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Rural response to urban-biased land use policy- New bottom-up planning strategies in Norway

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Abstract

Many rural councils are in favour of dispersed low density housing as it takes advantage of a country location. They are likely however to increasingly come into conflict with the planning system and with governmental planning policies which favour a planned and dense development. We discuss the degree to which six rural councils on the urban edge have developed dispersed housing as a strategy and how this is addressed in their planning. Five of them have strategies for dispersed housing and used local planning as a means of realizing this goal. Nevertheless, only two had proactive plans to address this strategy. Despite governmental policy to ban dispersed housing, such areas are identified in negotiations between local and regional authorities who then subvert institutional barriers. We conclude that while central planning policy does not seem to constrain dispersed housing, local planning does. Local authorities do however set limits on dispersed housing through sector interests.

Keywords: land use planning, dispersed housing, governance, vertical negotiation, rural values

Contact details of the authors:

Eva Falleth, senior researcher, Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR); professor, Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB), phone: +47 22 95 88 00, fax: +47 22 60 77 74, e-mail: eva.falleth@nibr.no

Hege Hofstad, researcher, Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR), phone: +47 22 95 88 00, fax: +47 22 60 77 74, e-mail: hege.hofstad@nibr.no

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1. Introduction

There is strong multiparty support for sustaining the current geographical distribution of the population in Norway. The management of land and property is an increasingly important aspect of agricultural policy, and is further amplified by the new agricultural policy. The idea here is to create a “new deal” for the countryside (LMD 2005). Rural municipalities have a major interest in sustaining and even increasing their number of inhabitants in order to secure tax income and to ensure that they have the necessary number of inhabitants to sustain the production of public services and secure viable communities. A specific local strategy used to reach this objective is to offer attractive residential areas with the advantages of a country location such as seclusion, fresh air, greenery, peace and quiet in a location outside planned housing projects. These benefits represent relative advantages in contrast to urban land scarcity and dense housing.

We have labelled the active use of rural qualities in housing the *rural housing model*. A commitment to this housing strategy is the opposite of the planning policy prioritised by central planning authorities. The land use policy enacted by the Ministry of the Environment as the principal planning authority has traditionally encouraged densification, harmonized land use and transport planning and urban development. Planning authorities have additionally expressed a strong desire for planned rather than haphazard use of land. It is generally assumed and anticipated under the 1985 Planning and Building Act that all land use will be planned. Rural councils have pointed out, however, that this planning superstructure and national policy is not suited to their local challenges with abundant land, depopulation and little development pressure.

The rural housing model juxtaposes the political *motifs* of local development and counter-urbanisation. According to Mitchell (2004:23) however, counter-urbanisation, which denotes a population deconcentration from urban to rural areas, may have different motivations. Firstly, ‘*ex-urbanisation*’: the movement by well-off urban dwellers wishing to reside outside the metropolitan core, but at the same time upholding their urban ties by commuting to work. Secondly, ‘*displaced urbanisation*’: household moves to enhance job-opportunities, lower costs of living and/or available housing. Lastly, ‘*anti-urbanisation*’: the movement to escape crime, congestion and pollution by living in a smaller community closer to nature. People with ‘ex-urban’ or ‘anti-urban’ sentiments constitute attractive new inhabitants for rural municipalities at the urban fringe. As a consequence, some of them are actively trying to stimulate counter-urbanisation by developing attractive new residencies with large country sites in green surroundings and within commuting distance to the towns. It is an offer which towns suffering from land shortages and strong growth will find difficult to match. Low density development in this connection means isolated developments outside the town boundary and often outside planned developments and zoned land. This category of development has been seen as a “pariah” or as “illegal” under the current land use planning system, and has created the conditions for various types of conflict between landowners, local councils and other authorities.

The desire among local councils for dispersed housing is not a new phenomenon. But the mentality of agricultural and regional policy ministries seems to have changed in recent years embracing a rural housing model as a part of their policy (White Paper

no. 21 2005-2006:33). This has opened up a window of possibilities for the so-called rural housing models. In this article we will examine how six rural municipalities have responded to this new window of opportunity in order to formulate their independent land use policy. These councils are responding to an increasingly fragmented governmental land use policy by pulling together various national policy objectives in order to reach their own local objectives.

We ask:

1. To what extent does the established local planning regime constrain municipal housing strategies?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, are local councils taking advantage of the changing national environment to formulate an independent housing policy?

Land use policy is the end product of interaction between established cognitive, normative and regulatory structures (Scott 1995) in the area of planning. It is further formed and influenced by actors' interpretation and new expectations among stakeholders. This tense point of convergence, where established structures, new requirements, demands and expectations come together, provides the point of departure for this article. Together, they comprise what we have chosen to call the *Norwegian planning regime*. As alluded to initially, it is not a static but rather an evolving concept, the outcome of changing policies, prompted not least by the manner in which local councils interpret these government signals and react to them (Imergut 1998:7).

According to the Planning and Building Act, (section 20, sentence 1), "Municipalities shall carry out continuous planning with a view to coordinating physical, economic, social, aesthetic and cultural development within their own areas". The act also focuses on harmonising processes which depend on the actions of, and collaboration with, local and regional authorities, and with partners in civil society. It is considered a mode of government that improves effectiveness in complex societies: the authorities and the private sector come together to discuss and formulate good public policies and action plans (Rhodes 1996; Stoker 2004, Sørensen and Torfing 2005). "Governance" is the term used to describe this type of political management (Kooiman 2003). A central part of the planning process is about harmonising various fields of activity each of which may have its own "logic" in terms of institutional settings as objectives, knowledge and scope. The master plan is agreed upon through interaction and negotiation between the many actors and may function as a democratic anchorage for the various governance processes. Harmonization in master plans thus becomes a form of "meta governance" or general governance by regulating and framing the self-regulative actors. This will probably optimize outcome through a careful balance of market, hierarchy and society in network arrangements (ibid.).

Master planning aims to be comprehensive in order to optimize public performance through coordination. This optimizing role based on synoptic planning modes is however often criticized. Banfield (1959), Lindblom (1959) and somewhat later Wildawsky (1973) criticized rationalistic and synoptic planning ideals, and this gradually gave access to new planning ideologies applying communicative approaches in planning. This is called the "communicative turn" where planning theorists such as Forester (1989, 1993) and Healy (1996, 1997) are important contributors. They treat planning first and foremost as a generic, procedural activity

(Yiftachel and Huxley 2001). Yiftachel and Huxley argue, despite its relatively low profile in the main arenas of planning theory, that the material-critical approach is however alive and well in several works (Flyvbjerg, 1998, Twedwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998). Much Norwegian planning research focuses on material issues and argues that material planning matters, at least in cities (Sandberg and Saglie 1997, Kleven 1999, Falleth and Stokke 2001, Saglie *et al* 2006). Planning as a mechanism for the location of development has thus been afforded increasing attention by local authorities (Falleth 2007).

This article presents a study of land use planning in six rural municipalities at the urban edge. The perception of planning and housing in each municipality differs. Two municipalities use the planning system proactively to formalise their rural housing model in order to undertake efficient housing development. Three municipalities have a rather conventional planning approach, while one municipality currently has no planning approach to meet the demand for dispersed housing. Some municipalities communicate with regional authorities, while others do not. We argue that planning legislation does not necessarily place obstacles in the way of the rural housing model and that the scepticism of state authorities has gradually been replaced by a willingness to negotiate with the councils and “stretch” land use policy to meet their needs. This willingness to negotiate is based on a newly fragmented political setting. This offers local councils a chance to practice the rural housing model. In sum, then, the ability and resolve of local councils to negotiate vertically with central and regional authorities is as important as their ability to balance and coordinate local interests.

2. The context of the rural housing model

Dispersed housing and the planning regime

Historically, it was the large urban municipalities that tended to promote planning; it was the remote, smaller municipalities that needed time to acclimatize themselves to the new system with master plans in 1965 (Falleth and Stokke 2001) whereas today some 90 percent of all municipalities have master plans (Falleth 2007:96). We should not necessarily interpret the lack of planning by rural councils as expressing misgivings with the planning system. It can just as easily mean that they had little need of planning (Kleven 1999). There is little if any development pressure, and local development is relatively transparent. Rolling out a resource-hungry planning process may seem unnecessary. The first regulations to encompass low density housing came with the first nationwide planning law in 1965. Under this law, planned land use was the rule. There have always been “safety valves”, means of side-stepping this wholesale planning obligation, allowing for isolated planning permission via dispensation and guidelines for dispersed housing in zones on what is termed *open land* in the land use section of the master plan. Open land (agricultural, natural and recreational land) is an official classification in master plan entailing a general ban on building for purposes other than farming. The municipality also has the power to adopt local zoning plans which regulate development in open land.

To give dispensation is a controversial way of formalising dispersed housing. This unplanned development is regulated with few formal routines in terms of openness and the prescription of local routines and routines for interaction between local

councils, regional authorities and communities before dispensations are given. In contrast, several formal procedures exist for participation, interaction between authorities, and rules for public hearing in planning process. A study in three municipalities in the urban fringe documents that $\frac{3}{4}$ of new buildings outside built-up areas qualified as dispersed development (Saglie *et al.* 2006). Local councils, in 2007, gave 1311 dispensations for new buildings in open land in addition to the 1750 dispensations given in 2005 (SSBa 2008). Dispensations from the ban on building purposes in local plans seem therefore to be a way of bypassing restrictions on dispersed development.

Dispensations from the ban on development will also require dispensation from the Land Act (*jordloven*). In each case, assessments will also need to take into account the impact on public roads, drainage facilities/sewers, heritage sites/artefacts, monuments and the environment. The planning process facilitates a system for balancing such consideration for each project. Applications not already dealt with in the plan would need to be assessed individually, and represent a drain on municipal resources compared to proposals covered in the land use plan. This helps explain the call for procedural simplification from rural municipalities by issuing more frequently, and in new ways, guidelines on dispersed housing in the land use section of the master plan.

Under the powers provided by the Planning and Building Act, the government may draft national guidelines (White Paper no.31 1992–93, White paper no. 29 1996–97, MD 1993, White Paper no.23 2001-2002, White Paper no.21 2004-2005). Such guidelines shall frame local planning. Requirements enumerated in national guidelines tend to be relatively vague, allowing for local accommodation and interpretation (Kleven 1999). This is true, not least, in respect of national guidelines on harmonized land use and transport planning, the most relevant guideline with respect to low density housing (Johnsen *et al.* 1996). These guidelines seek to reduce the need for transport, concentrate developments at transport nodes and preserve unbroken stretches of land for agriculture, wildlife and recreation (White Paper no. 29 1996-1997:40). Densification is considered an important pillar of land use policy.

The rural housing model and sector authorities

Planned ‘open land’ shall not be developed. Technically speaking, open land cannot be zoned. As the various land uses have not been clarified, the interests of affected parties will not have been considered in the round either. The sectoral laws therefore serve a particularly important purpose for open land management (Skjeggedal *et al.* 2004). The Land Act, Outdoor Recreation Act, Nature Conservation Act, Cultural Heritage Act, and the Water Resources Act are all key in this respect. The Government plans to issue in 2008 a biodiversity bill along with proposals for a radical overhaul of the Planning and Building Act, both of which will affect the future management of open land.

The purposes of planning are set out in circulars and handbooks. Highlighted concerns relate to biodiversity, water resource management, outdoor recreation, the care of natural resources that sustain farming, forestry and fisheries, cultural heritage and natural scenery, in addition to curbing transportation needs, land and energy consumption (MD 1997, 1998). Open land is supposed to promote the preservation of wildlife, outdoor recreation, forestry and agriculture etc. The needs of primary industries to use the land, of the public to enjoy the outdoors, and of wildlife to

survive will however frequently come into conflict with each other. The management of open land has therefore been called the “battleground of the regimes” (Skjeggedal *et al.* 2004). Incompatible objectives in the forestry sector serve as an example here. In the white paper on environmental policy and the state of the environment, the Government proposed changing the rules on forest roads so as not to threaten wildlife, flora and fauna, biodiversity and other conservation priorities (White Paper no. 26 2006-2007:77). Despite this assurance, however, the Ministry of Agriculture introduced a tax incentive for forest owners to build forest roads (LMD 2006). Here, the objectives of the Ministry of Agriculture were clearly out of sync with the Ministry of the Environment’s, and until further notice, local councils as the appropriate planning authorities are left to reconcile them.

Sector laws and the Planning and Building Act require local councils to take due consideration of these various interests in the management of land. It is often the case, however, that the land has not been properly surveyed and classified. Central and regional authorities oversee land use plans via guidelines and objections. In most counties, local and regional authorities have established procedures for exchanging views. Normally, regional authorities will work closely with planning authorities in the municipalities to clarify regional and central government policies. Regional authorities are also at liberty to object to municipal land use plans if they believe that the interests of government are insufficiently addressed. National guidelines, the plans of the local council itself, and state sector plans provide grounds for criticism. Dispensations fall into a different category, however. There is basically no obligation to consult with or inform others in these matters, although some counties discussed in this study, such as Hedmark have adopted procedures to ensure affected parties in dispensation matters are consulted. Affected parties, individuals and organisations may appeal against dispensation decisions and development plans, but not master plans. Appeals are dealt with by the county governor.

3. Variation in municipal housing strategies

Norway’s urbanization accelerated in the 1980s. Between 1995 and 2005, urban regions in Norway grew in excess of 10 per cent, while the least urbanized regions experienced negative growth of around 4 per cent (Sørli 2005). Therefore, many of the 431 Norwegian municipalities experience decline rather than growth in population. The average number of inhabitants in Norwegian municipalities was approximately 11 000 in 2007, ranking from 200 to 550 000 inhabitants (www.ssb.no). Around 80 municipalities are located on the edge of urban regions (Harvold *et al.* 2007:99). The six rural municipalities in this study are among these. The population in these six municipalities ranks from 1 200 – 7 800 inhabitants.

The case municipalities are located at the edge of two peri-urban regions with Kristiansand and Oslo as urban centres. Nord-Odal, Sør-Odal and Eidskog municipalities are located in the southernmost part of Hedmark County in the Glåmdal region. This region has ties with several regions of “industry and commerce, labour, education and transportation,” as Hedmark county plan puts it (2005–2008). The municipalities lie in a south – northeast axis between the capital Oslo and the regional city Kongsvinger, and the east – west axis between Elverum and Hamar regional cities. Oslo airport is also a business centre for the Glåmdal region. There are therefore jobs aplenty within a radius of 50–100 km from the municipalities. The

distances between Oslo city centre and Nord-Odal (Sagstua), Sør-Odal (Skarnes) and Eidskog (Skotterud) are 93 km, 76 km and 102 km by road. Sør-Odal has the biggest population, 7,787 inhabitants, while Eidskog has 6,397 and Nord-Odal 5,091 (SSBb 2008). The population of all three municipalities is widely dispersed, with only between 30 and 36 per cent residing in urban centres.

Iveland, Marnadal and Audnedal are located in the Agder region in southern Norway. All are within commuting range of the nearest town, the regional capital of Kristiansand. The municipalities are in the Kristiansand labour and residential catchment area (Juvkam 2002). As a fast growing area commuting across municipal boundaries is also increasing. In light of these developments, an integrated land use plan for the Kristiansand region is being drafted. Iveland is involved, but not Audnedal or Marnardal which formally belong to another administrative region. One of the objectives of the plan is to enable the region to absorb upwards of 50,000 new residents. The distances between Kristiansand city centre and Iveland, Marnadal and Audnedal municipality centres are 42 km, 48 km and 58 km by road. The three municipalities in Agder are small. Iveland is the smallest, with a population of 1,211; 1,613 people live in Audnedal and 2,178 in Marnardal (SSBb 2008). Homes are typically thinly spread, and only Marnardal has a town. In this latter municipality, 16 per cent of the population live in a town, whereas none do in Iveland and Audnedal.

The six municipalities are therefore rural, thinly populated and part of the urban edge; they are not on the periphery nor are they part of the suburban spread. They are nevertheless within practical commuting range of important urban centres. Travel distances to the centres are around 1 to 2 hours. Spreading urbanization and increased mobility make growth increasingly likely, an understanding shared by the municipalities themselves. This *location* was the most important empirical selection criteria. These municipalities remain in danger of decline but growth could still be within reach with offensive strategies. *Variation* in municipal planning strategy was another important selection criterion. The degree to which these local councils have adopted a rural housing model to facilitate growth and used planning institutions to this end varies. Lastly, in order to reduce (some) spatial differences; *two regions* with three municipalities were chosen.

The study saw the use of several data collection methods. All of the senior council officials and politicians involved in planning in each municipality were interviewed as were the regional planning officers at the regional governments and the county governors as well as the officials in charge of ensuring managerial compliance with the Land Act. The interviews took place in groups where all interviewees in each municipality and three researchers participated. Interviews with regional officers were undertaken on an individual basis. The questions were semi-structured, and the group interviews were recorded and later written out in full. We also studied the master plans of the six municipalities. Based on the data material, we found an interesting variation in the planning strategies of the municipalities. In sum, it consisted of:

- Iveland in Agder: local mini zoning plans with 4-5 houses in each plan
- Marnardal in Agder: low density housing in small clusters in the master plan
- Audnedal in Agder: no formal strategy; dispensations as a tool for dispersed housing

- Nord –Odal in Hedmark: a trial with low density zones in the master plan
- Sør – Odal in Hedmark: Low density zones on open land in the master plan
- Eidskog in Hedmark: a broad approach for housing types and planning approaches

In the following we will discuss and provide further clarification of the various strategies employed.

4. The planning regime in a local context: Municipal strategies

Is the Norwegian planning regime incompatible with a rural housing model?

Despite the general ban on building on open land for non-agricultural purposes, the law opens up for dispersed housing indirectly through the system of *dispensation* under particular circumstances such as strong public interests favouring development. It is also possible to make housing guidelines for dispersed housing on open land using particular *zones* in the master plans and *regulation* in mini zoning plans. While dispensations are regarded as controversial due to the lack of formal procedures, zones and regulations are not. The challenge from the point of view of the local councils, is that the planned routes take a lot of time due to formal procedures (zoning plans, master plans etc), while the informal are time-saving (dispensations). Regional authorities are also likely to raise objections against mini zoning plans and zones for dispersed housing in the master plans because they are incompatible with government land use policy. Dispensations are not. They are flexible and take less time compared with planning. For the regional and national authorities, dispensations are seen as a mechanism of last resort to provide exemptions from the ban on the development of open land in particular cases where public interests are strong.

Another difficulty faced by councils wanting to put the rural housing model into practice is the *multisectoral legislation* covering, for instance, conservation of land and monuments, and restrictions on building access onto public roads. The main tools of the sectors supervising their distinct interest in local development are the planning process where they have formal participant rights and even formal rights to object to local plans. They are less influential when local councils provide dispensation from the ban on development. The county governor can overrule local decisions though the political legitimacy for such actions is generally lacking.

While it might formally be possible to reconcile the rural housing model with dispensations and development plans in the Planning and Building Act, the government's determination to harmonize transport and land use planning and promote densification limits this possibility. They want to minimize the need for transport, and, in consequence, to concentrate these developments in the vicinity of town or village centres. Governmental planning authorities want to maintain a clear division in terms of land use planning between built-up areas and (virtually) non-built-up areas, and this policy is diverted through the planning system. New national policy guidelines (regional policy) for rural dispersed housing create a fragmented policy framework opening up new possibilities in local planning. Local councils are therefore able to choose among different and partly conflicting national objectives for land development. And they often take advantage of this. We have seen in this study how these new objectives have constrained attempts by local councils to allocate in their land use plans large plots for dispersed housing. We have also seen that

negotiations between councils and regional authorities provide a means of reaching a compromise within the planning system, if the objective is controlled low density housing. It is therefore not the planning system *per se* that prevents a housing policy based on the rural housing model. It is rather the political guidelines in sector interests and their sector policy. This focus on the compact city has coloured rural councils' perception of the Norwegian planning regime as a problem solving mechanism for just cities. The rural housing model is the antithesis of these principles; it makes it difficult to achieve densification targets while reducing transportation needs.

Are local councils taking advantage of an independent housing policy?

The six municipalities have different strategies on land use planning and the rural housing model. Four councils have adopted a rural housing model. Two of them, Nord-Odal and Iveland, are using land use plans proactively to address issues arising from this policy using mini zoning plans and low density zones in the master plan. These two councils, in partnership with regional authorities, have negotiated integrated solutions to facilitate a rural housing model using the planning system to formalise dispersed rural housing. The process is formalized by incorporating zoning for dispersed housing in the master plan or by drafting mini zoning plans. The planning system, in this sense, is used *proactively* as an institutional structure around the management of dispersed land use. A third municipality, that of Eidskog, has adopted a rural housing model, and has used the planning process proactively in order to mobilise their citizens and improve regional authority cooperation in order to build a new local image of "living delight". Their plans, however, have a more conventional content consisting of traditional zoning plans, zones for dispersed housing in master plans and dispensations on open land.

The three last councils have a more conventional approach to planning. Under the law they have little choice but to draft plans; it is one of the tasks inherent in a hierarchical system. The regional authorities are viewed as partners with whom councils can discuss and negotiate joint solutions, however, to reach their housing policy targets. They are using the planning system reactively to develop a more efficient and local housing delivery system. Almost all their applications for building permits in open land require dispensations from the ban on the development of open land. The implication of this planning approach is that each building permit needs its own procedure where coordination with the regional authority is necessary before dispensations from the ban are given.

One of the key factors here is the relationship between councils and regional authorities. There are, or have been, conflicts between the regional authorities and all the local councils about local land use plans and policies. The success of the rural housing model seems to depend on how local councils work with regional authorities. The three councils who have used the planning system proactively have entered into dialogue with these authorities and reached a solution acceptable to both parties. In this process, the councils needed to accept certain constraints on low density developments in the municipality, but at the same time successfully market their rural housing model. In Nord-Odal, this resulted in a detailed survey of heritage sites and artefacts in the municipality, while Eidskog council went along with cuts to their dispersed housing zones. Iveland council made mini zoning plans. The regional authorities, for their part, by condoning informal zones for dispersed housing seem to have accepted low density housing as a viable proposition.

Local ‘meta governance’ strategies

Some of the local councils have drafted a policy based on local goals, alongside plans for harmonized land use and transport planning in response to government wishes. Meta governance is about finding organizational solutions for handling the complexity, diversity and “interwoven” hierarchies of existing institutions associated with government (Jessop 2004:13). It is also about achieving the best possible result, from the affected parties’ point of view, by the judicious balancing of market, hierarchy and network (ibid.). For spatial development master planning is a formal system for taking care of meta governance challenges. The capacity for these plans to be a tool for meta governance has however been questioned for many decades (Banfield 1959, Lindblom 1959, Wildawsky 1973, Flyvbjerg 1998).

Some of the local councils have successfully explained their challenges to the regional authorities. The regional authorities have accepted the local need to change the planning regime to facilitate a commitment to rural challenges. Some councils have achieved the best possible result in their handling of vertical coordination between the housing market, local planning and national objectives, pursuing what in many ways is a successful form of “meta governance”. It would not be wrong to call what they have instituted in relation to the development of local land use policy as a “bottom-up” process, one which has been increasingly institutionalized thanks to agreement between local and regional authorities on the ways of proceeding. It would appear, in other words, that regional and national authorities have recognised the shortcomings of ideals of high density housing and minimization of transport needs in rural municipalities with low building-to-land ratios. As an official at the county governor’s office in Vest-Agder told us,

We are not against low density housing per se. It is up to the council to set housing policy. We don’t get involved unless there is a clear impact of the environment, like building near the shoreline, or beside a river.

By talking together, it has been possible to agree on where low density homes can be built, and where they cannot. The former concerns land of less conservational value, the latter land of significant conservational value under sectoral legislation. Our study shows that it is possible to combine the rural model within the current planning system through dialogue with regional authorities. One reason for this is that regional authorities accept local priorities for dispersed housing if interests such as valuable land and nature are protected and safety traffic looked after. Another reason is that local councils see new possibilities for rural housing because the new regional policy focusing on rural housing – as a contrast to the focus on dense housing in the environmental and planning policy. This has opened a window for new planning actions, and some local councils act proactively on this new possibility. There seems therefore to be a compromise between local councils and regional authorities on accepting low density housing on some locations, but not on open land as such where detailed surveys in order to identify nature or cultural values have not been performed nor incorporated into the land use plans. For the time being, the Planning and Building Act lacks a clause empowering regional authorities to pursue a low density agenda. The still unclear formal framework for dispensations is, however, one reason for the new regulation of scattered development in the master plan in the proposed Planning and Building Act (Ot.prp.nr.32 (2007 -2008)).

Negotiation as a tool in planning

There are several likely explanations for the willingness of regional authorities to accept low density housing. One may be *rural* communities' acute *criticism* of the legal obligation to draft master plans that came into effect with the 1965 Planning and Building Act. Rural communities have been opposed to master plans since the 1960s. As there was never much shortage of land and the planning regime was widely perceived as a response to urban problems, motivation among rural councils to draft master plans was muted. Surveys found slow progress among councils after this first planning law came into effect; indeed, the master plan as such was not formally incorporated into council planning in most municipalities until the 1990s (Falleth and Stokke 2001). Only recently have rural councils begun to warm to the idea and start drafting master plans. The pro-active planning that we found practised by some of the councils in this study should be read against this historical backdrop. Some of the councils have found a focus for planning in dispersed housing and motivation to use planning as an instrument of government.

In addition, certain wider changes have probably worked to strengthen the hand of local councils *vis-à-vis* the regional authorities. *Green politics* and ethics have made headway and affected perceptions of the use of nature and the environment. Calls to protect biodiversity, wildlife, and to address issues of animal welfare, pollution and pollutants and climate change have all affected attitudes (Marsden 1999). Heightened environmental awareness has encouraged a "green", idealistically grounded "back to nature" mentality. 'Ex-urban' and 'anti-urban' migrants (Mitchell 2004) therefore provide a potential for growth in rural municipalities. Personal mobility has accelerated dramatically with people commuting further and oftener, increased migration, tourism and recreation (Røe 2001). Together, this opens up new opportunities for rural municipalities to attract people with an 'anti-urban' or 'ex-urban' sentiment. Rural housing strategies are their tool to boost this flow of potential counter-urbanisation.

The manner of government has also changed, as increasing devolution and *decentralisation* have put powers into the hands of local communities (Kleven 1999:69). The 1985 Planning and Building Act was one of the first land management systems which actually transferred power from the state to local councils. Later environmental and agricultural management has also been decentralised (Saglie *et al.* 2006, Falleth 2007). Public policy is changing at the national level. *Agricultural policy* is as likely to deal with land management issues today as to ensure the supply of food and fibre (LMD 2005; St.prp.nr.1 2003-2004). Land use policy is increasingly relevant to stakeholders in the farming industry. The idea is for farming to create pleasant rural communities and neighbourhoods. A competitive advantage for rural Norway would be consistent with the firm political will to uphold the country's current settlement pattern and population distribution, and by facilitating the creation of pleasant communities where people can both live and work, this policy target would be easier to reach.

For the municipalities, these cultural, political and governmental changes could encourage wider acceptance of the utilisation of farmland and open land in ways that have been proscribed or heavily regulated since the ban on development in open land. Some councils are using planning as a meta governance tool for drafting their dispersed land use policies, while the old attitude towards planning as a duty imposed

from above prevails in others. With a less black and white approach to planning along with the increased availability of suitable acreage, both local councils and regional authorities have a chance to accommodate planning to local conditions. The study also shows that planning finds its own governance solutions via vertical negotiations with informal priorities of open land, where formal constraints frustrate councils' efforts to plan rationally in response to their own needs. In this way, the general critique raised several decades ago of the rationalistic and synoptic planning ideal has been absorbed and resulted in change (Banfield 1959; Lindblom 1959; Wildawsky 1973).

The rural model and the local housing market

Meta governance is not only about achieving hierarchical coordination. If councils are to attract new residents by adopting and adapting rural housing model, they will need to create a market for those who are attracted by rural qualities. Creating a demand for building plots like these is a long-term prospect. Iveland and Sør-Odal have enjoyed a steady stream in recent years of movement into the municipality, while the populations of the other four fluctuate around a point (SSB 2007). The rural housing model would probably not appeal to most people, and in any case, a commitment to low density housing will not necessarily affect population statistics in any fundamental sense. The scale of low density housing in the six municipalities is quite small (Harvold *et al.* 2007). And for some of the councils in the study, breaking even or even very moderate population growth would be considered a success. Growth in housing resulting from the rural housing model has probably not been seen properly yet, apart from the Iveland case. This could also partly explain the authorities' willingness to sit down and talk things through. The scale is small, and threatens neither the environment, farming nor local heritage. But without a demand in the market, it will be difficult to control house building. Nor is it possible to predict when a planning application will be lodged, which in itself ties the hands of planners somewhat.

The councils are therefore obliged to work with local landowners and persuade them to free land for development. The right to own land and the entitlements that follow are relatively unassailable features of Norwegian legislation and culture, and are protected under the Norwegian Constitution. So council politicians take landowners' opinions seriously, and councils in many municipalities are reluctant to adopt plans in opposition to their wishes. If landowners want to say when and to whom they parcel out plots, many councils will find that the rural housing model lacks sufficiently sharp teeth. The reasons council officials and politicians give for not practising pro-active planning are couched in precisely these terms. If landowners do not want their land developed, it will not help much having zoning plans for low density housing in the master plans. Iveland has hit upon a solution by zoning council-owned land for low density plots in mini zoning plans. When councils own land themselves, this is an option.

5. Concluding remarks: Challenges to the rural housing model

In recent years, differentiated land use policy has breathed new life into planning in rural municipalities. Agricultural and rural policy makers want to play a greater role in setting land use policy, and offer a type of land use policy suited to these municipalities. But fragmentation of what the government seeks to achieve by imposing planning obligations on local councils will make local harmonization and

coordination difficult. Councils are obliged to act in accordance with proper procedures and ensure a correct balance between the interests of the local community and wider society. There will undoubtedly be competition to frame the problem or issue at hand, effectively setting the terms of the subsequent discussion. The Nord-Odal low density housing pilot project is an example. Schemes that address problems affecting rural councils, combined with greater local powers and the decentralisation of authority could however make planning more interesting as an instrument of government for local councils and would enhance the legitimacy of planning decisions in rural municipalities.

The incursion of regional and agricultural policy into the domain of land use policy could be interpreted as undermining land use policy as an instrument of environmental policy. If economic and demographic concerns top the agenda of local planners, environmental and similar concerns could lose out. If conservation is to be given prominence in planning decisions involving open land, there will need to be accurate information on the type and nature of the land in question, and if the council lacks this information itself, it must be procured from others with the necessary competence. If land use policy is differentiated, as the government seems set on allowing, there will be a need to classify land and record wildlife, biodiversity, landscapes, heritage sites and artefacts. Approval of dispersed housing in rural communities will be a test of land use planning for open land developments, not least in light of the farming industry's opposition to the introduction of zones. The study shows that including zones for low density housing in the master plan, after consultation with the implicated sectors, could help with the legalization of low density housing. In addition, the delegation of agricultural lawmaking will probably act in favour of community preferences for low density housing and undermine the farming community's control of open land. The six councils appear to realize the importance of conservation issues in their respective municipalities. It will be exciting to see, however, how councils manage to arrange priorities related to, among other things, heritage and biodiversity when faced with increasing demands to develop land and local demands for low density housing.

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Note

¹ The study set out to establish the prevalence of low density housing, explore the strategies of the six municipalities in light of the planning regime, study in and out migration in these municipalities, and finally assess the impact on wildlife and culture of dispersed housing (Harvold *et al.* 2007). The study was funded by the Research Council of Norway.

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