Nr. 241 - 2001

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THE FUTURE OF MARGINAL REGIONS AS PERCEIVED BY THOSE WHO ARE EXPECTED TO SHAPE IT

Summary

The paper's point of departure is the government's vision of the future of marginal regions, as expressed in its report on regional policy, endorsed by Parliament in June 2001. The political vision is then confronted with views on the future of marginal regions held by young people from the periphery, as expressed in recent locality studies .

Paper presented at The Sixteenth International Seminar on Marginal Regions, Ålesund – Volda, 5. – 12. August 2001.

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The future of marginal regions as perceived by those who are expected to shape it

The background: A brief overview

In previous papers I have used migration data to illustrate regional imbalances in Norway (Hansen 1989, Båtevik and Hansen 1995, Hansen 1999, Hansen 2001). Net out-migration has been a persistent feature since the second half of the nineteenth century when North America was perceived as a promising alternative to subsistence farming. Later – as urbanisation progressed – people left the peripheries and moved into towns and cities. A persistent high birth rate and falling mortality rates compensated for out-migration far into the twentieth century, but after 1950 birth rates were declining and the periphery started to lose more people than it produced. The long term effect has been an ageing population.

Behind this demographic development lie global and national structural change processes. It took the political system some time to realise that global competition weakened Norway's position as an exporter of semi-processed products based on natural resources such as minerals, timber, hydro-electricity and fish; the dominant activities of marginal regions. The post-war development of the Norwegian economy aimed at reconstructing what had been lost during the war, a relatively conservative approach. If anything, new initiatives such as the expansion of energy-consuming industries in peripheral regions made them even more dependent on natural resources.

The 1970s were years of radical restructuring of traditional industries in the Western world. In Norway, this restructuring was delayed because North Sea oil and gas gave a boost to the national economy. Oil and gas extraction and processing did not create many jobs in itself, but mechanical and machine industries producing equipment for oil and gas industries gave new life to many communities along the West coast.

More important for regional development was the income generated from oil and gas exports, much of which went into the Treasury and was spent on transport infrastructure, education, health and social services, as well as on support for traditional industries, in particular in peripheral regions. As the population redistribution process threatened the marginal areas, regional policy was directed

towards them This implied transfer of money to sparsely populated areas. The underlying objective of this regional policy was to slow down or halt the migration of young people to the larger cities. Available migration data show that this goal has not been reached, but one can always claim that the situation would have been much worse without our special brand of regional policy. A look across our common borders with Sweden and Finland gives some support to this view.

The present: The research problem

During the 1990s, unemployment has been very low in Norway, marginal regions included. The paradoxical situation is that there is now a shortage of labour in peripheral Norway. Seasonal workers in agriculture and tourism come on a temporary basis from abroad, political refugees from Sri Lanka and Bosnia process our fish, Poles pick our apples and strawberries, shipyard contract workers come from Eastern Europe. There is also shortage of labour in health services – Swedish doctors and nurses from Poland and the Philippines help to run many hospitals, also in marginal regions. Labour market authorities suggest import of Russian contract workers on new construction sites in North Norway. Norwegians are not interested in these jobs, and workers from Finland and Sweden, who used to come in thousands to work in the oil sector, now find jobs at home. Why are Norwegians not interested in these jobs? Part of the answer lies in an expanding education system which encourages young people to climb higher and higher, skipping vocational courses and jumping on to higher education.

This general introduction leads to the paper's main theme, which is to describe the perceptions of the future of marginal regions held by two important groups of people who through their ideas and actions will shape the future of the Norwegian periphery. One of these groups act from above, one from below. The top down approach is that of national actors who through political action point to future regional policy directions. The bottom up approach is that of young people growing up in the periphery, and through their progress through the education system take decisions which will make them stay or leave. The top down people still think that they through political action can halt or slow down out-migration. The bottom up people pursue their individual life projects, often oblivious of the ideas top down people have about their future. Other actor groups also carry convictions, such as local and regional

economic actors. I leave them outside this discussion, because I think that the most serious threat to the Norwegian periphery is the top down peoples' lack of understanding of the perceptions of young people who are about to take strategic decisions about their lives.

The future of marginal regions: Perceptions of top down people

Top down people think a lot. Instead of penetrating the jungle of political thoughts, I have chosen to offer a text analysis of official documents. Every fourth year, government presents a regional policy report to Parliament. The most recent report (St. meld. nr. 34 (2000-2001)) dates from April 2001. The Ministry of municipal and regional affairs prepares the government's report which then goes to Parliament. Its committee of municipal affairs presented its recommendations to Parliament on June 6 (Innst. S. nr. 318 (2000-2001), and Parliament duly discussed it on June 11 (item 19 on the agenda), five days before the end of the spring session and, as it happened, at the end of a four year electoral period. In practice, this means that the government's report looked beyond Parliament and into the electoral campaign of the parliamentary elections in early September 2001. In other words, the government tells the voters what it intends to do if re-elected.

A semantic digression

Before identifying top down strategies and priorities and their relevance for the young generation which will, through individual actions, shape the future geography of Norway, I will point your attention to the Norwegian words used to describe what regional policy is. The title of the 2001 report) is *Om distrikts- og regionalpolitikken.* A literal translation into English is *About district and regional policy.* What is then the difference between *district* and *region*? A *district,* according to The Concise Oxford Dictionary, is either a territory marked off for special administrative purposes, or a division of a county electing its own councillors, or an area which has common characteristics. A *region* is, according to the same source, an area of land or division of the earth's surface, having definite boundaries or characteristics. In a comprehensive Norwegian-English dictionary, *distriktspolitikk* is translated into regional policy, whereas the word *regionalpolitikk* does not exist. The word *distrikt* in Norwegian political rhetoric is a normative expression, meaning parts of the

country which are perceived as marginal or peripheral and therefore in need of political support. When the 2001 report was being prepared, under a Centrist minority government, it was seriously suggested that it should be labelled *Om distriktspolitikken.* But Labour got back into power in March 2000, and the title of the previous report was used. But nobody seemed to suggest a return to the title of the 1993 report, which was *Town and land – hand in hand. On regional development.*

What is then Norwegian regional policy about?

The Centrist proposal was logical. Regional policy, as defined by the Ministry of municipal and regional affairs, deals mainly with peripheral areas. The main objective of this regional policy is to stop or reduce out-migration in order to consolidate the settlement pattern. It follows logically that parts of Norway with population losses should be supported through spatial policy measures which by definition should not by applied in growth regions. In contrast, the main objective of regional policy in most West European countries is to develop a spatial production system which boosts national economic growth.

In its 2001 report to Parliament, the minority Labour government tried to please both periphery and centre. The distant North deserved special attention, and so did one company towns in need of restructuring. Government also promised a special effort for sparsely populated areas far from urban settlements. But the report also made it clear that a policy of settlement and population consolidation cannot include all settlements.

Previous regional policy reports defined the *municipality* as a geographical arena for consolidation. Around one half of the 435 Norwegian municipalities experienced population losses between 1990 and 2000, a prolongation of trends apparent since the 1960s. The last decade has been one of national economic growth and a generous regional policy, compared with most neighbouring countries. Table 1 shows that four out of five municipalities with less than 2000 inhabitants and two thirds of municipalities with between 2000 and 5000 inhabitants lost population during the 1990s. Almost one half of municipalities with between 5000 and 10000 inhabitants also lost population. On the other hand, only one of ten municipalities with more than 10000 inhabitants lost population.

TABLE 1.
POPULATION CHANGE 1990 – 2000 (Jan.1.)
THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL.

	Municipalities	M. with pop. decline	%
NORWAY	435	228	*52*
Size groups (2000):			
Less than 2 000 inh.	95	76	*80*
2 001 – 5 000 inh.	152	104	*68*
5 001 – 10 000 inh.	88	40	*45*
More than 10 000 inh.	100	8	*8*
By Major regions:[1]			
Oslofjord [2]	69	9	*13*
Interior East [3]	74	53	*71*
South West [4]	56	15	*27*
West [5]	98	49	*50*
Trøndelag [6]	49	33	*67*
North [7]	89	69	*78*

1) See location map (figure 1)
2) Counties of Østfold, Akershus, Oslo and Vestfold + Drammen economic region in Buskerud and Skien/Porsgrunn economic region in Telemark
3) Hedmark, Oppland, Buskerud (÷ Drammen),Telemark (÷ Skien/Porsgrunn)
4) Aust-Agder, Vest-Agder, Rogaland
5) Hordaland, Sogn og Fjordane, Møre og Romsdal
6) Sør-Trøndelag, Nord-Trøndelag
7) Nordland, Troms, Finnmark

Most small municipalities still have out-migration and, as a long term effect, an ageing population. Is this because they are too small to attract private service enterprises and new industries?

Table 1 also sums up the geographical variations. Almost all municipalities in the Oslofjord region have an increasing population, and three fourths of those in the South West.

FIGURE 1.
NORWAY. MAJOR REGIONS

This is where private services choose to locate, where the positive effects of the capital region are strongest, and where much of the oil industry is located (Stavanger region). The West coast and fjords present a more complex picture. Municipalities where maritime industries are located usually have an increasing population, whereas many fjord municipalities, the location of old one company towns, are declining. The interior East lies behind the Oslofjord region. Here, 70 per cent of the municipalities lost population during the1990s. This inland region suffers from employment decline in primary activities (agriculture and forestry) and in manufacturing industries processing natural resources. Population densities are low, distances between centres and their peripheries are long. This region has exported its young to the Oslofjord region, and as a result, the population is ageing. In extreme cases, old people are the main source of income, because their pensions, supplemented by money transfers from government to the municipalities they live in, generate jobs in health and social care. We are close to the kind of communities found in parts of Canada, where most people live on welfare.

The farther north we get, the darker is the demographic situation. Trøndelag have many of the problems found in the East inland region, and also has its part of small, isolated fishing communities with small centres which we find so many of in North Norway, which is the ‘worst case’(Hansen 1999).

The 2001 regional report presented this picture clearly. The report writers in the Ministry of regional and municipal affairs had access to research findings which clearly demonstrated the futility of linking the consolidation of population to the municipal level.

The new level of population consolidation

In 1999, Statistics Norway (Hustoft et al. 1999) presented a new standard for economic regions. The old one, from 1966, was out-dated, reflecting that too many municipalities in Norway are too small to be functional regions (Hansen 1997). The economic region lies somewhere between the municipality and the county. NUTS 4 would be the equivalent EU term. Statistics Norway points out that the most ambitious alternative would be to make a division of Norway into functional regions, based upon data on service provision, trade and labour markets. Service and trade data are not good enough. Trade takes place across county boundaries, and no NUTS 4 region can be located in two or more NUTS 3 regions (counties). Since county boundaries in Norway were set hundred of years ago they are not functional for analysis of economic interaction data. Statistics Norway therefore had to rely upon one data source, that of commuting between municipalities. Through analysis of these data (also with shortcomings), the division of Norway in economic regions was undertaken. The result was a map of 90 regions. The procedure was to identify a municipality where commuters from neighbouring municipalities went for work. If one municipality had a commuting population to another municipality of at least 10 per cent of its working population, it became part of an economic region with the in-commuting municipality as centre. It soon became clear that there often was an exchange of commuters between two or more municipalities where at least 10 % of the working population in one municipality commuted to the other, and vice versa. Such economic regions were defined as regions with two centre municipalities with equal standing (I would call them complementary). They were looked upon as troublesome twins, difficult to classify. In reality, a region where commuters cross

municipal boundaries in both (or several) directions are probably the closest we can come to a genuine economic region. But most of the economic regions in Norway are loop-sided labour market regions, where most commuters go into the municipality with the biggest centre, and hardly anybody in the opposite direction. In such cases, the commuting data show that the regional labour market is asymmetric. When Statistics Norway started to apply the commuting principle, it soon became evident that commuting from surrounding municipalities to the regional centre in many cases was far below 10 per cent. But since no municipalities by definition could remain outside an economic region, and since an economic region by definition should consist of more that one municipality, the commuting definition had to be waived in numerous cases. It would have been more correct if Statistics Norway had made a list of municipalities which did not fulfil the criteria for inclusion in an economic region.

Another tricky problem for Statistics Norway was to define the minimum size of the dominant urban settlement in the centre municipality. The definition of an urban settlement in Norway has a lower population limit of 200. Nobody would consider a settlement with 200 inhabitants as the vibrant centre of an economic region. But Statistics Norway abstained from introducing a higher minimum population limit. It agrees that a general criterion for a centre municipality should be that it should contain an *independent* (the meaning of independent is not explained) urban settlement of a certain size (Hustoft et al. 1999, p. 11), but it adds that it is difficult to give an absolute definition of ‘a certain size’, “because an urban settlement with for instance 2000 inhabitants relatively speaking would be small in some parts of the country and big in other parts” (my translation). One must conclude that the methodological basis of the new regional division is unsatisfactory. In addition to the quantitative criteria, unspecified qualitative criteria are used, partly as a response to objections raised in an extensive hearing of a first draft.

Let me give two examples of compromises. The island municipalities of Hitra and Frøya on the south-west coast of Trøndelag are defined as one economic region. The total population is around 8.000. The municipal centre of Hitra has 500 inhabitants, the centre of Frøya 600. Four per cent of the working population of Hitra work in Frøya, 4 per cent of Frøya’s working population commute to Hitra. The Nordfjord region consists of 6 municipalities. Not less than four centres are defined. They do not fulfil the commuting criteria (“but since commuting in Sogn and

Fjordane county is low, we consider this criterion to be of little importance" (Hustoft et al. 1999, p. 19)). Their population size lies between 1900 and 2500. The reason why the four centres are included, is that none of them are dominant, as is the case in the Ålesund region north of Nordfjord and the Førde region south of Nordfjord. Then it is difficult to see why Nordfjord should be defined as an economic region at all.

TABLE 2.
POPULATION CHANGE 1990 – 2000 (Jan.1.)
ECONOMIC REGIONS

	Regions	R. with pop. decline	%
NORWAY	90	38	*42*
Size groups (1998):			
Less than 10 000 inh.	9	8	*89*
10 001 – 20 000 inh.	27	17	*63*
20 001 – 50 000 inh.	33	13	*39*
50 001 – 100 000 inh.	11	0	*0*
More than 100 000 inh.	10	0	*0*
By major regions:[1)]			
Oslofjord	15	0	*0*
Interior East	17	9	*55*
South West	12	2	*17*
West	17	8	*47*
Trøndelag	12	8	*67*
North	17	11	*65*

1) See figure 1 for location.

But the new economic regions are there to be used. When comparing table 2 with table 1 one can easily see that the coarse-meshed 90 region division presents a more positive picture of population changes during the 1990's than the fine-meshed 435 municipalities division. Municipalities with population losses are now grouped in regions where increase in one centre municipality compensate losses in surrounding municipalities. A good example is Bodø economic region which consists of 11 municipalities. Only the centre municipality had an increasing population (13.2 per

cent), whereas the 10 surrounding municipalities experienced a decline of – 9.3 per cent. In the case of Bodø economic region, there have been no noticeable positive spill-over effects from the centre to the periphery.

But table 2 also shows that even on the regional level, more than 40 per cent of the regions had population losses during the 1990s. A majority of the less populous economic regions are losing population. In the interior East, Trøndelag and the North the majority of regions lose population. On the other hand, all regions with more than 50000 inhabitants and all regions in the Oslofjord major region are winners, and so are most of the regions of the South West. These variations in part reflect the dynamic regional economies of the Oslofjord and the South West and the more stagnant regional economies of the interior East and the northern regions. But the variations are also at test of the validity of the delimitation criteria discussed above. Many of the small, peripheral economic regions are not really functional regions, but artificial constructions because all municipalities have to be ascribed to an economic region. But as long as one is aware of the shortcomings of the new regional division, one can take the necessary precautions to stay out of statistical traps.

This long excursion into an official statistical regional division would have been completely off the mark if it had not been used as a structuring element of the recent report on regional policy.

The robust regions

The report introduced the term *robust samfunn* as an intermediate policy arena between the municipality and the county. Literally speaking, the term means robust societies or communities. I prefer to use the term *robust regions* because the report emphasised that it wanted to target regions as a counterweight to increasing centralisation. By region the government meant an area consisting of one or more urban settlements and adjacent rural areas, bound together through commuting, functioning as one housing market, and able to offer its inhabitants a wide range of public and private services. One recognises the most ambitious alternative considered but rejected by Statistics Norway because the data needed were not there. But in the regional policy report it emerged again, now as a normative policy instrument. And then it became problematic. The preceding paragraph has demonstrated that many of the economic regions are statistical constructions, not functional regions. But the

government did not seem to have seen the inherent risk of linking this spatial term to regional planning.

The political argument of civil servants and national political actors was based on the belief that it was possible to defend the existing population distribution on the economic region level. This assumption was wrong, as demonstrated in table 2. Still, a wide range of policy measures would be applied to reduce regional disparities. These measures should be directed towards robust *regions*, not towards *places*. It is assumed that robust regions could offer their inhabitants work and services within acceptable distance from where they lived, not necessarily in centres, but also in rural settings. The government did not like the term centralisation, not even on the level of economic regions. The ideal spatial configuration would be an integrated functional region where economic growth was not concentrated in urban centres, but where there was a spill-over into more peripheral areas. A robust region should offer its inhabitants the best of urban life as well as the advantages of rural surroundings.

The analysis of population changes in the 1990s (table 2) indicates that the conditions for a balanced urban-rural development were met in the largest economic regions in the Oslofjord and South West major economic regions. Migration to these regions was important, the age structure favourable, the labour market for well educated women expanding, the young people have a wide range of education and leisure opportunities.

The regional report stated that the future district and regional policy to a larger extent than previously should include the whole country (St. meld. nr. 34 (2000-2001, p. 9). But on p. 7 the report emphasised that “this report will not deal with challenges and opportunities in the major urban regions”. These challenges and opportunities were handed over to the report on the government’s major policies for the period 2002-2005, prepared by the Ministry of finance and published in March 2001 (St.meld. nr. 30 (2000-2001). A search in the 400 page document revealed one page (p. 224) about urban development and living conditions in the major cities. Very little was said about the economic and regional role of these urban regions within an national context. A few paragraphs reminded the reader of the need for a co-ordinated physical planning, but the overriding message was that intra-urban social inequalities should be reduced in the major cities. In other words, the major city regions were

thrown out of the report on regional policy and converted into a social problem in the long term programme report.

In 2000, 56 per cent of the national population lived in the Oslofjord region and the four major urban regions outside this region (Arendal/Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim). These regions absorbed 91 per cent of the national population growth of the nineties, partly because the population of these regions was younger, partly because so much of the internal migration in Norway went to these regions, and partly because so many of the immigrants from abroad ended up here. In the 1990s, population growth in these robust regions was 10 per cent, in the rest of Norway only 1 per cent.

But these genuinely robust regions, which better than other robust regions in Norway were able to do what robust regions should do, according to principles described in the regional policy report, were held outside regional policy. Through this ingenious twist, the regional policy report could concentrate upon the demographically stagnant *districts*.

The political handling of the regional policy report.

Important reports from government to parliament tend to be sent over towards the end of the parliamentary session, in the case of the regional policy report just before the Easter vacation (which is taken very seriously in Norway). The parliamentary committee of municipal issues worked under serious time constraints, and produced a 36 page report where the political parties spent much more time in marketing their old and well-known views than in trying to respond to new ideas. The committee asked Parliament to vote for the following proposals:

"l. Parliament asks the government to contribute to the training of more positivity agents. The activities of the positivity agents secretariat in Vega should be embedded with the municipalities and counties involved.

2. Parliament asks the government in its budget for 2002 to clarify how the municipalities can be stimulated to introduce web-based education, such as electronic classrooms.

3. Parliamentary report nr 34 (2001-2002) is put on record."

Parliament spent 80 minutes to discuss the matter, without adding much to the debate on regional policy, and endorsed the committee's proposal.

The mountain had finally given birth to a mouse.

The conclusion to be drawn from the text analysis of top down documents is that the Ministry of municipal and regional affairs did what it was expected to do. Its report gave adequate descriptions of major regional changes. The main objectives of regional policy were presented, and the need for a gender and life cycle perspective in regional development were emphasised. When it comes to policy implementations, the political canon took over, insisting on the importance of primary activities for the preservation of the existing settlement pattern. The gender and life cycle perspective, focusing of aspirations and actions of individuals, is overshadowed by general labour market considerations.

The policy parts of the report did not really follow up the problem analysis in the first part of the report. This is a criticism not only of this report, but also of earlier regional policy reports. When political actors take over from the civil servants, a diluting process sets in. Major changes in policy are avoided, and so were changes which may be unfavourably received by specific regional interest groups. In the case of the 2001 report things were not made easier for the civil servants because mid-way in the work with the report the minority centrist government was replaced by a minority labour government. Minority governments tend to avoid confrontations. So did the committee for municipal affairs when preparing its report to parliament. The different parties presented their views. There was no need to develop competing alternatives, since Parliament does not make important votes when reports are presented. The important votes will have to be taken when the budget goes through parliament late in the autumn session.

The open debate in Parliament, given calendar and time constraints, inevitably became an anti-climax. It did not make newspaper headlines, and was conveniently forgotten in the hectic weeks before the summer recess.

From top down to bottom up perceptions on regional policy .

The general picture of changes in population distribution has been described in the first part of the paper. It can be summarised as follows: The major urban regions are the winners. But they are not included in the government's strategies for regional development. The marginal regions are the persistent losers. Also rural areas outside commuting hinterlands of medium-sized and small towns experience out-migration.

Special development programs should be directed towards these marginal regions. But between the periphery and the major centres are *the robust regions*. The government's idea of a robust region is that it should offer work, housing and public and private services to the young people growing up there. But as pointed out above, among the *economic regions* of Statistics Norway, defined as regional labour markets, many are not really regional labour market regions, but just local centres surrounded by demographic peripheries with little contact with the centres.

The top down people in the political system seem to believe that regional policy measures can strengthen these robust regions, so that fewer young people will leave, and that many of those who leave will come back. But then it is worth while to find out what really makes people stay or move. Over the last few years, many studies have asked these questions. Some of the findings are reported and commented upon in the following paragraphs.

<u>Mobility is the rule.</u>

Young people, wherever they live, are very mobile. The national register of population makes it possible to follow individuals over time (Statistisk Sentralbyrå 1999, Sørlie 2000)

TABLE 3.
AGE COHORTS BORN 1960 – 62 FOLLOWED BETWEEN 15 AND 35
(PER CENT OF 15 YEARS OLD MEN AND WOMEN 1975 – 77. FOUR TYPES OF MUNICIPALITIES)

MIGRANT CATEGORY	TYPES OF MUNICIPALITIES							
	Rural		Local centre		Regional centre		Major urban region	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
1. Non - leavers	35	18	42	25	43	29	42	33
2. Return migrants	15	15	16	19	18	20	19	21
3. Leavers	50	67	42	56	39	51	39	46
4. Newcomers	18	31	25	35	35	47	57	66
Balance (1 + 2 + 4) ÷ 100	-32	-36	-17	-21	-4	-4	+18	+20

Source: Sørlie 2000, table 3.3

Table 3 sums up some of the major findings of Sørlie's general study. He follows all Norwegians born between 1960 and 1962 between the age of 15 and 35. He classifies them as either non-leavers (still living at the age of 35 where they lived at the age of 15), return migrants (moved out and back again between 15 and 35), leavers (not living at 35 where they lived at 15) and newcomers (not living there at 15, but at 35). Four categories of municipalities are used; rural municipalities without centres, municipalities with local centres, municipalities with regional centres and major urban regions.

The table shows that two thirds of the women and one half of the men who lived in rural municipalities at the age of 15 had left before 35 The propensity to leave is reduced the more urban the municipalities are, but even in the major urban regions 40 per cent of the men and 46 per cent of the women are leavers. As opposed to rural municipalities, migration in larger urban regions often are short distance moves between municipalities within one urban housing market.

The old idea that migration is related to work opportunities is still popular with many politicians. If the young can find work where they grow up, they will stay. The regional policy report to some extent echoes this view. But when school leavers are asked about their views on the future: will they leave or will they stay, work is among the less important facts of life they take into consideration. To them, future work is less important than social needs in the near future. The transition from childhood into adolescence is also a liberation process. They want to leave in order to see alternatives. Their views on the world outside the valley of their childhood are influenced by what they read, often on the Net, or what their older relatives and friends who have made the move tell about life out there. Their ideas of the good life out there are often superficial. The answers they give in questionnaires or in written essays, or when interviewed personally are often copycat answers. What comes in their minds, is what they discuss with friends. The point to be made is not that they do not know much of life elsewhere, but that they know that they want to go away, perhaps not for life, so at least for some time (Båtevik and Olsen 2000).

Some do not leave.

In the good old days children went straight from school into work. They followed the paths of their parents within a local labour market based on the exploitation and

processing of natural resources. This is now history in most parts of Norway, but still some leave school early and find work where they live. For them, elementary school or one or two years of vocational school is enough. They are tired of school. Two thirds of them are boys. The regional policy report spends much time in pointing to job opportunities in natural resource based activities. But the number of jobs in these activities has been drastically reduced, and even when available, the young people do not want them. The boys who start work when 16 or 18, get beginners' jobs in transport, warehouses and stores, in auto repair shops, in building and construction work, often working for relatives or other people they already know. When interviewed, they appreciate earning money , often spent on hobbies such as motorcycles and cars. They live at home for some years, and they keep up school friendships. They become the masters of the street, since so many of their contemporaries have left. The girls they knew may have left, but there are new girls to get to know, two or three years younger, still at school, not saying no to an evening ride in the newly acquired second-hand Volvo station wagon. Since they have decided to stay, they talk mostly in positive terms about the place they live in. They are embedded. But some of them are not sure that they will not leave one day.

The girls who leave school early do not go into available farming and fishing jobs. They do not want them. They find temporary jobs as assistants in nursery schools, old people's homes and as shop assistants. A case study from Aurland (Hansen 2001) shows that many of these girls changed their mind after a few years of unskilled, low-paid jobs. They decided to go back to school, completing secondary school and pursuing higher education in nursing, teaching and office work. It helped if these education opportunities were found within commuting distance. Many of these girls had found partners where they lived, and did not want to leave. The partnership becomes more important than work.

Table 3 shows that more men than women stay. In rural municipalities more men leave than stay (respectively 50 and 35 per cent). In the other categories, the difference between leavers and non-leavers is small, but the non-leavers never are a majority of the male cohort. Only one of five women in rural municipalities are none-leavers. The proportion increases the more urbanised the municipality, but never reaches more than one third.

Education – a prime mover or an excuse for leaving?

Studies based on the population register of Statistics Norway (Grimsrud 1999, Statistisk Sentralbyrå 1999, Sørlie 2000) show that education is a driving force. Young people from municipalities without secondary schools will have to go elsewhere if they want to continue to study after elementary school – and they want to. Many of them can commute, some have to move. In both cases, they will meet new social environments, and see the place they grew up in from the outside. They are given a choice between places. Sooner or later, all of them must make this choice.

In a recent study, Grimsrud (2000) has made in-depth interviews with 37 women who at one time in life have left or arrived in a region in Interior East Norway She finds that it gives little meaning to classify the migrants by motives, because the decision process leading up to migration is very complex. Education, work, partnerships, children, relatives and place embeddedness are important elements in this decision process, but the weight of the different elements varies over time.

Over the last fifty years, an intermediary phase of life has wedged itself between childhood and work. The wedge is education, and it becomes more and more forceful as time goes. Higher education means moving out for most of the young living in the so-called robust regions, so attractive for the top-down people, not only the political thinkers, but also for the members of municipal councils who have a vested interest in the locality their own children want to leave. When students in secondary schools are asked about their immediate plans, almost all the girls and a majority of the boys believe that they are going to leave. The 'official' reason is that they have to leave in order to study. Behind this reason lie other considerations.

Førlandsås (2001) has studied attitudes of young people to life in the restructured industrial town of Rjukan (the case of Rjukan is presented in Hansen 2001) A secondary school girl in Rjukan sums up her relationship to Rjukan : 'To a 17 year old girl this is the worst place one can live in' The place, she realises, can be attractive to her parents, to smaller sisters or brothers, or to a married cousin with two toddlers. But she is too young to go to the pub or to get a driver's licence. There are too many restrictions on her life. When she stays with friends, she often is fed up with them, in particular with the boys. Always the same tiresome faces. She definitively has decided to leave, but does not exclude the possibility of coming back. Almost all the girls in Rjukan secondary school, and a majority of the boys, do not take

vocational courses leading them into the local labour market, but follow the general studies curriculum. Many of them do not know what they are going to use their general studies background for, but they are convinced that by choosing general studies, they are not being tied to local jobs, but can use this general education as an opening for higher education studies elsewhere. The higher education path leads them out a the local environment which is too small at this stage of life. Higher education is a means to get away more than a goal in itself. One year before leaving Rjukan for higher education elsewhere, most of the pupils do not really know what kind of higher education studies they are going to follow. Quite a few of them just want to travel around the world for some months.

Will they return?

Since so many politicians wishfully think that return migrants can give new life to ailing communities, one should look at the reality, as presented by Sørlie (2000). Going back to table 3, we find that of those who left, almost one half returned in the best category; men to regional centres, less than one in five in the worst case; women to rural communities.

These empirical data are available for all municipalities in Norway (Statistisk Sentralbyrå 1999). Sørlie's national report was commissioned by the Ministry of municipal and regional affairs, and is referred to in the 2001 regional policy report (p. 17-19). Of course his documentation must be depressing for top down politicians who hold high hopes for the future of the Norwegian periphery.

They chose to ignore these empirical findings. In her presentation, the spokesman for the committee of municipal affairs, a member of the Centre party, told Parliament: "We want to insist that not all those who move do so because they find very interesting opportunities or because the grass is so much greener on the other side of the fence. Questionnaire surveys in fact show that many people, not least young people, answer that they would not have moved if they could find work where they lived. In a report from 1999, more than 50 per cent of those who had moved said that they definitely, or perhaps, would not have moved if they had been offered better opportunities in the place which they had left." (My translation). One should always be careful when interpreting answers to hypothetical questions. This precaution is also valid for members of Parliament.

What makes people return?

The general picture is relatively clear, but should be followed up with case studies which also give qualitative insight in why some people return.

TABLE 4.
MIGRANTS INTO AND FROM TINN

MIGRANT CATEGORY	Cohort 1 (born 1949 – 56, 15 years 1964 – 71)		Cohort 2 (born 1960 – 62, 15 years 1975 – 77)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1. Non - leavers	33	23	55	42
2. Return migrants	17	17	12	16
3. Leavers	50	60	33	42
4. Newcomers	13	23	29	21
Balance (1 + 2 + 4) ÷ 100	-37	-37	-4	-21
5. Incomers in transit	33	45	50	53

Source: Statistic Sentralbyrå 1999

Tinn municipality with its local centre, Rjukan, is such a case. Let us start with the quantitative background (table 4). One half of the men and 60 per cent of the women born between 1949 and 1956, and who lived in Tinn at the age of 15, had left at the age of 35. This heavy out-migration took place when the chemical industry in Rjukan went into a long period of decline. For those who were born between 1960 and 1962, who lived in Tinn when they were 15, and reached the age of 35 between 1995 and 1997, the corresponding numbers showed that one third of the men and 40 per cent of the women had left. The oldest cohort left elementary school between 1965 and 1975, a period where job losses in the dominant chemical industries were considerable. By 1997, the chemical industries had closed down, but Rjukan had profited from important regional policy measures, and many new jobs in secondary and tertiary activities had been created for those in the youngest cohort. The most important difference between the 1949-56 cohort and the 1960-62 cohort is that the proportion of non-leavers increased. Local restructuring made more young people

hang on, but the return rate of out-migrants was still low. Out of four who left, only one came back.

Førlandsås (2001) interviewed return migrants to Rjukan. She finds that work is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for coming back. Family networks, cheap housing and good environments for bringing up small children are also important. The return migrants did not come back to escape from big cities. In the phase of life they were in (around 30-35 years old), Rjukan had become a different place from the one they left 10 to 15 years ago. Whereas the 17 year old youngsters today often paint Rjukan in dark colours, the return migrants find many attractive features. They do not feel claustrophobic about the place. They intend to live in a more extensive space than they did when they were 17. They are more mobile and keep contact with the place they left. To them, Rjukan is not an isolated place in the middle of nowhere, but a place which together with other places constitute the spatial basis of their lives. But some of them envisage moving on. When their children grow older, they may go elsewhere. They like the work they have at present, but see few opportunities to find new and better jobs in Rjukan. They are approaching a phase in their life cycle where Rjukan once more may become too small. The point to be made is that perceptions of place and space change over time during life, and that mobility is one way of finding the right place at the right time.

Grimsrud (2000) has interviewed women from interior East Norway who were living in Oslo. Some of them considered coming back The reasons are familiar; stress in work, transport stress, expensive housing, fear of criminality. More interesting are their definition of return migration. If they move back, it is *not* to the municipality they left, but to small towns not too distant from the place they initially left. One of the reasons is that the most of the women want work in public and private services, not in primary activities. And these jobs are more easily found in regional centres. Another reason why they do not want to return to where their relatives live, is that they are afraid of losing their own identity. They do not want to be looked upon as 'the daughter of …', 'the wife of …' or 'the sister of …'. They have developed their identity after they left the place of their childhood and early youth. When they come back, they do not necessarily want to join the old networks. The choice between proximity and distance is problematic. Women who left rural communities and local

centres, may return to the nearest regional centre. They move up the urbanisation ladder, but in their way are faithful to the region of their childhood, if not the locality.

They thought they would return, but did not. Why?

Many young people find partners where they have chosen to pursue higher education studies. If the partners come from different places, they may chose to stay where they studied, if job opportunities are better. If one of the partners can offer housing in his or her place of origins, the other partner may follow. One return migrant brings with him/her a newcomer. Grimsrud (1999) finds that in her study area in East Norway quite a few women move into the area together with farmers' sons who have work and housing waiting for them. The women prefer jobs in public services, and appreciate living in a rural environment when the children are small. But this alternative becomes less and less important since the number of farms in Norway is being rapidly reduced.

As women become more and more educated, return migration becomes less probable. A long higher education binds them closer to the town where they studied or other large, diversified labour markets. Socially, they become gradually more and more integrated in the town of study. Ideas they initially had about returning home fade away.

Wiborg (1999, 2000) has interviewed students at the Regional College in Bodø in North Norway about their attitudes to the place they came from and where their family still lives. She finds that the women she interviewed are developing their social identities through a continuous process, and that the process also changes their identities over time. Higher education for them is a journey in time and space from one identity to another. This journey increases the distance between them and their childhood friends who stayed behind, finished their education early and formed a family with partner and children. For the educated women, in the phase of life they are in (around 25), children are seen as an obstacle to the development of their social identities. They discover, when visiting their families, that they and their childhood friends have less and less in common. They tend to look down upon these old friends, and sometimes feel that their former friends do not understand them. An alienation process sets in, which makes it more and more difficult for these educated women to

return. Behind the remark ‘there are no jobs for us’ are hidden profound personal reasons for not coming home. ‘Home’ is family, not place.

The older the potential return migrants, the less probable is it that they will return. And what is holding them back is perhaps not the lack of adequate work when returning, but the simple fact that their continuous identity projects are more and more anchored in the place where they live now. There is not much regional policy measures can do to make them change their minds.

Are in-comers going to replace those who left?

As already pointed out, at present there is very little unemployment in Norway, and a serious shortage of labour, also in peripheral areas.The local council chairman in a very remote forest municipality in East Norway summarised the situation in his municipality: “This is a very good place to live in. The only things we are short of is work and workers”. People leave such municipalities because they do not want hard physical work, in production jobs or in the social and health sector. Vacancies are not filled, or filled by temporary immigrants or political refugees. But also in less strenuous service sector jobs there are vacancies, in particular in jobs for people with higher education. Local people who leave to educate themselves for such jobs, tend not to become return migrants. In such a situation it is important to identify the role of in-comers in local labour markets. Table 3 shows that the number of newcomers (in-comers who stay on) in all types of municipalities are higher than that of return migrants. It also shows that newcomers are more attracted by regional centres and major urban regions than local centres and rural communities. There are more women than men among the newcomers. The kind of jobs which attract them are not the traditional local jobs of peripheral areas, but public and to some extent private service jobs which are found all over Norway. For newly educated people who want a foothold in this national labour market, it is easier to find such jobs in less central communities, because the turnover there is higher and opportunities for getting a first job better. Some of the newcomers, and especially women, come with men who are return migrants. Quite a few of the in-migrants remain newcomers only for a short period of time. They move on to the next step in their career, or because they did not like the place.

Table 4 shows the relation between newcomers and movers-on in Tinn. For men in the oldest cohort there were almost three movers-on for each newcomer. These men arrived when the old manufacturing industries were still in operation and needed unskilled workers, but the phasing-down had begun. Many of them came from rural communities in the same region, and soon moved on. For each female newcomer there were two movers-on. The youngest cohort met a different labour market. The old basic industries lived through their last years of existence, but new jobs were created in other manufacturing industries and in service industries. The differences between men and women were reduced, but the mobility was still very marked, and the number of movers-on, specially among women was higher than was the case for the older cohort. This must be ascribed to the fact that the new jobs available in Rjukan required skills that also could be used elsewhere. The level of education was higher in the younger cohort than in the old cohort, and higher education usually means higher mobility.

Førlandsås (2001) interviewed a few newcomers, all of whom worked in service jobs. They had previously lived in larger cities, and found life in Rjukan less stressing than where they came from. They also appreciated cheap housing and available nursery schools. They found friends easily, partly because there were so many in-comers in the same situation. They did not feel isolated, because they knew that a couple of hours travel could bring them to larger towns, and – as one of them said – : 'Two hours to the airport and another 6 to the Canary Islands, that is OK with me'. But they also kept an opening for moving on in their minds. It was not easy making a career in Rjukan. And when their children grew up and wanted to study – what then? For these in-comers, Rjukan was a good place to live in during a specific stage of the life cycle, but perhaps not a place for ever.

Where do we go from here?

The main point of this study is that human mobility is increasing, and that it is here to stay. There are many good reasons for individuals to move, and job opportunities is only one among many. A decision to move is a part of an individual's ever changing identity project. Places are deconstructed and constructed as life goes on. Most people have the human and economic resources to change places if they want to. And many do.

In a regional policy perspective, there are losers and winners among regions. The bottom line of table 3 is a balance sheet. If you add non-leavers, return migrants and newcomers, the bottom line tells you that rural areas have a negative balance of around one third of those who lived there at the age of 15 in 1975. The negative balance persists, but less pronounced, in municipalities with local centres. When we come to regional centres, there is only a slight negative balance. The winners are the major urban regions, those – we remember – who in the government's long term plan 2002-2005 mainly were defined as areas in need of help because of the social problems , and in the regional policy report are not considered as true objects of regional policy.

An alternative regional policy could be to improve living conditions in the regions where people want to live. That could be done in making a real effort in public housing in the major urban regions, to improve accessibility, and to improve the living conditions of the marginalised people living in these regions. Outside the major urban regions, the regional centres should be given better opportunities to receive return migrants Then there would be correspondence between an all-inclusive regional policy and where the people who are going to shape our future want to live. One reason to present this alternative regional policy is that the present *distriktspolitikk*, favouring local centres and rural areas, does not seem to work well. It has been tested on almost 40 cohorts of young people, and rejected by most of them.

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