

## **Skedsmo as municipal test pilot – Norwegian experiments in strategic spatial planning**

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*"A test pilot is an aviator who flies new and modified aircraft in specific maneuvers, known as flight test techniques or FTTs, allowing the results to be measured and the design to be evaluated." (Wikipedia, Test Pilot)*

In 2008 the Norwegian Parliament adopted a new Planning and Building Act. A few years after its implementation, the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation commissioned an evaluation of the act's planning section, in compliance with established management routines. The task was conveyed by The Research Council of Norway, and formulated as a research based evaluation. Through this research project, which the authors of this paper are involved in, the efficiency of the new planning system will be investigated by analyzing its basic parts. However, in real life it is the planner, not the researcher, who sees to it that all issues and questions are taken into consideration. The act's emphasis on comprehensiveness requires a methodology that allows the consistency of practical planning to be measured. The aim of this paper is to discuss to what extent the new and modified system allows planning to be carried out in a consistent way.

The municipality of Skedsmo, bordering the capital city of Oslo, was one of the first to test the tools of the new and modified planning legislation. The processes the municipality were engaged in at the time when the act was adopted makes it

particularly relevant. The problem of consistency will be investigated by analysing ongoing territorial processes, the planning tools offered to handle them, and the strategic maneuvering in the face of changing circumstances.

#### *Territorial restructuring processes in Skedsmo*

The inauguration of the new national airport in 1998 triggered a series of processes that represent the main drivers for planning to deal with. When a new train tunnel was opened, one year later, Lillestrøm (Skedsmo's municipal centre) was connect to the inter-city system, with a mere 8 minutes travel to Oslo Central Station, and hosting the only stop of the airport high speed shuttle. In the middle of these national investments everything seemed set for "planning by the book": development of a new knowledge economy, transition to low emission society, and compact city development around a transport node. However, old structural conditions put constraints on the land use, representing considerable strategic challenges. Strømmen, a nearby former administrative centre, with a strong local identity and a thriving commercial development finds itself out of place, bypassed by the fast-rail transportsystem. The Kjeller area manifests a footprint from the Cold War, with its isolated military/nuclear research centres and the persistency of the old military airport. Third, the transition from rubber to rails meets strong resistance by the fast-growing suburban area of Skedsmokorset, where a third of the population lives, along a car based transport corridor connected to Oslo. This situation makes the case of Skedsmo particularly suited for assessing how the modernisation of planning in the Norwegian model addresses these challenges.

#### *A new and modified planning legislation*

A universal problem in urban planning is the gap between comprehensive land use planning at the municipal level and the project-based planning processes. Municipalities in the Nordic countries are large in area, and may comprise several urban cores, and suburban and rural areas. The 2008 Planning & Building Act supplied the municipal planner's tool box with two distinctive instruments for planning at the intermediate level: The *Kommunedelplan* (§11-1) and the *Områdereguleringsplan* (§12-2). The first alternative is linked to the comprehensive planning tradition, in practice it will be worked out as a de-scaling of the overall local politician-led planning

to respond to the challenges of a structural unit, or a distinct urban, suburban, industrial, recreational or rural sub-area. The second type addresses the same types of area, but is linked to the classical physical land use planning tradition, and can be characterized as an augmentation of the detailed physical/technical plan, also legally binding. The area regulation tool was introduced in the 2008 Act, and our ambition is to observe how this type of planning is carried out in a municipality, as a strategic tool to fill the gap between comprehensive land use control and the initiatives on the ground.

### *Specific maneuvers*

The municipal authorities have embarked on a two-sided strategy: to perform its proper role within the capital region's transportation and housing infrastructure needs, but at the same time to develop jobs and institutions within the municipality, and to make the municipal centre, Lillestrøm (pop. 20.000) , into "City nr 2" in the capital region. Now the problem for Skedsmo is that its settlement structure does not conform to the "one center"-ambitions. Lillestrøm has today less than 40% of the municipality's total population, and is also physically confined by a river on the West side with a neighboring municipality (Rælingen) and an airport area on the Northern side. Only a thorough high-rise strategy could fulfill the ambitions of establishing Lillestrøm as "city nr. 2", and this alternative has its political expenditures as well, as the majority of voters live outside the city centre. Thus, to work out a counter-strategy to the residential-area-only option, the municipal leadership has decided to use the new planning tool of Area Regulation Planning, In addition to the city centre, it has identified 8 localities to be planned according to the municipality's overall strategy. At the same time, Skedsmo is engaging in a regional level transportation planning, taking place at different levels, which in the given situation means finding solutions that may turn the commuting directions, or at least balance them.

At this stage, a first round of document analysis and interviews with municipal planners and politicians has been carried out (autumn 2015). We find the analysis of Skedsmo interesting for several reasons: First, the municipality's predicament is of generic interest: Outside the capital and metropolitans centers, smaller cities and municipalities strive to become attractive. Second, the use of a new planning tool in

this respect will be well worth studying – in the interface between traditional land-use planning and the strategic planning traditions. Third, we find the interdisciplinary approach stimulating and well suited to the analysis of a local political system, a local planning culture, Skedsmos’s professional and political linkages to a wider regional dynamic, and at the same time the attempts at mobilizing sub-municipal energies. However, the project that Skedsmo has embarked on will also have its challenges and pitfalls, and in the paper presentation will offer a more complete analysis of the ongoing process.