Planning and Democratic Structure in Oil Related Development Areas on Norway's West Coast

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Abstract:

This paper describes how changes in civil society, economic development, communication systems and related changes in the localisation of economic activities and jobs can influence regional structures and integration. The development processes increases the differences between the urban core and the rural periphery, which appears to be changing into three major regional structures with different planning challenges:

1. The large-town belt in the South West, from Stavanger to Bergen that has almost 700.000 inhabitants and 2/3 of all jobs in Western Norway.
2. The small-town belt in the North West, dominant clusters are marine industries related to fisheries, shipbuilding and support services to oil and gas activities.
3. The marginal rural area, comprising fjords, mountains and islands with ¾ of the land, but with less than 1/5 of jobs and population. This area is divided into a lot of small job markets due to the geographical structure.

There is no clear "best" alternative for regional political and administrative organisation in Western Norway that can build on an existing "total" integration, mainly due to a lack of infrastructure, networks and intra-regional flows. The region has a lot of conflict lines and differences of interests between coast and inland, urban and rural areas, south and north and maybe only a strong common enemy (the capital Oslo) can unite the area. I have tried to illustrate structures that are possible in the future; the challenge is that they do not exist today but they can be developed by heavy investments and involvement. Instead of establishing political/administrative structures that "fit" existing social and economic patterns, political/administrative reorganisation would be an "instrument" and part of the strategies for the creation of new intra-connected regions, regions that will be relational and geographically dynamic. If so, new models of geographical political and administrative organisation are needed.

1. Introduction

In Norway a political process is currently taking place in respect of how to reform sub-national political and administrative structures. At present Norway, with a population of 5 million, holds direct elections to 426 municipalities, in Norwegian termed *kommune,* and 19 counties (in Norwegian *fylkeskommune*). The last major reform of the local political structure was made in the 1960's which saw a 30% reduction in the number of municipalities from, approximately, 700 to 450. The county structure has however remained unchanged for over 100 years (Selstad 2003), though directly elected councils were first initiated in 1974.

From the 1960s onwards, urbanisation, better communications, internationalisation, the construction of the welfare state, and the emergence of new politico-administrative approaches such as New Public Management etc., began to fundamentally alter the political and territorial landscape to such an extent that government (KMD 2014 a, b) now sees a discrepancy between functional and political regions. While most municipalities in the 1960s contained a common job- and housing market, new roads, more cars, urbanisation and the acceptance of longer travel distances from home to work have helped produce a new structure of approximately 160 residential and labour market regions, 60 of which have such a difficult or constrained geographical make up that they exist as single remote municipalities,

most often with a population below 5000 inhabitants and with a low population density (Juvkam 2002, Gundersen & Juvkam 2013). Similarly Norway's few metropolitan regions should be seen as being special cases as regards their urban structure. Excluding these metropolitan and peripheral regions, there are about 90 residential and labour market regions in Norway with an average population of 30 000 inhabitants divided between 2 to 10 municipalities. These are the municipalities that represent the biggest structural challenge to the success of the reform process. Typical arguments from politicians and/or researchers who favour a reduction in the number of municipalities include the following (Amdam *et al* 2004):

- Small municipalities (below 5000 inhabitants) are simply not capable of efficient welfare production and able to solve responsibilities transferred from state to municipality level. A state expert committee concluded that a municipality needs 15.000 inhabitants (KMD 2014 a, b) to take care of advanced responsibilities. A lot of public partnerships have evolved and have developed challenges regarding political control.
- It is not possible to develop sustainable and self-developing residential and labour market regions because of the lack of political empowerment at this level.

The same types of arguments have also emerged at the county level. The challenge here is that the functional boundaries of the metropolitan and other larger urban regions do not correspond well with the old county structure (Amdam et al 2014). There is also a growing need to coordinate activities on a level below that of the state but above the existing counties. As such, and in line with this observation, responsibility for hospitals was transferred from the counties to five state owned regional health companies in 2002. A similar approach to territorial reorganisation has now, moreover, been developed by more than 30 other state authorities (Amdam et al 2014).

While the strategy in the 1980 and -90s was to utilise county and municipality borders to provide the basis for the allocation and provision of all kinds of public activities, the last 20 years has seen a process of territorial reorganisation and state centralisation, in relation to a number of activities, both 'up' and 'down' the administrative scale to new levels between state and county and county and municipality. The need for greater coordination at the labour and residential region level and on the K-region level (communication and knowledge, university regions) can, for instance, be seen as the driving force behind such a change in approach. The problem remains however that each state sector has its own borders and territories and faces inter-sector coordination challenges. In effect we have public activities and administrations on five separate levels below that of the state.

Municipalities and counties are according to planning law supposed to coordinate all kinds of public activities in their territory, which is very difficult in this situation. A further challenge moreover is that the counties in particular have lost legitimacy as political authorities, while two of Norway's major political parties have stated in their programme's their desire to eliminate the county-municipal level along with its directly elected county councils.

The focus here is on both local and regional politics, development and planning - the role of the municipalities and counties as 'leading partners' and responsible planners and the role that municipalities and counties have as important welfare producers in Norway. Structural changes will certainly have an influence and on the role of local and regional politicians and administrators. What then are the alternatives, and what are the likely consequences of such a change for local and regional development and planning, as well as for welfare production? Such questions are typically representative of those we often receive from local and regional politicians and administrators and are discussed in part 1. Western Norway is used in part 2 and 3 as an example on how model structural alternatives can be problematic when applied in specific regions..

In this article the challenges and alternatives we can see emerging in respect of these questions will be discussed, as well as the types of important consequences likely to emerge in the context of this type of planning process with possible political conflicts between the state, regional and local levels (Amdam *et al* 2003, 2005 a, b, Amdam et al 2014).

2. Part 1. Challenges on the local and regional level

Any local or regional community exists within a specific context and situation and faces challenges both from other parts of the world, and from within, which inevitably vary from community to community. How inhabitants, companies, organizations etc., react to such challenges – how they cooperate and compete - to a large extent influences the capacity such actors have to develop efficient responses to these challenges (Amdam 2000, Amdam and Veggeland 2011, Bennet and McCoshan 1993, Healey *et. al.* 1999, Putnam 1993, Stöhr 1990, Vigar *et al* 2000). For practical reasons the notion of community has been divided into three areas; public activity (both political and administrative), private industries and the civil society. The focus of this paper is on public activity at the local and regional levels in addition to cooperation with the private sector and on public activity at the national level.

If we look at the current list of municipal (and county) responsibilities of both as a community and as a political and administrative organization they can be divided into three areas as in figure 1 (Amdam and Veggeland 2011):

- **Public administration and the allocation of rights**. The municipality issues building permits etc., to inhabitants and companies in accordance with national laws and local and regional plans, while also providing economic support to inhabitants and families who fall outside the national welfare scheme or other labour insurance systems – 'help for self help' - which was one of the first responsibilities the new political municipalities adopted in the 1840s (Teigen 1999, 2000, Amdam et al 2014). Usually there is little participation from inhabitants in respect of such activities, illustrated as a one way arrow in figure 1.
- **Public production of services** such as education, kindergartens, hospitals and the care of the elderly and infirm etc. The modern Norwegian welfare state is more of a 'welfare municipality' than a 'state' since most of these activities are organised and produced by the municipality, within the context of economic support from the state and where services are provided in accordance with state regulations. Some activities in this area compete with private sector providers while in monopoly situations some 'user participation' exists, illustrated here by weak back arrows in figure 1.
- **Development of the 'good society'.** Politically this has been the most important activity on the local and regional level since the emergence of a local political system in the 1840s until, approximately, 1960 when most of the rebuilding after the war was over and the construction of the welfare state began in earnest. A municipality or a county cannot however develop a society by itself, participation and partnership with the private sector as well as with civil society and nongovernmental organisations (the municipality as a community) more generally is also required as illustrated by arrows from both sides in figure 1.

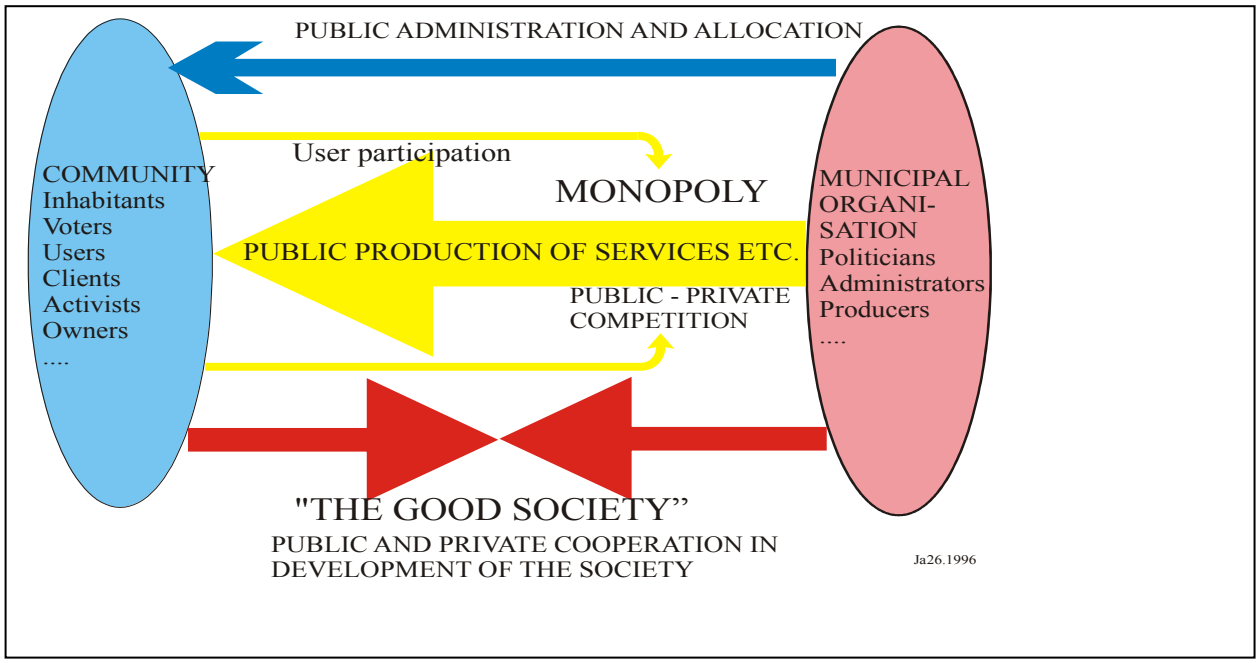
To lead and coordinate these activities a **democratic authority** is needed and in Norway we have direct elections to municipal and county parliaments. A change of municipal structure could have some, though probably small, consequences for the administration of rights and welfare state activities. In most municipalities the prevalence of such activities is small as compared to welfare and service activities or production, or to the nature and scale of the challenges related to the further development of the specific society in question. As such then this paper focuses on production and development activities as well as democratic planning activity.

2.1 Welfare production

The production of welfare services mainly relates to public activity and to civil society as outlined above. Individuals and families are the main recipients of this production and thus any proposed changes will directly influence both the recipients themselves and 'voters' more generally as many are employed by the municipality to produce services (over 10% of inhabitants are full or part time employees in this production and approximately 50% are recipients, mainly children and the old and infirm). We have then to focus on the impact on these groups if we are to understand the consequences of any proposed change.

As shown by Myrvold and Thorsen (2003) and others (KS 2003, KMD 2014 a, b) there are few, if any, economies of scale to be had for kindergartens and primary schools in municipalities larger than 3000 inhabitants. For home-based care and homes for the elderly there are almost no economies of scale at all, and the same is true for health-care facilities for the elderly with more than 30 to 40 patients. In small, rural municipalities with an aging population this is often the number of people who need such attention in a general population of 3 – 4 000 inhabitants. These activities can be termed basic welfare production activities and typically take 75 to 80 % of the municipal budget. Thus the question emerges why should municipalities that are already larger than this merge when it is clear that no economies of scale will result?

Figure 1. Different kinds of 'cooperation' between public organizations and communities.



One reason often forwarded for this is that small municipalities often do not have what central politicians and administrators believe is an 'optimal and efficient' production structure. Instead of one school, one kindergarten, one hospital for old people etc., there are many spread over different local communities that fight politically to preserve themselves while in some places, for instance, private schools are established when public schools are forced to close. These institutions are important to local inhabitants, particularly for their identity, where it is often perceived that there is benefit in having common institutions and activities in a small remote community.

Local politicians, moreover, usually accept this even if it implies greater costs than a more centralized structure. So to reduce costs the municipality has to be merged so that the larger and stronger unit can fight more efficiently against local interests. What is interesting here is that alternative solutions are seldom forwarded. Why not accept the idea of having local kindergartens and schools if local inhabitants themselves are willing to cover the extra costs and organize the activity? Why not let parents take control of local schools in partnership with the municipality where they, by contract, are bound to national standards and curricula? This approach is likely to be as least as cost efficient as any general centralization process and may even increase local activities and promote a positive local identity.

A further reason for the desire for mergers is the savings they can deliver in respect of the centralization of activities that automatically produce economies of scale, such as administration, culture and sport facilities, health care, technical infrastructure and activities that need specialization (KS 2003, KMD 2014 a, b), ie are on the regional level as illustrated on table 1.

The Norwegian concept here is that of the 'general municipality' i.e., that all municipalities have the same responsibilities and activities regardless of scale. Small and remote municipalities however continue to experience difficulties in recruiting specialists such as doctors, planners, technicians, and administrators. Some cooperation with neighboring municipalities is possible and is undertaken (Sanda 2000, KMD 2014 a, b), but often only on a single project or functional basis. Since research has shown that large 'merged' municipalities produce such services more efficiently and often to a higher standard then small municipalities, this is deployed as the main argument for merging municipalities in spite of the fact that this usually concerns only 20% of budget thus producing a cost reduction that is often is no more than 10 to 20% (2 – 4 % of total budget, Amdam *et al* 2004, 2014).

Table 1 Responsibilities of welfare production and development and planning at the municipal and regional level

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

2.2 Development and planning

Local and regional development and planning focuses on all activities in a municipality or region, as well as on individual inhabitants, private companies and NGO's. Typically, before 1960, local politics was tasked with organizing and implementing improvements in an area's infrastructure, organizations and institutions, while autonomous and stakeholder-owned organizations were made responsible for continuous activities such as the running of the cooperative bank, diary, shop etc. – the development of which we would today term as 'partnerships' or 'collaborations' based on social networks and territorial 'belonging' (Friedmann 1992, Healey 1997, 1999, Storper 1997). The municipality and county were arenas for the development of common visions and initiatives – 'meaning-making-processes' based on negotiation and cooperation – which today we try to 'reproduce' in strategic and mobilizing communicative planning processes (Amdam and Amdam 2000, Amdam R. 2005).

This part of local political activity has however been neglected in Norway because of the challenges local and regional politicians face in respect of the way in which welfare production is allocated 'on contract from the state'. Instead of being entrepreneurial and problem-solving, most of that which passes for local political activity has degenerated into conflict prevention since such allocation conflicts, where resources are too small to produce 'win – win' situations, are never solved.

2.3 Possible municipal and regional structures

We have made a study for the *Norwegian ministry for municipalities and modernization* regarding possible municipal and regional political-administrative structures in Norway, see table 2 (Amdam et al 2014). A voluntary amalgamation process among municipalities started in 2014 and is supposed to end in 2020 and we have identified four possible outcomes. Without commando from state level we think that the number of municipalities will be refused from 426 to approximately 300 in 2020 and with a structure not unlike the situation today, over 100 of these will have under 5000 inhabitant compared to over 200 today.

Expert advice, like Rattsø (2014) and the Expert group (KMD 2014 a, b), is to organize municipalities according to regional daily life regions (focusing on tasks in the upper group on table 1). Two alternatives will reduce the number of municipalities to: a) approximately 150, accepting 70 regions/municipalities with less than 15.000 inhabitants or b) demanding that all must municipalities must have over 15.000 inhabitants and approximately 80 local/regional political-administrative units, over 30 of these very big in land, long distances and low population. A forth alternative with a flexible organization of responsibilities between municipal and county level is also discussed (Selstad et al 2012, Amdam et al 2014), but is not politically acceptable today. On national level political support for using national commanding power to change municipal structure is not present, but can be possible after the coming election to parliament.

Counties are also invited to participate in the restructuring process ending in 2020, but not with the same enthusiastic government support as on local level. One reason is that our blue-blue government would like to abolish the county level and have a two layer political system, but have not support for this strategy in parliament. Another reason is the view that a change on municipal level will promote change also of the county structure.

Norway has 19 counties, one of these the capital Oslo is both a county and a municipal. Regarding county responsibilities like college level education, public communications etc. expert groups have advised that counties should have more than 200.000 inhabitants. Today 5 counties have fewer inhabitants and voluntary amalgamation processes have been tried without success. One county Finnmark has only 70.000 inhabitants but localized next to the North Pole and with a tremendous land area and long distances this is a special situation, see map 1.

On county level we (Amdam 2014 a, b) have described five possible alternatives including the 0-alternative, see table 2. The county structure is and will be dependent of the changes of municipal structure and we have identified 5 combinations what is more or less possible or acceptable. I will use these alternatives in my discussion regarding the restructuring of Western Norway in part three of this paper.

0-alternative – the existing county structure is combined with 300 municipalities. As shown in table 3 this alternative is possible but also problematic due to small population counties will have problems regarding cooperation and responsibilities with bigger and fewer municipalities.

Alternative 1. Amalgamation. The number of counties is reduced to 10-15 by voluntary processes so that all of them have more than 200.000 inhabitants maybe except Finnmark/Troms. Responsibilities as today but increased population and land area can increase possibilities for transfer of responsibilities from national level and increased political power. If the number of municipalities is reduced to maybe 300 we would advice this change and have evaluated it in our analysis.

Alternative 2. Big regions. Regional structure is decided on national level base don moderen communications and geographic structure and not bound by county borders. Seven new regions are established with increased responsibilities compared to counties like hospitals, universities, communications, regional development and planning etc. This change have low possibility on the short term but if introduced we believe it will be in a combination with 80 – 100 municipalities.

Alternative 3. Big city and flexible regional organization. Like Selstad et al (2012) propose municipalities are divided into four groups according to size and the (4 – 6) biggest are given responsibilities like Oslo, they are both municipality and county. Outside cities municipalities cooperates and develop partnerships also with counties in a structure where responsibilities are related to the number of inhabitants, the principle that all municipalities have the same responsibilities is abolished. This alternative has been proposed by Rattsø (2014) but have little political support outside the bigger cities. We have evaluated this alternative with 150 – 170 municipalities.

Alternative 4. Flexible political organization. As in alternative 3 the general principle is abolished but municipalities have responsibilities according to their expertise and recourses in near cooperation with neighbors and the county. The county and its municipalities are together responsible for tasks given by the welfare state and local/regional challenges, in fact have an almost total responsibility for planning, development and welfare production according to local and regional needs and challenges. This idea was proposed by Selstad et al (2012). We analyses this alternative with 150 – 170 municipalities and 10 to 15 regions, but we recognize that this is a challenging alternative regarding political-administrative traditions in Norway.

On table 2 our summative evaluation of these alternatives is presented, see Amdam et al (2014). The criteria used are built on the proposal from the municipal amalgamation expert group (KMD 2014 a, b) and the discussion above.

Table 2. Alternatives and consequenses (Amdam et al 2014)

Alternative Criterion	0-alternative 19 counties ca. 300 municipals	Alt. 1. Amalgamasjon 10 - 15 regions ca. 300 municipasl	Alt. 2 Big regions 7 regions and ca. 80 municipasl	Alt. 3. Big city Flexible organization ca. 150 municipals	Alt. 4. Flexible organization 10 – 15 regions and 150 – 170 municipals
Democracy	Unchanged	Positive	Positive	Negative	Strong positive
Production of welfare	Negative	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive
Public administration	Unchanged	Positive	Strong positive	Strong negative	Positive
Planning and development	Unchanged	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive
Total	Negative	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive

3. Part 2. Regional structure and innovation

The term region can have many meanings. In our context here, it primarily refers to a geographical area between state and municipal level that appears as a homogeneous economic area in which business, industry, civil society and public sector activities are facing more or less the same challenges. The capability of a region to meet challenges is particularly dependent on how the various actors manage to produce and exploit competitive knowledge (Diez 2000). At the same time, challenges must be answered with strategies and measures in which the whole community involves itself and which are adapted to suit the situation and meet the challenges in the region in question (Stöhr 1990). The establishment and development of regional innovation systems requires certain conditions to be met (Nilsson & Uhlin 2002). There needs to be an active business and industry with a high degree of co-location and co-operation, plus active co-operation between various actors and organisations with competence in the field of developing and dispersing knowledge (Lagendijk & Cornford 2000, Storper 1997).

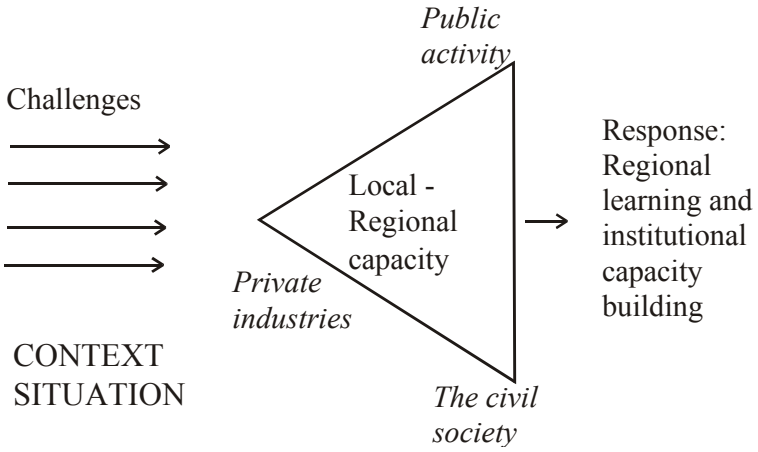


Figure 2. Regional capacity building (Amdam 2003).

In this article where the interconnection between economic and political-administrative structure is focus, the starting-point is that the ability of a region's business and industry for innovation and change is dependent on the conditions and changes in civil *society*, in public activity *(the public sector)* and in *business and industry* (see figure 2). If one transfers this perspective to competence and capacity development – to develop "learning regions" (Asheim 1996) or "clusters" (Porter 1990) - the challenges to the system can be illustrated as in figure 2. At regional level, there are three sub-systems which have to be made to function as well as possible as a collective unit: business and industry itself, public sector activity aimed at competence and capacity building, and the civil community. Each of these sub-systems is linked together with both larger (national and international) and smaller (local suppliers, etc.) systems that form the framework of conditions, challenges and changes (Stöhr 1990). In this perspective a region is a set of dynamic relations with a geographical concentration and the development capacity of a region can be changed by changing sub-systems. The basic question will be how to change the sub-system public activity by political and administrative reorganisation so that the regional capacity increases. How will the alternatives described in part one her function on the West Coast of Norway regarding this objective.

Co-operation, joint development work, the building of networks, interactive learning etc. seem today to be the main strategies in use to get such systems to function together and to further regional development (Asheim 1996, Asheim & Isaksen 1997, Healey *et al.* 1999, Koschatzky & Sternberg 2000). But basic to the whole process is the fact that it is human beings who develop, communicate, use and are bearers of knowledge and competence. Knowledge gathered in libraries, on the Internet, etc. is passive and does nothing to further regional development unless it is activated and integrated in social processes (Amdam 2000, 2003a, 2014), i.e. the development of human resources and competence. Even though it is possible for individuals to develop new knowledge, the recognition, further development, dissemination and use of such knowledge is linked to co-operation and networks

between people and organisations - to social processes that require nearness (Törnquist 1997). This is another perspective for the understanding of figure 2; the spatial integration of the three sub-systems will provide better opportunities for social processes and a higher intensity of intra-regional flows that will increase the abilities to cope with challenges. A political-administrative structure that is as identical as possible with the economic and social spatial structure can be an advantage with regard to development and competition. This perspective can be called "total integration" (Cornett in Bengs 2002). It can be necessary to use strong economic, social and political power to influence all three subsystems to "create" such a region and also to maintain it.

My focus is regional planning and development from a communicative viewpoint: whether it is possible politically and by using tools like political and administrative reorganisation to change structures and institutions and to get systems to produce other and better results for society than has been the case? According to both the perspectives presented above; what are the major changes and challenges in Western Norway and how can and should these influence the decisions on new administrative regions? The focus is Western Norway, which from the north comprises the four counties of Møre and Romsdal with Ålesund as the biggest town, Sogn and Fjordane, Hordaland (Bergen) and Rogaland (Stavanger). Based on figure 2 I will first present and discuss the structure and changes of the three sub-systems before discussing possibilities for geographical integration and change that can stimulate future development.

3.1 An overview of structural change in Western Norway

Looking at details regarding population and employment structure and change in Western Norway after the Second World War, some general characteristics are dominant (Amdam 2005):

- the South is growing while the North is stable or declining.
- the Coast is growing while the fjord and mountain areas are declining
- urban areas are growing and rural areas are declining

In post-industrial urban society there is a large difference between communities that are or can be integrated into these urban structures and communities on the outside. Almost all job and population growth is now taking place in these urban zones, while the rural communities on the outside show stagnation or decline. Selstad (2004) also reveals a strong geographical correlation between level of urbanity and population growth.

The process that increases the differences between the urban core and the rural periphery also influences Western Norway, which in my opinion is changing into three major structures, see figure 3:

a. The large-town belt from Stavanger to Bergen that has over 700.000 inhabitants and 2/3 of all jobs in Western Norway. The area is still not well integrated due to fjord crossings, but in the near future it will be possible to travel by car from Stavanger to Bergen in approximately 2 hours. Oil and related industries is the dominant cluster.
b. The small-town belt in the North West that includes Kristiansund, Molde and Ålesund and due to a new undersea car tunnel opened in 2008 also Ulsteinvik and Ørsta/Volda as the fourth region with more than 10.000 jobs. This area organise approximately 1/5 of the jobs in Western Norway, some of them related to oil supply and fishing abroad, and a population of approximately 200.000. It is less dynamic than the south and dominant clusters are marine industries related to fisheries, shipbuilding and support services to oil and gas activities.
c. The marginal rural area, comprising fjords, mountains and islands, inland of and between the urban structures with ¾ of the land, but with less than 1/5 of jobs and population. This area is divided into a lot of small job markets due to the geographical structure, and faces the same kind of challenges as the eastern mountain areas of Norway, see figure 3. Welfare production as well as primary production and tourism are the dominant industries.

In 1942 Inge Krokann (1982) gave the name "Det store hamskiftet" (literally, "the great shedding of skin") to Norway's industrial revolution, the change from traditional agriculture into modern industrial

production that started around 1860 in most rural areas in Norway. A corresponding change has been ongoing after the Second World War, from the modern to the post-modern society. In Western Norway this change is somehow different than in other parts of Norway. While primary production has been reduced on the same scale as the rest of Norway, secondary production (manufacturing industries) is still important and even small peripheral job regions are less dependent on public funding than corresponding regions in other parts of Norway (NOU 2004:2, Onsager & Selstad 2004).

CIVIL SOCIETY

An important task in local and regional capacity building is to increase social capital. Healey *et al.* (1999) define this task as influencing the three dimensions of institutional capital; knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilisation capability. A region with a high local openness combined with strong local capacity usually copes better than regions with strong local capacity but a local closure strategy or a region with high local openness but weak local capacity. Traditional rural regions typically have a combination of local closure (strategic focus on traditional activities) and weak local capacity due to class struggles and internal conflicts, while flexible rural regions are both open and have high local capacity – a common strategy for development that includes all important local shareholders. Important factors are nearness and identity. As illustrated by the authors of the history of Western Norway (Helle ed. 2006) the area has a strong common identity due to its common history, the combination of agriculture and fisheries, high equality, a sea-based system of transport and communications etc., but also strong local identities due to the difficult communications.

Maybe the major change in modern times is the shift in transport and communications from sea to land, from boat to car, which is still going on and will certainly have a strong influence on identity and social proximity. A strong indicator is the change in geographical labour markets. These changes are illustrated in figure 3, which shows labour market regions (municipalities where the centre is within commuting distance of the centre of the region) with more than 10.000 jobs in 2001 and compares these with (approximately) the corresponding commuting area in 1960 (Sandal 1977). Comparable changes are taking place in smaller labour markets.

Before the Second World War the sea and fjords were the dominant systems of transport and communications in Western Norway. Only Bergen, Stavanger and Åndalsnes (Møre and Romsdal) had railroads to Oslo and no north-south connection due to the high cost of fjord and mountain crossing. Also proper roads were rare and found mostly near the bigger towns. Ferries for fjord crossings were extremely scarce before 1960 (Nerheim 2006).

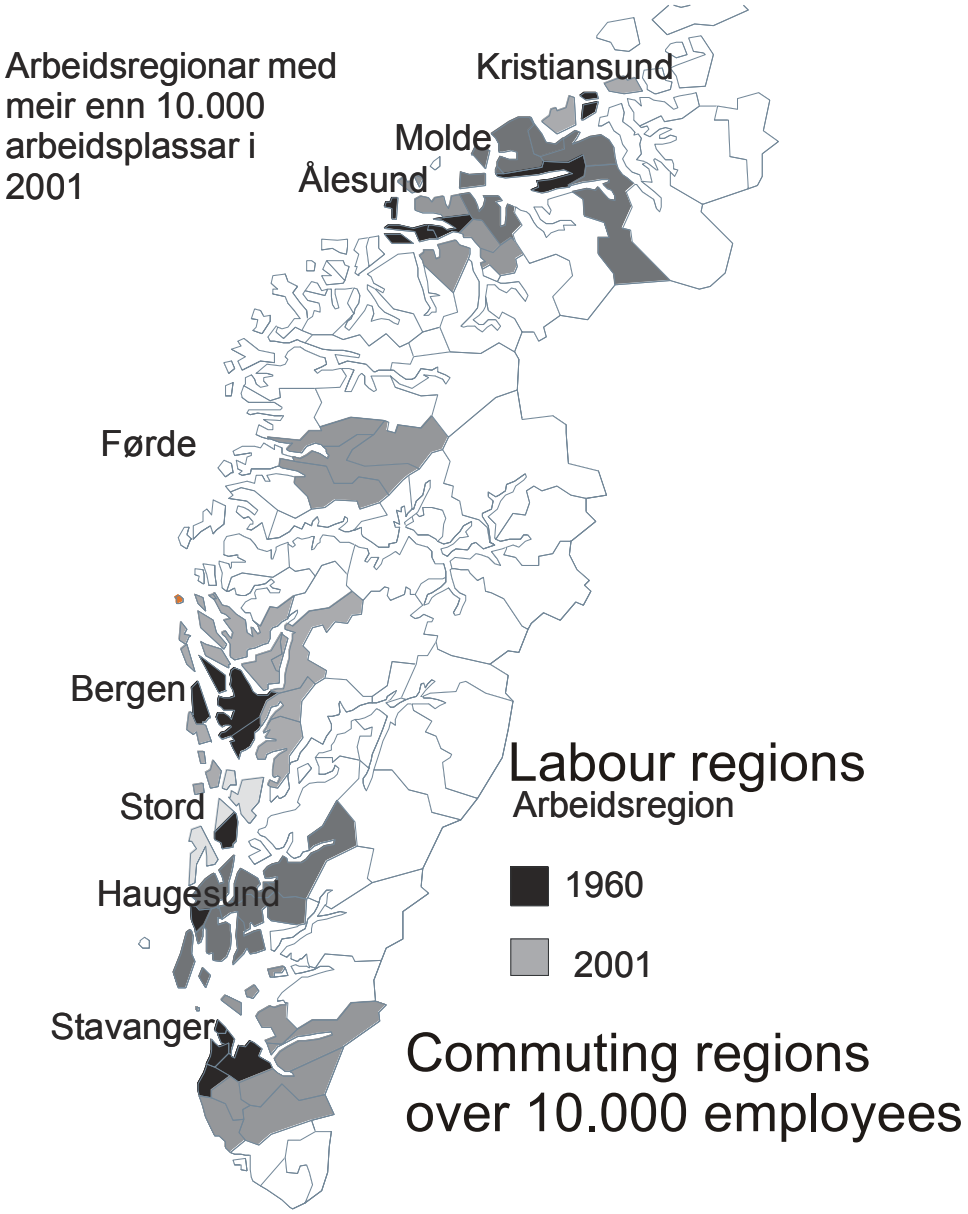


Figure 2. Labour market regions, over 10.000 employees in 2001 (Amdam 2005).

From 1960 onwards there has been a continuous political effort to change the transport system from boats to roads and cars, but Western Norway is still lagging well behind the eastern and central part of Norway. To go by car from Stavanger to Kristiansund using the road system in the four counties will take approximately 12 hours and involve 6 fjord crossings using ferries. Nevertheless, this still represents a tremendous change from the situation before 1960, when only boat transport was possible. Some regions implemented the shift from sea to land transport earlier than others, particularly the urban regions. But still the commuting regions were small in 1960 due to the lack of proper road systems and the fact that cars were scarce, even around cities (at least in the Norwegian context) like Bergen and Stavanger (see figure 3). In fact Sandal (1977) has shown that in 1960 the commuting areas in practice were a lot smaller than the theoretical area.

The most profound structural change in Western Norway after 1960 is the tremendous geographical growth of the commuting areas. But as shown by Gammelsæter *et al.* (2004) and Amdam *et al.* (2000), fjords and mountains still act as borders and result in labour regions that are a lot smaller than the direct distance as the crow flies. Especially in the fjord and island areas the change from boat/ferry to car is still a thing of the distant future due to a lack of proper investments and political priority.

Some integration processes are ongoing due to changes in transport and communication patterns. The most dominant one is the Main Coast Road project from Stavanger to Kristiansund (south-north). The plan is to make this road "ferry free" (6 ferries today) and have two-lane standard (only 40% today), a process that can take 20 to 30 years dependent on national priorities of infrastructure investment. But if plans are fulfilled the road between Bergen and Stavanger can be ferry-free in 10 years' time, reducing the travel time by car from over 4 to close on 2 hours. This process will strengthen the coast and the south even more and can create a very strong urban belt from Bergen to Stavanger. This will also increase the need for common strategies for development and planning and an administrative integration to meet such challenges. A corresponding integration process in the north is more difficult, due to lower population and higher costs.

The other process is better communications along the fjords – east-west, to integrate the fjords into the more dynamic coastal areas and to integrate small town labour markets, like Kristiansund/Molde, Førde/Florø and Ulstein/Volda. But these changes will mainly have local effects. The challenge is that over 70% of the land areas of Western Norway have less than 20% of the population. These rural areas are so distant from major towns and town belts that major commuting integration is very unlikely in the near and distant future because the political power is now predominantly in the urban areas illustrated in figure 3.

In 2002 Western Norway had 40 labour market regions, 14 of these were single peripheral municipalities and 18 consisted of less than 4 municipalities. New infrastructure as well as population change will certainly reduce the number of real labour market regions and the expansion of the dominant urban regions will continue as illustrated in figure 3. But this will mainly lead to a better opportunity for integration in the urban areas in the south and north, while the rural areas "in between" can be left behind.

Local and regional newspaper structure is another indicator of the integration of civil society. Both Bergen and Stavanger have strong regional newspapers that dominate their corresponding counties and also the southern part of Sogn and Fjordane (Bergens Tidende). In the northern part three regional newspapers share the market, each based in a small town (Kristiansund, Molde and Ålesund), the biggest Sunnmørsposten in Ålesund is also dominant in the northern part of Sogn and Fjordane. The north-eastern part of Møre and Romsdal is dominated by the regional newspaper in Trondheim. At the local level there are a tremendous number of small newspapers covering one to a couple of municipalities, especially in the North West. This is a strong indicator of the lack of social integration in Western Norway and also of counties like Møre and Romsdal and Sogn and Fjordane.

On the other hand the regional structure of the state broadcasting company NRK adheres strictly to county borders and acts as a strong integrator in a county like Sogn and Fjordane. Looking at the media as an indicator of integration, Western Norway has no common structure that links information flows spatially. In reality Western Norway can be divided into 6 regional newspaper regions, two large and one small in the south and three small in the north corresponding to the urban structure (see figure 3), and maybe an emerging small region in the middle with Førde as the core. A lot of private services are also structured in this way since they use these newspapers as important parts of their marketing.

4. Part 3. Future structure and integration

Real spatial integration of economic, political and civil regions is a major challenge. As shown in figure 2, a possible integration that can increase the capacity for regional development must also include a social integration (common identity etc.) and a political/administrative integration into a region where all actors work together to meet challenges and respond to opportunities. A spatial "political" integration is not enough; for example, according to Cornett (in Bengs 2002) a "total" integration is characterised by:

- The development of specific geographically defined systems of production such as industrial districts, clusters of industries, or systems of innovation.
- A system of urban networks defined according to specific functional links.
- The availability of a relevant regional infrastructure linking the analysed areas together.
- Last but not least, the intensity of intra-regional flows relative to outside flows can be considered the "conditio sine qua non" when we talk of a spatially integrated area.

In short and according to Healey *et al.* (1999) the internal knowledge structure, relations and mobilisation activities must be stronger in the region than between the region and the outside, and the region must not include sub-regions that are stronger on their own than as a part of the whole. A common commuting area that has functioned over a long period is typically one such integrated region, but can these characteristics also include a band of partly overlapping commuting regions, since there will be demands both in the south and north to create real "town belt regions"? Can territorially distant areas like the north and south of Western Norway be integrated in the future by better communications etc. in spite of the dominance of Oslo as the capital and communication node? And can such an economic integration lead to a common understanding of the situation and the challenges faced by all involved and in that way lead to social, political and administrative change that can empower the area?

Based on the arguments above and the pattern shown in figure 3 I will analytically divide Western Norway into three zones regarding situation and challenges and also discuss whether and how it can be possible to meet the characteristics of a "total integration" as described by Cornett. The three zones are a) the south-west; the urban belt from Stavanger to Bergen, b) the north-west; the small town belt from Kristiansund to Ørsta/Volda and c) the "rural remainder".

4.1 From small-scale manufacturing to a diversified "metropolitan" region – the South-West?

One type of region and a regional development that maybe is historically characteristic for Western Norway as a whole is "Small-scale manufacturing" (Nilsson 1997), also called "Flexible rural areas". Typical is production on a small scale, flexibility, labour intensive production, small cooperating companies, etc. – often "Third Italy" is used as a model for areas like Sunnmøre (north) and Jæren (south) in Western Norway (Asheim & Isaksen 1997). With regard to manufacturing, the difference between the factory and the workshop is often used as an illustration of the difference between "English" and "French" industrialisation. Except for the metal and textile factories, most of the industries in Western Norway have grown out of workshops and in tight cooperation with demanding customers (fishermen etc.) (Wicken 1997). The "clusters" (Porter 1990) we have today are the result of such processes (Reve *et al.* 1992). But some regions are more "dynamic" than others and maybe also more lucky regarding specialisations, which also explains some of the dynamics of regional concentration (Selstad 2004).

Jæren (South-west) is an example of demands for new equipment from agriculture that leads to new industries and national dominance in the production of such equipment (Asheim & Isaksen 1997). But it is also the history of "English" localisation of oil industries and a flexibility regarding new markets and challenges that has created an impressive cluster of maritime oil activities. In the region around Stavanger there are today 600 large and small companies with approximately 33.000 jobs in the petroleum cluster. In a Norwegian context the Stavanger region is a large-scale manufacturing region

with a high proportion of foreign ownership, but still with a lot of the characteristics of a flexible and dynamic rural region.

Above I have shown that changes in transport and communications in the near future will integrate the commuting areas from Stavanger to Bergen. It will be difficult to live in Stavanger and commute daily to Bergen, but by living in the middle of the area it can marginally be possible to commute both to Bergen and Stavanger and not spend more time than in many metropolitan areas. But not only must the ferry-free road system be built, road taxes must also be reduced to an acceptable level.

One important demand regarding integration is the intensity of intra-regional flows, networks and infrastructure and this kind of integration has not been achieved today. For example, air transport is a lot more intensive between Bergen and Oslo or Stavanger and Oslo than between Bergen and Stavanger and this is not compensated by land or sea transport. What are common to both Bergen and Stavanger are of course services but also oil related and marine activities (Selstad 2004). Stavanger dominates the oil cluster, but on the coast companies in Bergen, Sunnhordaland, Haugesund and Stavanger are cooperating and competing when it comes to production and services to both the oil industry and other North Sea activities. Shipbuilding has to some extent changed into oil rig building. Fish farming is integrated into large international companies etc. The universities and other knowledge and research organisations in the area compete internally but to a lesser extent than with Oslo and Trondheim and internationally. To increase economic growth a stronger regional cooperation and integration as well as specialisation in activities that have a strong regional environment, such as oil and maritime activities, should be promoted.

Western Norway has no diversified metropolitan core like Boston that can function as a growth centre (Nilsson 1998), but is that possible in the future? Bergen may have ambitions, has a good university environment, but to a great extent functions as a campus for youth from Western Norway before getting work in the Oslo area.

What are the possibilities that Western Norway can meet the challenges of the post-industrial society and change into a knowledge-based diversified metropolitan region? In fact the term metropolitan will be an exaggeration, since the total population of Western Norway is only 1.1 million and as mentioned above, only South-Western Norway with its approximately 700.000 inhabitants can be integrated into a region that possibly can function as a diversified urban region. To do so, two strategies must be implemented, a) regional enlargement with the development of an integrated polycentric core, and b) knowledge growth. This means tremendous investments in communications, especially road and tunnel building, and universities; education and research. The area already has a high knowledge base when it comes to both petroleum activities and marine and maritime activities.

Since economic integration is possible in the future, can a political/administrative change promote this development? In reality the major challenge to the area comes from the capital Oslo and overseas regions; an integrated South-West region may be the only region nationally that can compete with Oslo. But to do so the region must develop a common strategy and also have common means to achieve goals and tasks and this can most easily be organised by a joint political/administrative structure. But a common “enemy” is maybe not enough in an area with strong local and regional identity that from days of old has been “organised” around the fjord systems and where Bergen and Stavanger from time immemorial have competed economically and politically. Still the area is split into two by regional newspapers, based in Bergen and Stavanger, which very much create their own political agendas and “internal” conflicts. An amalgamation “from above” before the area has been integrated with regard to transport systems, economic activity as well as socially can easily increase the level of conflict between the different identity regions, between the two large towns and between urban and rural areas.

4.2 Growing self –developing urbanised rural areas in the North-West?

So what about the North-West? Is this a stagnating, formerly flexible, rural area with little dynamics in the small towns? While the South-West has scale and is already growing, the North West's lack of scale and growth is a profound challenge. The geography also makes it difficult and very expensive to expand labour markets and to integrate the urban areas. While the South-West is still growing when it comes to advanced services, Oslo functions as the service provider for the North-West and with small local growth in advanced services and jobs. The North-West is even among the most difficult regions in Norway with regard to communications (Selstad 2004). The change in the pattern of communications from sea to land is still going on and will do so for a long time. The area is also very fragmented with regard to identity, dialects, newspapers, commuting areas etc. (Gammelsæter *et al.* 2004).

Fisheries, maritime and oil related activities integrate the small town band from Kristiansund to Ørsta/Volda and also most of the coast in Sogn and Fjordane. The Kristiansund region is enjoying a "fresh start" related to oil and gas activities, the Ålesund and Ulstein regions are dominant in fisheries as well as in the building, equipping and use of supply boats for the oil industry. Ownership is a challenge in the area since a lot of the dominant companies have been taken over by international companies like Rolls Royce (who have their maritime headquarters in Ulsteinvik), Aker Group etc. The region is an important international cluster when it comes to specialised boats and equipment for fisheries and oil activities in climatically challenging areas. The major challenges for this cluster/area are to achieve an increase in competence, knowledge, research, economic support etc. so as to be dynamic on the international market in the future and in that way create conditions for stability and growth in the region – to become a flexible and dynamic "rural" area in the future. The demands and challenges are greater than in the South-West, as is the need for the support of regional and national policies.

With proper investments in communications it should be possible to better integrate the area from Kristiansund, Molde, Ålesund, Ulstein to Volda (see figure 3). By road building and tunnels under fjords to get rid of ferries it can be possible to reduce travel time to maybe less than 3 hours compared to over 4 today. The required investment is possibly 30.000 mill NOK and the population that can be integrated into this zone only numbers 200.000. It is not possible to finance this kind of investment without heavy national investments. And the integration of transport in itself gives no guarantee for growth and dynamics. Interestingly the North-West town belt is already politically integrated as a County, but has a lot of political conflicts between the three fjord and town systems. Economically one could argue that the coastline of Sogn and Fjordane also is integrated into such a unit. On the other hand the fjord- and mountainous eastern part of Møre and Romsdal has a lot in common with the small regions in Sogn and Fjordane and the inner part of the South-West.

Gammelsæter *et al.* (2004) argue for an amalgamation of the North-West into one region due to the many common challenges that especially are different from those facing the large urban area in the south. Such a region will be dominated by rural small and medium-size municipalities and commuting regions. Of a total population of approximately 360.000 inhabitants, only approximately 150.000 live in the commuting areas of the three towns (see figure 3). If one focuses on common interests, the small town belt on the coast may have other interests in the future than the rural periphery, especially in a possible future where globalisation and economic development is more dependent on what is happening in the commuting area than in the marginal rural surroundings.

4.3 What about the traditional rural areas in Western Norway?

The areas outside the South and North town belts, what do they have in common apart from challenges involving stagnation and decline? The area consists of two economic (commuting) regions in the north, Sunndalsøra and Surnadal, that in the future can be integrated into the Trondheim region due to changes in transport and communications (see figure 3). In the middle are 7 economic regions from Odda in the south to Nordfjord in the north, or the County of Sogn and Fjordane together with two

economic regions in Hordaland, with a total population of approximately 150.000 inhabitants. This area has from days of old been dominated by Bergen as the service and administrative town and connections are still strong. Each of these 7 economic regions even has areas that are outside commuting distance from "local region centre", the lack of an integrated transport network is profound.

Employment structure and challenges also vary and one can point to the fact that the only feature they have in common is that they are all outside commuting distance of a town with at least 10.000 inhabitants in the urban area! But this characteristic is something these regions have in common with most of the mountain area of South Norway. Compared to remote regions in the east of Norway the marginal regions in Western Norway have a strong tradition of manufacturing industries. As shown above and exemplified by Sogn and Fjordane County the primary industries have been reduced as in the rest of Norway, but even in these small regions manufacturing industries are still important.
While the opportunities for integration that can stimulate growth are high for the urban South-West, and maybe for the urban-rural North West, the marginal rural areas of the South Coast face even greater challenges. The area is very fragmented with regard to dialects, identities, local newspapers etc., has a lot of commuting regions with few possibilities for integration into bigger urban regions, large in land and sea area and small in population. Some of these regions like Årdal, Sunndal, Odda are dominated by large-scale metal production that is going through downscaling processes. Other regions are very dependent on agriculture and/or fisheries. Since the population is small, even minor changes in employment can lead to significant growth or decline.

Further decline in primary industries will continue; also a decline in the established "English" pattern of manufacturing industries will certainly happen and with few possibilities for new manufacturing jobs as compensation. But small scale and a tradition of social equality and flexibility, the will to live in a certain region, are maybe the most important means for development. The national change from a rather young population focused on manufacturing to an older population focused on welfare and dependent on oil incomes, combined with growing social conflicts in the rest of the world, maybe offers new opportunities for small "safe" rural communities.

Rural communities in Western Norway have historically few of the social differences of the typical big farmer – land worker communities of most of inland Scandinavia. Farms were small, all inhabitants equally poor, but also open to the wider community since the sea transport system was perfect for jobs as seamen, fishermen etc. (Gammelsæter *et al.* 2004, Kolle & Haaland 2006). Healey *et al.* (1999) characterise such communities as having strong local social capacity combined with local openness. This is an advantage also with regard to the integration of "differences", as we see few challenges involving foreign workers in industry etc. As the number of old people will double in the coming 30 years, social unrest maybe will increase in the typical "old town areas" in the south – perhaps the very socially secure fjord and island communities in Western Norway can be places to escape from a turbulent world? Can care, tourism etc. become growth industries for at least some rural regions?

What is clear is that a "total" integration of this area according to Cornett's demands is not possible, but some of these areas can possibly be integrated into the more dynamic urban areas in the south and the north.

5. Conclusion. Possible regional organisation in the future

Due to the spatial structure of Western Norway the area can be divided into three zones with different situations and challenges now and in the future. A political structure that corresponds fully to this structure is not realistic or even advisable, mainly due to the geographical structure of the "rural remainder", see figure 3. But the spatial structure shown above can be used to discuss pros and cons regarding proposals for a new political-administrative structure see part 1. The 0-alternative is also a possibility if the ongoing voluntary municipal restructuring process ends by small changes in 2020.

Western Norway as one region. This alternative is called "Big regions" in part 1 and is based on proposals in Selstad (2004) and his alternative with 7 regions in Norway, and an integration of all of the 4 counties on the West Coast. This political structure will be dominated by the south west town belt that will have more than 2/3 of the population. It is very uncertain that the northern part of Møre and Romsdal will join such a construction due to its proximity to Trondheim. The large western region will be a strong region nationally with over 1 mill inhabitants, but if no proper understanding is developed between south and north, coast and inland, town and country, there can be a lot of conflicts that will reduce the external and internal political power of the region. The major challenge is a lack of integration south-north, for a lot of areas Oslo is closer in travel time than Bergen or Stavanger. The potential power struggle between Bergen and Stavanger can easily reduce the necessary political focus on the rural area and the north-west. Using Cornett's criteria the region fulfils the requirement of a geographically defined system of production, but the three other demands are not fulfilled now, nor can they be in the near future. Looking at the demands for a coordinated economic development a political region for most of Western Norway should be positive; the challenges will be the lack of intra-regional flows, of integrated urban networks and of a linking infrastructure.

Two regions; South and North. This alternative correspond to alternative 1 (Amalgamation) in part one, but with flexible change of borders. The south will consist of Rogaland and Hordaland and parts or all of Sogn and Fjordane. The population will be approximately 800.000 inhabitants. The two cities of Bergen and Stavanger will dominate the region and if they can cooperate and integrate activities as well as plans into a functional polycentric structure, this can be a rich and dynamic region that can even stimulate the marginal areas and integrate them more fully than today. A full integration of the most distant areas north, east and south will need at lot of investments in infrastructure and also a policy concerning decentralisation, cooperation and the expansion of urban networks that will be very demanding.

The north will include the rest of Sogn and Fjordane and Møre and Romsdal, maybe apart from the Sunndal and Surnadal regions – and have a population of 250.000 to 350.000 inhabitants. The small towns of the northern region do not have the dynamics today to stimulate the area and an integrated transport network will be difficult to establish. The area has more in common as a political empowerment structure with regard to national and maybe international policy than with economic and social integration. While Sunnmøre and Ålesund traditionally have been "on their own" (Gammelsæter at al 2004), the northern part of the area is closely linked to Trondheim, while the southern part has close links with Bergen and most of the area has stronger flows to Oslo than to these two cities. The region can be full of internal conflicts that can result in passivity and a lack of political focus on economic and social development. Only by heavy investment in infrastructure and coordinated polycentric development can it be possible to establish an urban core that can stimulate regional integration and development.

Three regions; This alternative correspond to alternative 1 (Amalgamation) in part one. Møre and Romsdal and Rogaland as they are now, and an amalgamation of Hordaland and Sogn and Fjordane – maybe with some border corrections. This alternative will separate Bergen and Stavanger and can reduce the synergic effects of a polycentric integration as shown above. Both Møre and Romsdal and the new "mid-region" will have internal conflicts between town and country, coast and fjord and in the north also between the small towns. The positive effects of this structure can be a clearer structure regarding town and hinterland and can stimulate that integration.

Also other alternatives like a two-layer system with large municipalities that correspond to economic regions as well as division between cities and rural areas (alternative Big cities in part 1) have been discussed (Amdam *et al.* 2000), but these are today politically unrealistic. The challenge is of course that while economic integration is a continuous and ongoing process in an area like Western Norway, where major changes in transport and communications are still taking place, where international competition results in activities being clustered geographically and strengthens urban areas, the social integration in particular is lagging behind. Due to the continuous economic and social changes, any political integration into stable spatial governing units is difficult. This is also apparent in the

fragmented state sectors' own spatial organisation processes. Using Cornett's criteria the possible alternatives for integrated political-administrative regions are not fulfilled now, nor can they be in the near future.

There is no clear "best" alternative for regional political and administrative organisation in Western Norway that can build on an existing "total" integration, mainly due to a lack of infrastructure, networks and intra-regional flows. The region has a lot of conflict lines and differences of interests between coast and inland, urban and rural areas, south and north and maybe only a strong common enemy (the capital Oslo) can unite the area. I have tried to illustrate structures that are possible in the future; the challenge is that they do not exist today but they can be developed by heavy investments and involvement. Instead of establishing political/administrative structures that "fit" existing social and economic patterns, political/administrative reorganisation would be an "instrument" and part of the strategies for the creation of new intra-connected regions, regions that will be relational and geographically dynamic. If so, new models of geographical political and administrative organisation are needed (Farsund *et al.* 2002). Particularly the possibilities for polycentric cooperation and organisation as promoted by the EU system (Bengs 2002, Selstad 2004), can provide new opportunities but will also inevitably create new challenges.

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