very much difference. Local knowledge and their own understanding of the situation as it is developed through the group work and by the groups having to inform each other of their conclusions at regular intervals, seems to be essential to the mutual learning process that actually takes place, and regarding what participants give priority (Amdam and Amdam 2000).

If possible, it would be advantageous to reserve two days for the first mass meeting. The second day the assembly is divided into groups according to each area of effort (strategy). This is often difficult to do. Instead we often organize the second stage as group processes where each group meets five to seven times on evenings during a three to five week period. There may well be several groups for each area - a little rivalry is good in order to generate ideas. Then the groups begin to work through work book 2 where the subjects are:

1. Formulate a vision for the planning subject (e.g. the local community or the communication system etc.).
2. Suggestions of strategies to achieve the vision for the area of priority.
3. Rank the five most important strategies in order of priority.
4. Concretize the five most important strategies/tasks - for each: Cues for the strategy. The product. Effects. Organization of the production. Critical stages. Concrete actions.
5. Priority of the actual strategies in time, use of resources and responsibility for implementation.

Most of the work with the development of strategies takes place in the form of groupwork. During the years we have been doing development work in practice, it is in this field that we have learnt the most. To begin with, work book 2 was very academic and rationally related to the development of objectives, searching for alternatives, the evaluation of consequences and the choice of solutions. On the basis of our experience from the group processes, the workbook is now organized so that it is more natural for the groups to organize their work according to it. Thus it provides both instructions on the work process and information about which questions are the most relevant to the development of strategies. Today greater emphasis is therefore placed on an evaluation of the situation, the development of a vision, a statement of the objectives, and the development of complementary and/or alternative strategies with which to achieve the goals. Likewise the process includes giving priority to the activities. A great deal of effort has also been put into finding a terminology that is functional for people who are not used to the "language of planning".

As a rule a working group is formed for each area of priority defined by the mass meeting. Today we recommend that the groups should not be too large (max eight people), which it is a good idea to establish competing groups within the same field e.g. expert groups, groups of enthusiasts etc. to generate ideas that can later be evaluated and combined to form more thorough strategies. Often it is not the experts who dare to "take the bull by the horns", they

have a tendency to "beat about the bush". Non-professionals who know where the shoe pinches are in fact better able to define the problem, even if they do not always arrive at the best professional solution.

The further work of giving priority to the use of resources so that as many activities as possible can be carried out, it is important to understand that the commune as an organization is unable to be responsible for making all the efforts necessary for the development of the community. Through the processes connected to identified strategies, programs and tasks involving the particular stakeholders (see figure 5) one should reach a reasonable work-sharing arrangement between private and public sectors, and between different public sectors, services and offices at national, regional and communal level. Until now this work has tended to be the domain of planning experts, administrators and central politicians, in so far as they have evaluated the proposals at hand, supplemented them and given them priority in relation to resources etc. in the long and medium term. Generally speaking this has worked well, maybe because of loyalty to the analysis and proposals developed in the communicative process. It is in this field that we have witnessed the most dramatic changes visually, because the new planning documents look and have a content that are totally different from the old ones. While the experts' plans were composed of facts and prognoses, the new documents focus on the strengths and weaknesses, possibilities and threats, areas of priority, visions, strategies and projects. They are much more to the point.

They also discuss other problems than those found in traditional planning documents, for example ideas for changing attitudes in a commune - for burying the so-called "law of Jante", which expresses the petty envy and jealousy found in most small communities or organizations - "what makes you think you are somebody? You are no better than I am." We also have the clear impression that the new planning documents are being used, e.g. that politicians periodically examine and receive reports on what has been done in relation to the planning document.

When the plan documents have been drafted, a broad participation should be arranged to invite suggestions for changes to the documents. We have developed a process built on a work book with three group activities:

1. Strength of the plan
2. Weaknesses of the plan
3. Proposals for change

Used at a mass meeting or in smaller groups in local communities, public organizations etc., this work book can systematically expose priorities (the plan's strengths and faults) and generate concrete suggestions for improvements.

3. CHALLENGES REGARDING COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING IN RURAL AREAS

I have tried to show that rural areas is not a homogeneous entity, the situation and challenges differs a lot between areas heavily influenced by the urban core and remote areas and different groups in the same rural areas have their specific situation, challenges and need of strategies and tasks. Traditional coping strategies based on natural resources and traditional industries is often not as efficient as strategies that also include development of institutional capital and that tries to diversify industries, integrate new types of stakeholders and inhabitants. Social fragmentation as well as the need of increased flexibility and new knowledge increases in my opinion the focus on communicative processes that tries to develop common visions, strategies, tasks and learning (Amdam and Amdam 2000).

Ideally the mobilization processes should originate spontaneously on the basis of local initiative. In our case the research work has been organized by us as a research institute in the form of an offer to the local communities, communes etc. to participate, i.e. the initiative has come from outside but participation is voluntary. The aim is to develop methods and processes that will work independent of us. The intention is that it is the participants in the process who themselves define the objectives, develop the strategies and projects, and implement these. Our role is to give assistance in the process and training in the use of the work methods. Due to the publication of textbooks (Amdam and Amdam 1992, 2000, Amdam 2005) and articles describing the methods and practical use and experience as well as training courses, we believed that the need for such assistance should be reduced over time. This is not our experience because of the rapid turnover of political leaders and planning officers in rural communes and also that such communicative methods increasingly is used in new public sectors. The "communicative shift" is a continuous struggle to learn leaders that to speak and communicate is extremely important before writing text or plans that are easily misunderstood.

In our studies of the planning processes in rural areas in Norway we have developed the model on figure 7 that is built on the planning system on country and commune level in Norway (Amdam 1995, Amdam and Amdam 2000), but also include systematic learning focused evaluations and institutional development. The five major planning and development activities can even be described as the major variables in communicative planning processes (Amdam R. 2005).
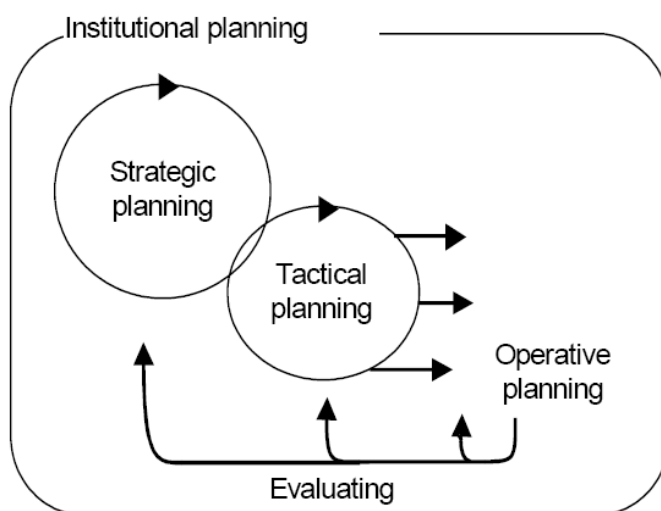

Figure 7. Coordinated planning system

Strategic planning - mobilisation

Mobilisation of inhabitants and important internal and external stakeholders is fundamental in communicative rural planning. It is our experience that to promote more fundamental changes in attitudes, institutions, visions, strategies as well as tasks, strategic planning in the civil society must be as open and including as possible. Very seldom have communities the need of secret strategies, the more public and including the higher is the possibility of public debate and common ownership that influence and coordinate the decisions of participants (Amdam and Amdam 2000).

Communicative strategic planning must include the common formulation of visions, goals, objectives and strategies built on learning from earlier planning and implementation processes and recognition of the real situation and challenges inside and from the outside of the community. To formulate visions and strategies one need a moral discourse which involves and mobilises the community in a common consensus-building process (Amdam 2000, Amdam R. 1997, 2001) where as many as possible is involved. Methods as described above can be used, but also other kind of workshops that engage and can lead participants to develop and learn common understanding, visions, strategies etc. (Farner 2003).

Mobilisation regarding visions and strategies are also the most critical part of communicative rural planning in practice. It is often easier to mobilise against a new power plant or a national park, a specific task or project with concrete stakeholders. Mobilisation for the development of our own community can be difficult if the inhabitant's ties to the community are weak as often is the case in fragmented rural areas. To plan the process of mobilisation is an important task, as well as to use methods that engage and also lower barriers of participation. Personal contact and motivation of key person in organisations, businesses, political groups etc. are extremely important because they have the means to destroy or hinder mobilisation and communication. But we have also learned that if a group of motivated local people take care of the motivation and contact to people using the internet, telephone, meetings in organisations etc. a very high proportion of local inhabitants can be motivated to participate in mass meetings and group work (Amdam 1995).

Our experience shows that communicative approaches as the ones described above can gain wide approval and support, but simultaneously can appear as a threat to key politicians, bureaucrats, planners and key persons in the community who are oriented towards traditional routines and rational planning (Amdam and Amdam 2000). It can seem to them particularly "dangerous" that the process is open-ended; no-one knows where it is going to lead them. The process may also conclude that the whole or parts of the established local power apparatus is an obstacle to the desired development, which can in fact lead to a greater polarization between the power apparatus and the rest of the system. Major conflicts have in a few cases developed between the political leadership in the communes and clearly administration-minded civil servants and planners who feel their positions threatened. In a few cases the administrators have tried to establish rival activities that they themselves control. In particular some of them are afraid of rival projects and a different set of priorities than they themselves want. If the mayor, chief administrator and other important leaders are not willing or motivated to use the resources necessary and the proper methods for mobilization, participation and self-governed planning processes, our advice is to let it be. In such cases it is better to educate and motivate leaders, or first organize a political process that change the power structure (and that can be organized as a mobilization process).

In most cases local politicians have experienced mobilization processes as far less threatening then we expected in the beginning (Amdam and Amdam 1990, 2000). On the contrary, they have often expressed very positive attitudes to the experience and method of working, which shows the clear political element in the approach. We have even experienced that politicians and civil servants have adopted these methods in their own work with the planning of e.g. health and social welfare activities, compulsory education, planning in sports associations, voluntary organizations etc.

A greater challenge is the lack of direct results from mobilization processes. The development of visions, strategies, action programs etc. is often distant from concrete actions. Most often participants and groups in mass meetings and local work groups will point to needs and tasks that easily can and should be done. The planning process must have the flexibility and the

means to quickly organize the implementation of such tasks and needs that all agree on, this increase the legitimacy and the support of the processes tremendously – they function!

We have also experienced challenges regarding high mobilization. Especially in small communities such processes are dependent of social entrepreneurs and high mobilization can lead to a tremendous load on a few front persons that easily "burn out" and function as a bottleneck for further development. Over time processes can be more like "gas and break" than continuous increasing processes as described on figure 4. To motivate, to teach, to engage supporting groups, new social entrepreneurs etc. are an extremely important part of the mobilization and development process. We have learned that a successful communicative planning process must start with a period of solid training, during which we in fact go through the various stages "in miniature" with leaders (organizations, businesses, politicians, public servants, social entrepreneurs etc.) so that they can see on a small scale what is going to happen before they start the mass mobilization. In addition it is important to draft detailed plans of action with clearly defined partial activities, time schedules, descriptions of who ought to take part in the various phases, responsibility for reports, drafting documents, informal and formal decisions etc., and that the leaders themselves are responsible for this work. There is, of course, a danger that this can lead them to having too much control and influence, but this has not been a problem so far.

On figure 5 these preparation activities are included in the first stage called "Planning activity and partnerships". The project plan will include decisions on questions as (Amdam, Kleven & Sæterdal 1992):

- when the planning process shall start and hopefully end by a decision in the commune council, as well as milestones like presentations of and the interim decisions in the commune council regarding visions, strategies etc.

- who is formally and in reality responsible for the planning process; the content and substance of the plan of process

- how the planning process is connected to political and administrative organizations and interest groups in the community

- what activities the planning process will include, when these will happen and why these activities are included

- the connection between activities, what activities must build on other former activities etc.

- who shall participate in each activity and why; why should interest groups be invited to participate and to prepare demands? When the planning process should be completed, when is a draft plan ready for hearings etc.

- what outcomes (organizational and substantial) are expected/hoped from activities and processes

Tactical planning – organisation

While the mobilisation process can develop agreement on visions, strategies and some tasks, further development of concrete strategies and organisation of the implementation of strategies, programs and projects must also be done. This process is dominated by an ethic-political discourse dominated by conflict solving which mainly involves stakeholders and politicians and administrators as representatives of common interests (Amdam R. 2001). As told above our experience is that to organise specific communicative and concrete processes that include major stakeholders have been successful regarding the development of concrete action programs and tasks. In most cases groups in local communities has taken the responsibility for both planning and implementation of actions that they can do themselves.

We give clear advice that during the tactical planning process "owners" of tasks must be identified and motivated. We also try to motivate participants to discuss "what can and should we do ourselves", "what can and must we not do – who should/must be responsible – how can we motivate and influence them", and "what must we do in partnership and who is/must be partners – how can we motivate them and organise the common activity" (Amdam and Amdam 2000).

Some of the challenges regarding tactical planning and organisation of activities are connected to the Norwegian public system. As told in the beginning the welfare commune is an important local actor both for the state and for local communities. In the Norwegian planning system tactical planning is near connected to the 4-year implementation programme (handlingsprogram) which are revised every year and which today are dominated by the commune's or county's welfare responsibilities. In practise this operative planning is very difficult in rural areas since public activities are extremely dominated by state policy and the state itself has no 4-year tactical planning. Since political compromises dominates state budgets, communes and counties have to change their plans each year according to new signals and resources from the state budget, which also means that in practise there are small differences between tactical and operative planning. It also means that tasks have to wait in a priority list and also easily can be given a higher or lower priority due to political actions.

Operative planning, implementation of plans

If strategic and tactical planning has functioned according to their role in the system and the process, most conflicts related to each concrete project and action should have been solved at this stage. That means that further detailed planning and implementation have clear objectives, and can be rather instrumental. In some cases there can still be differences in opinion of how "things should be done in practice", which can be solved by a pragmatic discourse involving only those responsible for the task and natural and juridical persons with a direct and identifiable interest (Amdam R. 2001).

While the implementation of actions that local groups themselves controls most often are carried out according to agreed plans, challenges are higher regarding actions that one have to rely on other actors to get fulfilled as shown above. Very often local communities have to develop specific actions of influence to motivate external and in some cases internal actors and stakeholders to act.

Evaluation and leaning

A fundamental part of communicative planning is learning as illustrated on figure 4. Evaluation for learning is a continuous process where we have to ask questions like are we doing the right things, are our strategies proper response to challenges, do we involve the right natural and juridical persons so as to develop ownership and identity to strategies and tasks …

Learning is also an important bottleneck in communicative development processes. Some persons are in the position to learn more then other. If this learning is monopolised these central persons will develop a more important, powerful and "professional" position that easily dominate processes and other stakeholders and participants. As Stöhr (1990) and Friedmann (1987, 1992) have shown this "monopolisation of power" is one of the most problematic challenges of development processes from below. This kind of "power centralisation" can easily also develop in organisations like the commune (political elite group), in local NGO's, cooperatives etc. By mass mobilisation like the mass meetings described above that start with evaluation of the situation (strengths and weaknesses) and the future (treats and opportunities) and communicative and task related processes built on

common visions and strategies, is it possible to empower new groups and common rural inhabitants.

Institutional planning - cultural and institutional differences

Ideally communicative and collaborative planning processes should create common agreement on strategies, tasks etc. so that "formal decisions" would not be necessary. In realty and looking at the complexity illustrated in figure 1, 4, 5 and 6, this is impossible. There are always stakeholders inside or outside the planning community that do not involve themselves in consensus building processes and that have a strong power over resources. To implement strategies, tasks and actions that are against their interests, one must follow accepted institutions like laws and regulations – to give "full compensation" etc. Therefore it is important to make formal decisions as part of planning processes and in to follow formal procedures and regulations.

Another factor is the local culture. Some local communities enjoy a long and positive tradition of voluntary community projects and mobilization and of doing things themselves. In these communities this method of working is stimulating and results in a more systematic and effective approach, because the local development work is better coordinated and the purpose becomes more apparent. In these communities it is natural for them to ask what they themselves can do and what they can achieve in cooperation with their superiors, with enterprises etc. On the other hand are the communities where the initiative has to come from "the lord of the manor" or where they are used to everything coming "from above". Instead of their own activity and their own projects, they concentrate on making demands of the commune, of the state, of enterprises etc., an attitude which often breeds conflicts instead of cooperation and development.

The mobilization strategy presented here is without doubt most successful in the first type of community. In fact, it can even be dangerous for the local community to adopt it if the community is "of the demanding sort", unless simultaneously great emphasis is placed on a "cultural and institutional change" and on consciously using mobilization to this particular end. In such a case the role of the planner will not only be that of the leader of the process, but also that of the agent of change, which makes new demands and raises new problems, not least on the question of values (Forester 1993, Sager 1994). But as shown by Healey et al (1999) such processes are necessary to develop higher institutional capital and the capacity and capability for change. In our experience communicative planning processes are often important arenas both for decision making and learning – learning to cooperate, to organize, to motivate etc. and also to learn to learn and to develop relations and new friendships that can reduce the fragmentation.

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