

How is the *Regional Planning Strategy*, a new tool in the planning and building act 2008, been implemented in Norwegian counties? To what degree is the regional planning strategy functioning according to the planning and building acts' intentions?

Ulla Higdem¹, Aksel Hagen²

¹⁻² *Lillehammer University College*

¹*ulla.higdem@hil.no*

²*aksel.hagen@hil.no*

The new Planning and Building Act of Norway (PBA) from 2008, introduced a new tool in regional planning, named the Regional Planning Strategy (RPS) (PBA 2008). This paper aims at evaluating how this new tool is understood, interpreted and implemented as practices. The evaluation is conducted as a part of, but also as a supplementary research project to the comprehensive evaluation EVAPLAN2008 of the planning section of PBA. EVAPLAN2008 revolves around the extent to which PBA works in line with the intentions of local and regional planning.

Planning legislation in Europe is constantly changing, ranging from adjustments to major amendments (Miljøverndepartementet 2007-2008). A common feature is a call for coherence and comprehensiveness enabled by strategic planning (Salet and Faludi 2000). Our RSP evaluation of the Norwegian adaption to this European trend will contribute to a broader understanding of how the concept of strategic planning is understood and implemented within different institutional contexts. We will draw lessons learned from relevant evaluations in European countries, and in particular from countries that have similar planning strategy provisions, such as Denmark (Sehested, Groth, and Caspersen 2008).

Document studies and interviews from the first round of regional planning strategy work in the Norwegian counties 2011/2012 constitute the basis of the evaluation, together with experiences from the trial period (Skjeggedal et al. 2011),

which formed the basis of the ministry's directing document (Miljøverndepartementet 2012) . It may also be appropriate to interview people who have experience with relevant planning practices and implementation research in other countries.

Theoretical approach – explanation approaches

Leaning on theories of implementation (Hill 2013), earlier research of regional planning (c.f.Vareide, Møller, and Jensen 2002, Higdem 2007), a national survey in 2012/13 on the status of regional planning strategies (Langset and Nilsen 2013), and an evaluation of one county (Higdem and Hagen 2015), we expect to find variations in how the RPS is implemented in the 19 counties of Norway. Consequently, we expect to find differences in whether or [to what extent](#) the counties' RPS' function related to the PBA's intentions. Variations in implementation can be explained from several approaches. First, implementation theory provides explanations in such top-down situations. Second, the notion of path-dependency (Page 2006) enables explanations on the direction and pace of change as a long established planning practice permits. Third, implementing a new tool calls for paying attention to its origin. RPS can be understood as a 'model that flows'(Røvik 2002) between different institutional contexts, as European countries, and how models are translated (Røvik 1998) and hence transformed and adapted into another context. Finally, theories of governance (c.f.Sørensen and Torfing 2007, Albrechts, Healey, and Kunzmann 2003, Healey 2006, Veggeland 2004) help to understand the complexity of actors at regional level involved in decision-making of the RPS, and therefore influence how a new tool is interpreted, shaped and implemented as practice. At a later stage, this project will depict what sort of strategic planning Norway is aiming at represented by the RPS (c.f.Salet and Faludi 2000, Healey 2006).

The intentions of the PBA

The main goals for, and the intentions behind inserting such a new tool into the regional planning system was to make the political priorities for regional planning more targeted and increase the regional planning's efficiency and flexibility (Miljøverndepartementet 2007-2008), which were heavily debated issues within the former PBA and its practices (c.f.Falleth and Johnsen 1996, Higdem 2001, Asmervik and Hagen 1997, Vike 1995, Røsnes 2001). Additionally it was important to establish

the principle that regional elected bodies must have responsibility for the development of the region. In short, *'the planning strategy shall give an account of important regional development trends and challenges, assess long-term development potentials and determine which issues are to be addressed through further regional planning'*(PBA 2008, 7-1). Finally, the RPS were understood as a better instrument for implementing central state's policies and a tool for coordination between the major planning actors of the region (Miljøverndepartementet 2004).

Figure 1 describes the new regional planning system from 2008. The RPS is a tool defined as a *strategy* of the planning activities, *not a plan*, and now the only mandatory element in the regional planning-system. Figure 1 illustrates that the start-up of an actual regional (master) plan of a territory or within a sector or a theme, is the result of the Regional planning strategy.

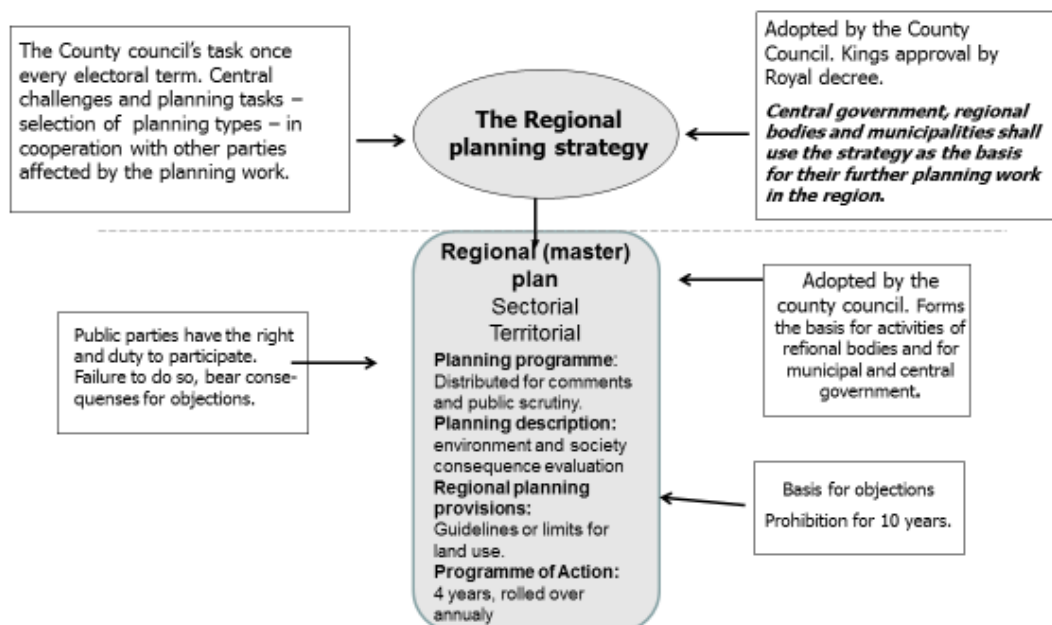


Figure 3: The Regional planning system of Norway (Higdem 2012).

Increasing the efficiency of regional planning is done by abandoning the former mandatory comprehensive county plan, and replacing it by deliberate regional planning related to some identified vital challenges. Hence, the RPS is to give priority to planning by necessity rather than planning by duty. Flexibility is to be achieved by giving the

cooperating parties of the RPS the opportunity to choose between planning forms in accordance with the PBA.

The regional planning strategy shall also contain an overview of how the prioritized planning functions shall be followed up, and the arrangements for public participation in the planning work.

Even though the county council is the regional planning authority which adopts the RPS, the RPS is to be prepared in close cooperation with the municipalities and the regional state or other state bodies. The county council may also invite other organisations and institutions to participate in the preparations of the RPS. Finally, the King approves the Regional planning strategy. The King's approval implies a third intention of the lawmakers, namely *commitment* from the central government to regional planning, which influence the aim of increased efficiency of regional planning. When the approval is given, the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation in cooperation with the other ministries have assessed that the RPS do not counteract central Government's goals. Moreover, equally as important, the approval commits the central and the regional state bodies to the coming planning activities.

- PBA 2008. *Lov om planlegging og byggesaksbehandling. [The Planning-and building act]*.
- Albrechts, L, P Healey, and K.R Kunzmann. 2003. "Strategic Spatial Planning and Regional Governance in Europe." *APA Journal* 69 (2):113-129.
- Asmervik, S, and A Hagen. 1997. "Retorikk og planlegging. Fylkesplanen for Oppland - en plan som svikter sitt retoriske potensiale. [Rhetoric and planning]." *Rhetorica Scandinavia* (4):37 - 51.
- Falleth, E.I, and V Johnsen. 1996. Samordning eller retorikk? Evaluering av fylkesplanene 1996 - 99. [Coordination or rhetoric? Evaluation of County plans 1996-99]. Oslo: Norsk Institutt for By- og Regionforskning.
- Healey, P. 2006. "Network Complexity and the Imaginative Power of Strategic Spatial Planning." In *The Network Society. A new context for planning?*, edited by Louis Albrechts and Seymour J. Mandelbaum, 146-160. London: Routledge.

- Higdem, U. 2001. "Planlegging på fylkesnivå. [Planning on County level]." In *planlegging.no! Innføring i samfunnsplanlegging.*, edited by N Aarsæter and A Hagen, 131 - 153. Oslo: Kommuneforlaget.
- Higdem, U. 2007. "Regional Partnerships and their Constructions and Implementations. A Case-study of the Counties of Oppland, Hedmark and Østfold." Dr. Scient, Institutt for Landskapsplanlegging/ Dept. of Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning, Universitet for Miljø-og Biovitenskap/ University of Life Sciences.
- Higdem, U, and A Hagen. 2015. Oppfølging av Regional planstrategi for Oppland, 2012 - 2016 - en vurdering. In *Working paper*. Lillehammer: Høgskolen i Lillehammer.
- Higdem, Ulla. 2012. "Regional planlegging." In *Utfordringer for Norsk planlegging. Kunnskap - bærekraft - demokrati*, edited by Nils Aarsæter, E. I Falleth, Torill Nyseth and Ronny Kristiansen, 102-120. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Høyskoleforlaget.
- Hill, Michael. 2013. *The Public Policy Process*. 6 ed. Essex: Pearson.
- Langset, Magne, and Jørund K. Nilsen. 2013. Kartlegging av status i arbeidet med regionale og kommunale planstrategier. Oslo: Nvi-Analyse AS.
- Miljøverndepartementet. 2004. Ot.prp.nr 47 (2003 - 2004). Om lov om endringer i plan- og bygningsloven (konsekvensutredninger). edited by Miljøverndepartementet. Oslo: Statens Forvaltningstjeneste.
- Miljøverndepartementet. 2007-2008. Ot.prp. nr 32 (2007-2008) Om lov om planlegging og bygesaksbehandling (plan-og bygningsloven) (plandelen). [On law of planning- and building]. edited by Miljøverndepartementet. Oslo: Statens forvaltningstjeneste.
- Miljøverndepartementet. 2012. Regional planstrategi. Veileder. edited by Miljøverndepartementet. Oslo: Statens Forvaltningstjeneste.
- Page, S.E. 2006. "Path Dependence." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* (1):87-115.

- Røsnes, August E. 2001. "Norsk regional planlegging - umulig enhet eller mulig mangfold? [Regional planning in Norway - an impossible unity or a possible diversity?]." *Kart og Plan* 94 (4):213-228.
- Røvik, Kjell Arne. 1998. *Moderne organisasjoner. Trender i organisasjonstenkingen ved årtusenskiftet. [Modern organisations. Trends in organisational thinking at a new millenium]*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Røvik, Kjell Arne. 2002. "The Secrets of the Winners. Management Ideas that Flow." In *The Expansion of Management Knowledge: carriers, flows and sources*, edited by K Sahlin-Andersson and L Engwall, 113-145. Stanford California: Stanford Business Books.
- Salet, W.G.M, and A.K.F Faludi. 2000. *Revival of strategic spatial planning*. Amsterdam/Oxford: Elsevier.
- Sehested, Karina, Niels Boje Groth, and Ole Hjort Caspersen. 2008. *Evaluering af kommuneplanstrategier*. København: Københavns Universitet.
- Skjeggedal, T , H.O Bråtå, U Higdem, and T Selstad. 2011. *Regional planstrategi. Oppsummering av erfaringer*. Lillehammer: Østlandsforskning. Original edition, Notatet inneholder oppsummering av erfaringer fra arbeidet med regionale planstrategier som bakgrunnsmateriale for å utarbeide forslag til veileder om regional planstrategi.
- Sørensen, E, and J Torfing, eds. 2007. *Theories of democratic network governance*. Houndmills: Palgrave.
- Vareide, K, G Møller, and S Jensen. 2002. *Regionale plansystemer. En komparativ analyse. [Regional planning systems. A comparative analysis]*. Bø: Telemarksforsing- Bø.
- Veggeland, N. 2004. "Post-national governance and transboundary regionalisation. Spatial partnership formation as democratic exit, loyalty and voice options?" In *Cross-Border Governance in the European Union*, edited by O Kramsch and B Hooper, 157-170. London: Routledge.
- Vike, H. 1995. *Evaluering av fylkesplan for Telemark. En vurdering av plan og prosess. [Evaluation of the County plan of Telemark. An assessment of the plan and the process]*. Bø: Telemarksforsking.