

The Emergence of Urban Regions as Institutionalised Political Entities in Norway

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Abstract

Theoretically, the development of political, economic and cultural institutions in a region is a decisive factor for regionalisation. The success of regionalisation will depend on the “thickness” of regional institutions, among other factors. But the material spatial structure, the spatial everyday practices of the population and the symbolic formation of the region are also factors influencing the regionalisation and territorial demarcation of a region. These four factors constitute the basis for analysing the emergence of city-regions in Norway.

The paper is mainly empirical and focuses upon the emergence of political bodies as representatives for city-regions. This represents a new kind of bottom-up regionalisation in Norway quite different from the unsuccessful government initiative for establishing provinces. The regionalisation process in nine city-regions is scrutinised and characterised according to the four factors of regionalisation. Emphasis is given to the role that policy fields and institutions play in the development of city-regions as political entities and whether or not this regionalisation process challenges the local or the regional level of government. Another question touched upon is what the driving forces seem to be behind the emergence of city-regions; are they an example of the struggle to be a competitive node in the global economy, or are they just a result of pragmatic coordination between instances in a fragmented, multi-level, political structure with too narrow city borders?

Key words: regionalisation, city-regions, Norway, multi-level governance, network, policy making

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1. Introduction

The question of regional governance between the state level and the local level is currently being debated in Norway. The discussion is about what responsibilities the regional level should have and about the territorial size of the regions. Most of the debate's focus has been devoted to the unsuccessful proposal from the government on the establishment of provinces by merging counties and increasing regional responsibilities. During the same period, we have experienced an emergence of increased cooperation on a city-regional level. The mission of this paper is to shed light on this development in order to understand the driving forces behind that development. The paper proposes two alternative assumptions regarding the driving forces:

- a) The emergence of city-regions is a solution to the need for coordination in an urban region where the administrative borders are too narrow and the policy-making power is spread across different instances.
- b) The emergence of city-regions is a solution to the need for merging capacities to become a competitive city-region in a global economic context.

Theoretical perspectives on how regions develop as territorial units and how borders of regions are shaped constitute the framework of the mapping and analyses of the emergence of city-regions in Norway. This investigation will also illuminate the driving forces behind the regionalisation process.

The paper touches upon these research questions:

- To what extent are city-regions established as regional entities in Norway?
 - What kind of political bodies take the role of promoting and developing the city-region?
 - In what way does the territorial reference of the city-regional political bodies correspond to the everyday spatial practices of the population?
 - To what extent does the city-region exist as a well-defined, symbolic concept with definite borders?
- What seem to be the driving forces behind the emergence of urban regions as political entities?

These questions are investigated by document studies and interviews in nine urban regions in Norway. Mapping of the spatial structure and of everyday practices (i.e., how commuting, shopping, culture, etc., occur in the total urban area) represents a spatial frame of reference for the investigation of political bodies and symbolic formation in these urban regions. The paper emphasises the four policy fields of spatial planning, transport, culture, and business development and analyses the policy bodies in each policy field with regard to spatial basis, economic, political and administrative power and degree of institutionalisation.

The theoretical perspectives for development of regions function as the basis for the empirical research and are described in the next section. Studies of regionalisation are context dependent, and section 3 gives a short overview of Norwegian regional policy and the characteristics of the selected urban regions. The results of the empirical research follow thereafter, before section 7 presents the conclusions.

2. Theoretical perspectives on regionalisation

Regions come in all sizes. A region can be defined as a territorial unit with some kind of organising principle that differentiates it from other regions. Regions are perceived as building blocks that, when combined, form a whole (nations, provinces, transnational units). Many types of regions exist. *Administrative regions* -- also named political regions -- have traditionally developed within the nation's borders and are a part of the nation's hierarchical system. Administrative regions are also used as methodological regions for statistical and planning purposes. *Functional regions* denote territories where cooperation occurs based on issues, and a form of regional division of labour exists. Since the cooperation is functional, there is no need to follow the administrative borders. *Cultural / ethnic regions* are associated with perceptions of common identity and history and are also denoted as the identifying region. All types of regions are relevant for consideration when discussing regionalisation and regionalism.

There is still a widespread comprehension of regions as the territory or the context where the social, cultural and economic processes take place. The region itself is taken for granted. It is important to understand regions as a social construction, shaped by political, economic, cultural and administrative practices and discourses, both exogenous and endogenous, instead of the common perception of regions as independent entities, natural contexts or passive containers for the development of society (Paasi, 2001). In the social construction perspective, regions appear as important instruments in the shaping of spatial governance, economy and culture.

A distinct region represents a specific cultural and historical phase of the development of the society, so it is important to examine the origin, change, persistence and disappearance of regions. Regionalisation processes are unique, but some common characteristics or development patterns have been identified. Paasi (ibid) points at four aspects occurring simultaneously: the development of territorial, symbolic and institutional forms and the establishment of these forms as a region in the social consciousness. Lefebvre (1990) mentions three modalities as the basis for regionalisation: spatial practices (empirical spatial practices like commuting, transportation, etc.), spatial representations (discourses in society) and representational space (everyday practice).

Onsager and Selstad (2004: 35 – 40) define three conceptions as the basis for regionalisation: *interaction* between people described by time-space movements, *identification* shaped by processes connecting people to a territory and *institutionalisation* of the region. In the discussion of the development of city-regions as a regional level of governance, the development of institutional forms appears to be important. Onsager and Selstad (ibid) emphasise the development of political, economic and cultural institutions for and by the region, i.e., formal organisations create a regional identity, which makes people perceive the region as an important entity. The success of regionalisation will depend on how thickly (i.e. how many regional instances and processes) the region manages to establish institutional layers. The fundamental idea in these perspectives is that the interactions are contingent upon identification and, to a certain degree, institutionalisation.

Ellingsen (2002) supports this perspective but divides practices into everyday practices and institutionalised practices. He discusses regionalisation as a dialectical relationship between: (1) objects (natural and manmade), (2) concepts (ideas and ideology) and (3) practice (everyday and institutionalised). Practices can be observed (patterns of conduct), while objects and concepts represents resources for conduct.

Following the idea of regions as social constructions, the same applies for regional borders. A distinguished understanding of regions says that regions have never been definite territorial units, but have instead been constituted through transregionalisation, i.e., regions comprise a non-permanent merger of institutions, objects and practices involved in translocal and transregional processes (Brenner, 1999). Regional borders and their material and symbolic meaning should be perceived not as autonomous and evolutionary processes, but instead as representations of power structures and opinions associated with space, welfare and democracy. The participants in this process of regionalisation will be situated both inside and outside the region. The discrepancies between a region perceived as a defined territory (i.e., administrative regions) and a region perceived as a network of social relations and discourses will appear in the investigation of the development of city-regions.

These theoretical perspectives on regionalisation and regional borders form the basis for the empirical investigation and analyses of the regionalisation processes in the nine city-regions in Norway.

M^cGuirk (2007) discusses different theoretical contributions to city-region theory and the understanding of driving forces behind the emergence of city-regions. The arguments can be put into two broad categories:

- One set of perspectives sees the development of the city-region as a part of a global economy, in which the city-regions are connected and play a vital role that is disconnected from the nation's. The city-region's scaled spatial agglomeration is argued to be a functionally- and organisationally-effective economic and political space (Herrschel and Newman, 2002), and the motivation for the city-based regionalism is to secure the competitiveness of the city-region
- Another set of perspectives criticises the above perspective and instead emphasises the need for a coherent policy for the city-region as a territory and for the state as an initiator and constructor of the institutional framework for city-regional governance (M^cGuirk *ibid*).

The preceding two theoretical perspectives usually refer to connected city-regions or metropolitan regions of quite a different scale than the Norwegian towns and cities. Only a few of the cities in Norway would be called cities, most would be labelled towns¹. I will argue, however, that the theoretical perspectives presented above can also be applied to the Norwegian city-regions. Having contextual information regarding both geography and public governance is important for understanding the emergence of city-regions in Norway.

3. The Norwegian regional context

Like most other states in Europe, Norway has three democratically elected levels: the Stortinget (the Norwegian parliament) at the national level, 19 county councils (or the county parliaments) at the regional level, and city or municipal councils at the local level. The state also has administrative bodies at different regional levels, for some tasks in each county (the county governor) and for other tasks for collaboration, e.g., the state road and health authorities. The main responsibilities of

1 The term city-region is being used throughout the paper as a collective term for the urban regions with towns and cities as centres.

the county councils relate to the upper secondary schools, public transport (buses), industrial development, regional planning and culture. The county councils can be regarded as a specialty municipality. The municipal councils at the local level are responsible for all general welfare services, technical infrastructure (except major roads), culture and land-use planning.

The question of how to organise the regional level between the state and the municipalities has been regularly debated in Parliament for the last 40 years. One regional reform that would divide the country into five to nine provinces with considerably more responsibilities (transport, business development, higher education, culture etc.) was discussed, but the final solution seems to leave the counties as they are, with only minor changes in their responsibilities. This can open things up for the alternative idea of developing city-regions as a governmental level.

Economic and demographic centralisation has characterised regional development in Norway over the last 30 years (Bukve et al. 2004). The large cities in Norway, and especially Oslo, have grown significantly in terms of population, economy and space. A number of reports document the increasing importance of the largest cities to Norway's economic development (Holmen and Gjelsvik 2004; Vatne 2005; Hidle et al. 2005). Consequently, the city-regions are experiencing new challenges across institutional and geographical borders with regard to government and planning.

At the same time, the rural areas are characterised by a traditional and resource-based business life and by major challenges with regard to competence and infrastructure. A weak innovation capability had resulted in either standstill or a decrease in the number of inhabitants. For the last two or three decades, the government has focused on stabilising the settlement structure, and by means of such a policy, has given the county councils responsibility for industry development in rural areas. Specific industry policy for urban areas has been stimulated by the government only to a minor degree. OECD (2007) stated in their territorial review of Norway that, "contrary to many countries, Norway has no explicit urban policy per se."

The multiplicity of challenges for the regions of Norway has triggered different responses in the governmental system. On the one hand, the largest city-regions are assigned an increasingly more important role in the national economic development. The white paper on large cities (White paper nr 31, 2002-2003) emphasises the largest city-regions as engines for regional development, and the national authorities have tried to make the cities take part in this work through projects like "Innovation 2010". However, the large cities are also increasingly undertaking their own initiatives in the regionalisation processes. Cooperation agreements are being established with neighbouring municipalities in sectors such as planning, business development and infrastructure (Farsund and Leknes 2005, Leknes, Holmen and Farsund 2005). The focus on the importance of large cities has, to a large extent, been based on ideas gathered from global examples presented in international and national research literature, which emphasise very large city-regions as the breeding ground for new, knowledge-intensive industries that are crucial for national competitiveness in an increasingly globalised economy (Jacobs 1985, Florida 2002).

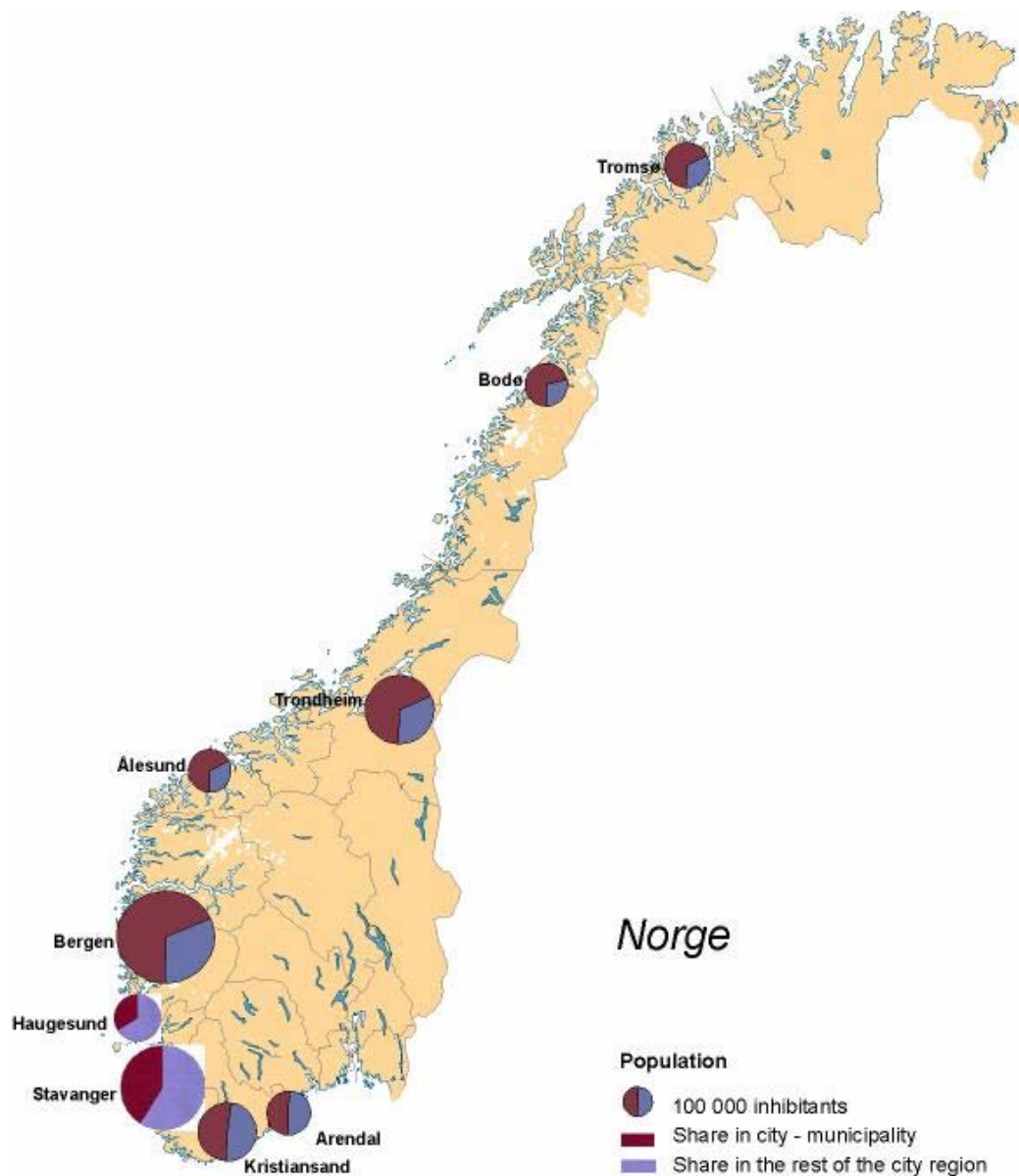
4. The settlement pattern in Norway and the city-regions

With a land area of more than 300 000 km² and a population of 4, 7 million, Norway has the second lowest population density in Europe (after Iceland). Although the total urban area is only around 0.8% of the land area, the settlement pattern has becoming more and more urbanised over the last 50 years. Just after the Second World War, the population was equally divided between sparsely

populated and densely built-up areas; now, 25% of the population lives in sparsely populated areas, with 75% living in the more densely built-up areas.

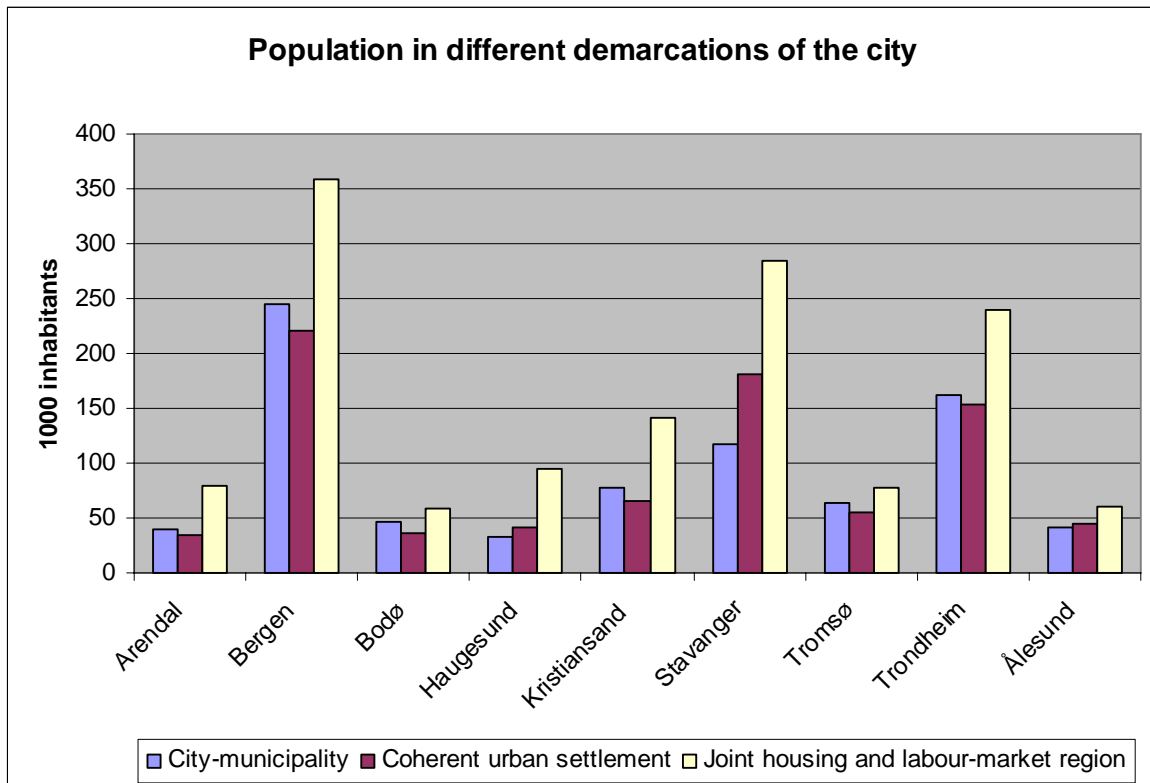
Approximately one half of Norway's population lives in coherent, densely-populated areas of the 20 largest cities and towns, which have expanded beyond the administrative borders of the municipalities. The last major adjustment of the division of the country into municipalities occurred in 1967, when the number of municipalities was reduced from approximately 750 to 450. In spite of several initiatives, only a few municipality mergers have occurred since 1967. The population growth in the densely populated areas (from 1,7 mill to 3,4 mill) during the last 50 years has resulted in the development of urban regions comprising city-municipalities and bordering municipalities.

The map below displays the major cities in the southern, western and northern parts of Norway and the share of population in the city-municipalities and city-regions.



The total population of these city-regions is around 1,4 million, or approximately 30% of Norway's population. These city-regions are among the 15 largest city-regions in Norway, and Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim rank respectively as number 2, 3 and 4 in the city-regional hierarchy. The map reveals that the core city-municipality share of the population in the city-regions varies considerably. The number of municipalities in the city-regions also varies. As we will discuss later, the relative sizes of the city-municipalities and the rest of the city-regions can have implications for the emergence of city-regional cooperation.

The graph below displays in more detail the population in our city-regions based on different boundaries.



The columns on the left display the population in the core city / town municipality of the urban region; the columns in the middle display the population in the coherent, densely-populated area around the city centre; the columns on the right display the population in the municipalities where more than 10% commute to the city.

The graph also indicates that the urban settlement crosses the municipal borders in at least three urban regions, i.e., Haugesund, Stavanger and Ålesund. The urban settlement in Arendal, Bergen, Kristiansand and Trondheim is also very close (less than half a kilometre) to the urban settlement of the neighbouring municipalities. Such a coherent urban settlement structure across administrative borders demands cooperation between the municipalities with regard to spatial planning and development and operation of technical infrastructure. We will see if this is the case later in this paper.

The graph indicates further that the population living in the joint housing and labour market region (based on 10% commuting to the core city-municipality) is between 20% (Tromsø) and 200% (Haugesund) larger than the population in the city-municipality. Such joint housing and labour

markets will demand a coordinated policy at the city-regional level with regard to public transport, location of industry and business development policy. We will investigate if this if the case later in this paper.

5. The territorial demarcation of the city-regions is based on everyday practice

The territorial boundaries of the city-regions must be based on certain criteria. The previous section revealed that both the densely-populated urban areas and the core city-municipalities cover less territory than the functional housing and labour area that is based on 10% of the population commuting to the core city. This should also be quite obvious. If we look at other indicators of *every day practices of the population* besides commuting to work, e.g., where the population shops and what newspaper the majority reads², we find that the city influences an even wider area.

The table below displays how many municipalities in the city-region share the same everyday practices.

| Number of municipalities (and inhabitants) sharing the same everyday practices | Arendal | Bergen | Bodø | Haugesund | Kristiansand | Stavanger | Tromsø | Trondheim | Ålesund |
|--|---------|--------|------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------|---------|
| Is a part of the coherent urban settlement | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 10% or more of the workforce in the municipality commute to the city | 6 | 13 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 14 | 3 | 9 | 5 |
| Shop in the city *) | 4 | 8 | 4 | 10 | 7 | 13 | 4 | 8 | ? |
| The city newspaper with the most subscribers **) | 3 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 12 | 5 | 12 | 11 |

*) This is a judgement based on statistics of retail trade surplus / trade deficit for each municipality

***) Source www.aviskatalogen.no

The table indicates that the city influences and attracts inhabitants in many of its surrounding municipalities. The general pattern regarding the spatial influence of the city is that distance matters. The closer a municipality is located to the city, the larger the part of the population that shares the same everyday practices as the city's inhabitants; i.e., that goes to work in the city, shops in the city and reads the city's newspaper.

Distance seems to be of significant importance with regard to commuting. A commute to the city of between one half hour and one hour seems to represent a demarcation of the joint housing and labour market in the city-region. For everyday practices like shopping and subscribing to the newspaper, distance is not an independent demarcation factor of the city-region. For these two indicators, the presence of competitive offerings (another newspaper and shopping malls located in other towns) seems to affect the extent of the city's influence. The presence of competitive offerings can also be an indication of a polycentric city-region. That is the case for Arendal, Bergen, Bodø, Stavanger and Trondheim.

2 We have also investigated how far the city's football team reaches, i.e., how far out from the city do we find members of the supporter club, the sponsors and the subscribers to the football matches – but it was difficult to find reliable statistics for all cities.

A more detailed study of the spatial aspect of everyday practices of the inhabitants in these city-regions would have revealed a broad spatial pattern of daily travel habits and other practices connecting the inhabitants to the material and institutionalised structures of the city-region. The indicators we have used reveal that the city-regions are established as everyday practice regions that cross administrative borders between the different municipalities.

The policy-relevant aspects relevant to the findings of the city-region as one shopping region are that this could be seen as an argument for developing a city-regional policy for locating shopping malls and regulating retail trade. The same policy could be applicable for locating industry and public transport, since the city-region appears as one labour market.

In general we could argue that the common, everyday practices of the inhabitants in the city-region are an argument for cooperation between the neighbouring municipalities about the provision and coordination of public services. In comparison, we observed that the private sector perceives the city-region as one market and that the administrative borders between municipalities do not seem to be an obstacle for running a business throughout the whole city-region. In the next section, we will investigate the actual cooperation that exists in developing a city-regional policy.

6. The emergence of city-regions as institutionalised political entities

The institutional practices of policy making in the city-region has been investigated and four policy fields have been scrutinised:

- Spatial planning, i.e., land-use planning either at a the city-regional level or as bi-lateral cooperation between two municipalities
- Transport policy, i.e., planning and financing of highways, public transport and development and operation of ports
- Business development policy, i.e., support to existing and new businesses, entrepreneurial services, regional marketing, lobbying and strategic business planning
- Culture policy, i.e., support of public, private and civil society cultural instances and of events and arrangements

The *institutional thickness* is viewed as an important factor regarding the development of a region and defining such a region's borders. This corresponds to our mapping of different policy-making instances³ with the city-region as spatial reference. We have mapped the emergence of city-regional policy fields by:

- identifying instances participating in the policy making
- mapping the spatial reference of these instances
- assessing the power of the instances in the specific policy field⁴

3 The notion of instances encompasses both organisations and looser cooperation, i.e., democratic institutions at local and county levels, intermunicipal companies, governmental authorities, public committees or boards, private and civil society organisations, governance networks and project-based cooperation.

4 We have assessed the power of the instances by mapping the formal political position of the participants, the economic and the administrative resources of the instance and what part of the policy field the instance is involved in.

- categorising the degree of institutionalisation⁵ of sub-policy fields on different spatial levels (municipal, city-region, county, etc)

The methods used in the empirical investigations of policy making in these policy fields include analyses of public documents, existing research and interviews with a broad set of informants from each policy field in each city-region.

We have firstly examined if a city-regional policy field exists for the nine city-regions. Secondly, if such a policy field exists, we have categorised the city-regional (City-R) policy making as: (1) of vital importance, or (2), of minor importance compared to the policy making in this field at the municipal or county level. This categorisation is based on an assessment of the empirical data and the analyses described above.

The table below displays the following:

- Dark cells: City-region where the policy-making instances at this level are of **vital** importance for policy making in the specific policy field, compared to instances at the municipal or county level. The number of municipalities included in that specific policy-making cooperation is displayed with bold figures.
- Light grey cells: City-region where the policy-making instances at this level are of **minor** importance for policy making in the specific policy field, compared to instances at the municipal or county level. The number of municipalities included in that specific policy-making cooperation is displayed with ordinary figures.
- Cells with no shadow or number: There are no instances at the city-regional level of vital or minor importance for the policy making in that field.

| Policy making by instances at the city-regional level of vital or minor importance, compared to the municipal or county level | Number of municipalities included in a coordinated city-regional policy | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--------|----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------|-----------|
| | Arendal | Bergen | Bodø | Haugesund | Kristiansand | Stavanger | Tromsø | Trondheim | Ålesund |
| City-R Spatial planning - vital importance | | | | | 6 | 8 | | | |
| City-R Spatial planning - minor importance | | | | 2 | | 2 | | 7 | |
| City-R Transport policy - vital importance | | | 9 | 3 | 6 | 8 | | | 19 |
| City-R Transport policy - minor importance | | 11 | | 6 | | 6 | 2 | 7 | |
| City-R Business development policy - vital importance | | | | 3 | | 4 | | | |
| City-R Business development policy - minor importance | 3 | 19 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 9 | | 13 |
| City-R Culture policy - vital importance | | | | | | | | | |
| City-R Culture policy - minor importance | | | 9 | 5 | 7 | 4 | | | |

5 Each of the broad policy fields is divided into some sub-policy fields. We have used five categories to indicate degree of institutionalisation of the instance, from low to high degree of institutionalisation: 1 = project cooperation, 2 = public committee, 3 = public board with decisional power, 4 = company with employees and budget, and 5 = public authority.

The table is comprehensive and the pattern is perhaps difficult to grasp. We will therefore comment on three dimensions in the table:

1. The occurrence of city-regional policy making varies considerably between different policy fields.
 - Transport policy appears as the most developed city-regional policy field. In five of nine city-regions, city-regional transport policy is of vital importance; only one city-region has no instances of importance in this policy field.
 - Business development exists as a city-regional policy field in all but one city-region, although in all but two, the city-regional business development policy is of minor importance compared to the municipality at the county level.
 - City-regional spatial planning is of vital importance in two city-regions and of minor importance in another two, but in the other five, no instances of importance exist at the city-regional level.
 - Culture policy is developed to a lesser degree as a city-regional policy field
2. The occurrence of city-regional policy making (in these four fields) varies considerably between different city-regions. The city-regions of Stavanger, Kristiansand and Haugesund all have policy-making instances at the city-regional level in all four policy fields. This implies that the city-region as a political entity can have a broad political basis in these three city-regions and that the institutional thickness will build up under the development of the city-region as a political entity. The rest of the city-regions have developed only two city-regional policy fields.
3. The spatial demarcation of a city-region as a policy field includes, in most occasions, a core of bordering municipalities to the city across different policy fields. Municipalities outside that inner city-regional zone of municipalities are included to a lesser degree in policy making at the city-regional level of vital importance. Distance seems to influence the reach of the city-regional policy field.

We do not find a general pattern when we compare the spatial reach of the city-regions (in terms of the number of municipalities) based on everyday practices with the spatial reach of the city-region as policy-making regions, .

If we look at the municipalities included in the city-regional 10% housing and labour market, we find that the business development policy field for some city-regions includes even more municipalities but fewer than in other city-regions. The transport policy field yields the same result. This indicates that there are other aspects than congruent everyday practices of the population that constitute the basis for cooperation on policy making at a city-regional level.

We will now look into each of the policy fields to understand the processes that create the city-regional policy fields and whether or not these city-regional policy fields can be understood as a step in establishing city-regions as political entities.

7. Characteristics of the four city-regional policy fields

The overall questions we will pose in relation to each of the four policy fields are:

- What kind of political bodies (democratic institutions at the local and county level, inter-municipal companies, governmental authorities, public committees or boards, private and civil society organisations, governance networks and project based cooperation, etc.) undertake the role of coordination and development of urban policies?
- What seems to be the background for the emergence of policy-making instances at the city-regional level, i.e., regionalism or the need for coordination?

Policy making in the field of *spatial planning* at the city-regional level is dominated by municipalities, counties and state governmental authorities at the regional level. All of these public bodies have legal power to take decisions or refuse planning proposals. The cooperation between these bodies can be characterised as formal, public *multilevel governance* organised as project cooperation. The background for establishing such a policy-making body at the city-regional level is *the need for coordination* across administrative borders and levels. Contextual and spatial circumstances like a shortage of development areas in the city and densely-coherent, urban-built areas (housing or industry) that cross municipal borders are also driving factors for establishing spatial planning as a city-regional policy field. The county council has been the organiser and primary promoter of spatial planning at the city-regional level.

The *transport policy field* at the city-regional level is divided into two subfields: highway planning and development and operation of ports. Public transportation does, to a minor degree, appear as a city-regional policy field. Highway planning can also be characterised as formal, multilevel governance organised as project cooperation. The background for this kind of policy-making body is partly that policy making in the field of *highway planning* has, to a certain degree, the same characteristics as spatial planning, but the local level (except the city- municipalities) has fewer formal responsibilities than the counties and the state road administration. This is due partly to the nature of transport, i.e., highways running through many municipalities, and partly to the formal division of the decision-making power between the county and the state road authority. The increased employment of toll systems in city-regions for financing of roads has also promoted the development of transport as a city-regional political field. The county council and the state road authority have been the organisers and promoters of highway planning at the city-regional level.

Another part of the transport field -- development and running of *ports* at the city-regional level -- is organised as intermunicipal companies. The background for establishing such city-regional political bodies for ports is the need for socio-economic efficiency, for avoiding competition between neighbouring ports and for increasing city-regional competitiveness by merging port capacities.

Business development policy making at the city-regional level includes different types of policy bodies, intermunicipal companies, governance networks (both at the same level and between the regional and local levels) and city-regional business associations. The emergence of business development as a city-regional policy field of importance seems to follow several phases. The initial phase comprises project-based cooperation between municipalities and eventually also the county; the next stage includes the establishment of a formal governance network, more project

activities and development of a strategic business development plan for the city-region. An intermunicipal company with budgets, employees, tasks and responsibilities and a public board represents the third phase of the institutionalisation of business development policy as a city-regional policy field.

The background for the emergence of business development as a city-regional policy field can be seen partly as a response to the lack of state-initiated business policies for cities (the state's focus has been on rural areas) and partly as more effective than having several municipal policies for business development. It can also be seen as a means of establishing one coordinated body that speaks on behalf of the city-region to the business sector and markets the city-region externally. Apart from these quite practical arguments for establishing city-regional political bodies, we find quite a partiality to regionalism, for example, such general understandings as: i) the need for the city-region to be competitive with other city-regions both nationally and globally, and ii) the future development of the city destiny lies in our own hands and not in the hands of the state or the county.

Culture policy has been established as a city-regional policy field only to a small degree; most cooperation is either bilateral or multilateral between different levels of governance.

The table below summarises the general findings regarding the two questions posed at the outset of this section:

| | What is the background for the emergence of the city-regional political field? | What in the most important political body for city-regional policy making? |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Spatial planning policy | Shortage of development areas in the city municipality, administrative borders cross coherent urban territory | Public multilevel governance network organised as project cooperation |
| Transport policy | The highways cross the administrative borders, creating a need for cooperation and planning and for financing by toll roads. | Public multilevel governance network organised as project cooperation |
| Business development policy | Practical coordination of marketing and strategic planning and the need to merge powers to increase competitiveness | Governance network gradually developing to a company with different stakeholders involved |
| Culture policy | Practical coordination regarding projects at a city-regional scale | Project cooperation |

To sum up: across the policy fields, transport policy appears as the frontrunner for the political institutionalisation of urban regions, while culture still remains as a municipal policy field. The institutionalisation of spatial planning as a regional policy field seems to depend on specific spatial contextual circumstances. The emergence of business development as a vigorous regional policy field seems to depend on the vitality and multitude of stakeholders and on public leadership

8. Indicators of the symbolic creation of the city-regions

The naming of the city-region can be seen as an important aspect of the regionalisation process (Paasi, 2001, Onsager and Selstad, 2004) by supporting its residents' consciousness about belonging to the region. The more times the name of the city-region is used, the more distinct will the city-region appear, not only in the minds of its inhabitants, but also for those living outside the region. An indication that different kinds of regionalisation processes are underway is when many different names are being used about the same city-region. Such a plurality of names can blur the construction of the city-region. The same kind of reasoning can be applied regarding the territorial boundaries connected to the name of the city-region; i.e., if many different boundaries are connected to the same name, the city-regional borders will become diffuse.

There is a general naming-pattern for the Norwegian city-regions. A white paper (White Paper nr 31, 2002-2003) on the larger cities in Norway recognised the existence of five of the city-regions and confirmed that a city-region name and its territorial boundaries are based on the functional housing and labour regions attached to each of these. Only one of the counties uses the city-region labelling of the regions in the county. Usually the naming of the region the city is included in is based on a more "neutral name" of the broader area (not focusing on the city). The political cooperation in the fields of spatial planning and transport is often connected to such neutral area names. We can find a distinct symbolic construction of the city-region in two areas: the naming of destination companies and in the field of cooperation on business development. The table below displays this pattern.

| | Arendal | Bergen | Bodø | Haugesund | Kristiansand | Stavanger | Tromsø | Trondheim | Ålesund |
|--|---------|--------|------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------|---------|
| City-region name in white paper | | ■ | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | |
| City-region in name of regions in the county | | | | | | | | ■ | |
| City-region in name of destination companies | | | ■ | ■ | | ■ | | | ■ |
| City- region in name of spatial planning cooperation | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ |
| City- region in name of transport policy cooperation | | ■ | | | | ■ | | ■ | ■ |
| City- region in name of business policy cooperation | | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | | | ■ |
| City- region in name of spatial planning cooperation | | ■ | | | | | | | |

The usage of the city-region name has increased recently, and there have been discussions in several of the city-regions about what name should be used for different situations – the city-region name or another name not focused directly on the city. Those discussions and the emergence of more instances where the city-region name is used illustrate the increasing occurrence of the social construction of city-regions in Norway. The discussion on names also signals that the construction of city-regions as political entities has both supporters and opponents.

9. Conclusions

Theoretically, the development of political, economic and cultural institutions in a region is decisive factors for regionalisation. The success of regionalisation will depend, among other factors, on the “thickness” of regional institutions. The material spatial structure, the spatial everyday practices of the population and the symbolic formation of the region are also factors influencing the regionalisation and the territorial demarcation of a region.

This study focuses upon the policy-making aspect of city-regional institutionalisation. Although we can find that city-regions in Norway are established both with regard to the material spatial structure and everyday practices across administrative borders, the thickness of political instances that confirm the “existence” of the city-region as an autonomous and important spatial level for the political region varies considerably between the different city-regions.

The three city-regions located in the southwest part of Norway -- Haugesund, Stavanger and Kristiansand -- appear more distinct as political entities than the other six city-regions along the coast, based on the number and importance of policy-making instances at the city-regional level. There are various explanations for this difference. One quite obvious and structural explanation is that the share of the population in these three city-municipalities is less than half of the city-regional population. With such a population structure and with administrative borders crossing the core urban region, one would presume that the need for the city-municipality to engage in policy coordination between the municipalities in the city-region would be more pressing than if the city-municipality were to have a greater share of the population and span more of the dense urban area.

The symbolic formation of the city-regions is blurred with regard to the region’s boundaries and the terms used to define it. Both the city-region term and a more neutral term (regarding spatial reference) for city-region are being used side by side in most of the city-regions. There is a trend, however, for the city-region term to be more connected to the business development field, while the more neutral term for city-region adheres to the transport and planning fields. The ongoing discourse and diverging practices in the city-regions about the labelling of the city-region reflect a tension between the centre and periphery within the region, as well as between those who think about the city-region in marketing terms and those who think about it as a democratic arena between equal parts. There does seem to be a tendency towards greater acceptance of the city-region term in city-regional instances.

The composition of the city-regional policy-making landscape explains the two alternative assumptions for the driving forces behind the emergence of city-regions as political entities.

The important and vital policy-making instances at the city-regional level in the field of spatial planning and transport are the public, multilevel, governance networks organised as project cooperation. These two policy fields at the city-regional level are established to manage and coordinate urban growth with regard to finances and negotiations between sectors and municipalities. The driving forces behind the development of these city-regional policy fields appear to be quite practical and partly of a distributional character. The county council and the state road authority have established the framework and are the initiators of these public networks; this can be seen as an argument against perceiving these city-regional policy fields as elements involved in shaping a politically-autonomous level of city-regional governance.

The driving force behind the emergence of the city-regional policy field of business development is, to some extent, the same as for the two other city-regional policy fields, namely the need for policy coordination. Since neither businesses nor employees follow the administrative borders of the municipalities within a city-region, why should the public business development policy follow those borders? The perception of city-regions as competitors in the national and global competition for firms and competent workforces is, however, much more in the forefront as a driving force behind the development of business development as a city-regional policy field. The mobilisation of public and private instances and their participation in horizontal governance networks at the city-regional level indicates that this emergence is also clearly connected to regionalism and less so to regionalisation.

These empirical findings illustrate that the driving forces behind the emergence of urban regions as political entities are: (1) pragmatic solutions to regional challenges, such as regionalism, and (2) the spatial organisation of multi-level governance.

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