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The Partial County Plan for the Rondane Region, an evaluation.

Stream: Multiple Commons, Wildlife

Discipline: Geography

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this paper is to analyse the Partial County Plan for the Rondane Region in Norway, and the plan's effects concerning planning in the local authority districts.

The Rondane Region is situated centrally in Southern-Norway, cf figure 1, and is about 150 km from north to south. It is situated in 12 local authority districts and 2 counties, Oppland in the west and Hedmark in the east, cf. figure 2.

By natural conditions the wild reindeer migrates between those parts of a mountain area giving the most abundant supply of nutritious plants at different times of the year. Migration by fixed routes is therefore part of a cycle that knits together areas which provide the best possibilities for survival. The best winter forage areas in Rondane are in the north and east, and the best summer areas are in the west and south. The wild reindeer in Rondane is one of the few remnants of the wild European mountain reindeer. In the years 1989-1993, the number of wild reindeer in the region was approximately 4400 every year. The average number for 1993-96 was 3500 wild reindeer.

As part of traditional use, and in order to adjust the number of animals to the amount of available food, the wild reindeer is hunted. In the years 1989-1993 approximately 1230 animals were shot every year, whereas approximately 800 were shot annually in the period 1993-96. The majority of the hunters live in the local authority districts, and hunting is open to everybody living there.

Due to the popularity of the Rondane region for tourism and out-door recreation there are approximately 12 000 private cabins, most of them located at the western side of the mountain area. Between the early 1920's and 1996 the number of beds in tourist cabins north of State Road no. 27 (see figure 2) increased from about 60 to about 520. Historical statistics showing the number of visitors exist only for the tourist cabins Bjørnholla, Grimsdalshytta and Rondvassbu, which in 1996 had 272 beds altogether. In the years between 1920 and 1994-96 the number of overnight stays increased from 225 to 21 000 pr. year in those tourist cabins. In the summer, the region is crossed by four roads. Several other roads penetrate the region from east and west. The disturbance due to these impacts has affected the distribution of the wild reindeer, both their use of the forage areas and the migration routes.

Most of the impacts leading up to disturbance have been subject for planning in the local authority districts, but traditionally the impacts have been planned without estimating their local and regional effects upon the wild reindeer. Proving negative effects from single impacts, in addition to the fact that small impacts may add up to severe consequences, are additional aspects.

Figure 1. Wild reindeer areas in Norway.
Source: Skogland (1994).

Wild reindeer districts and wild reindeer areas in Norway

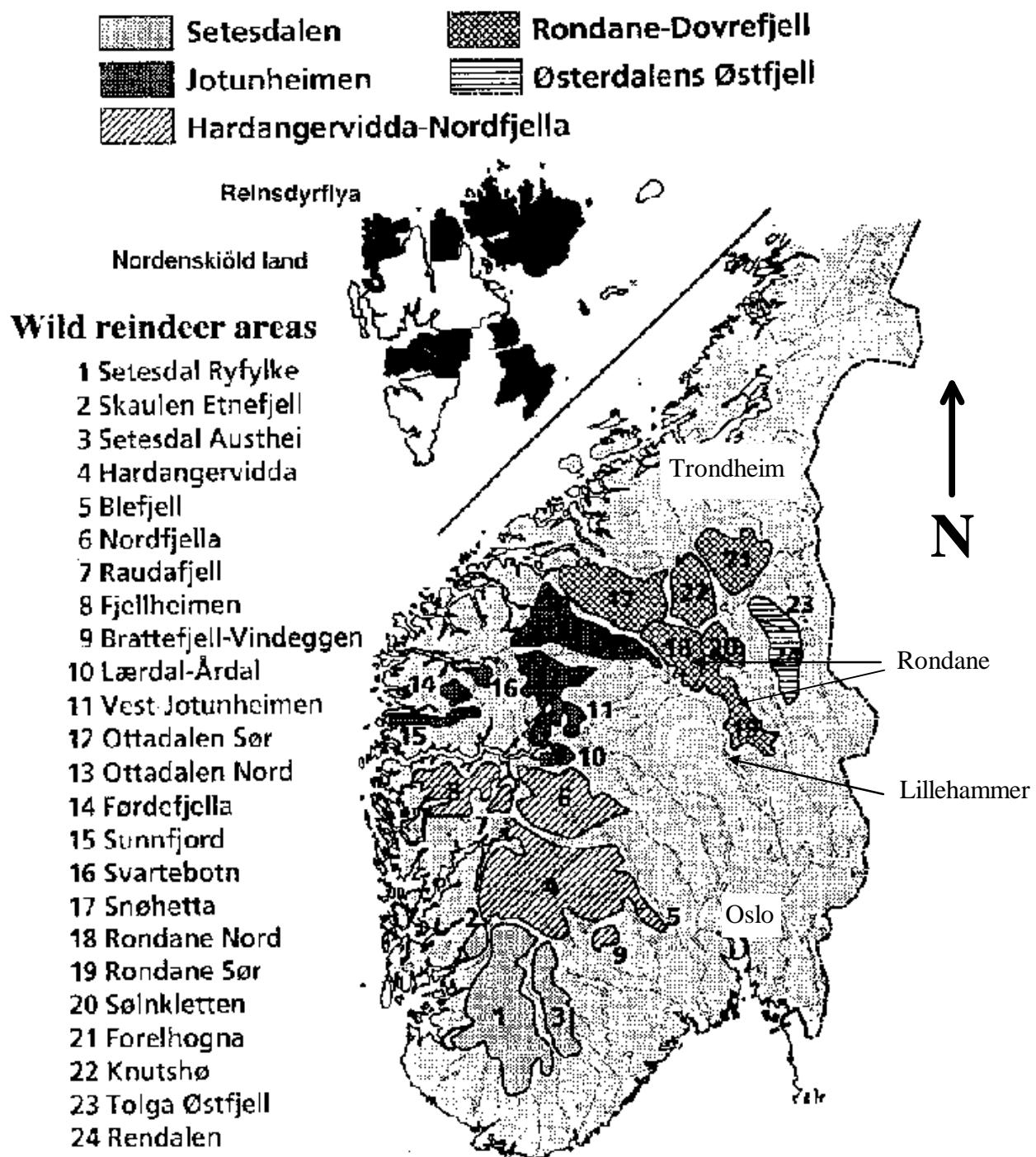
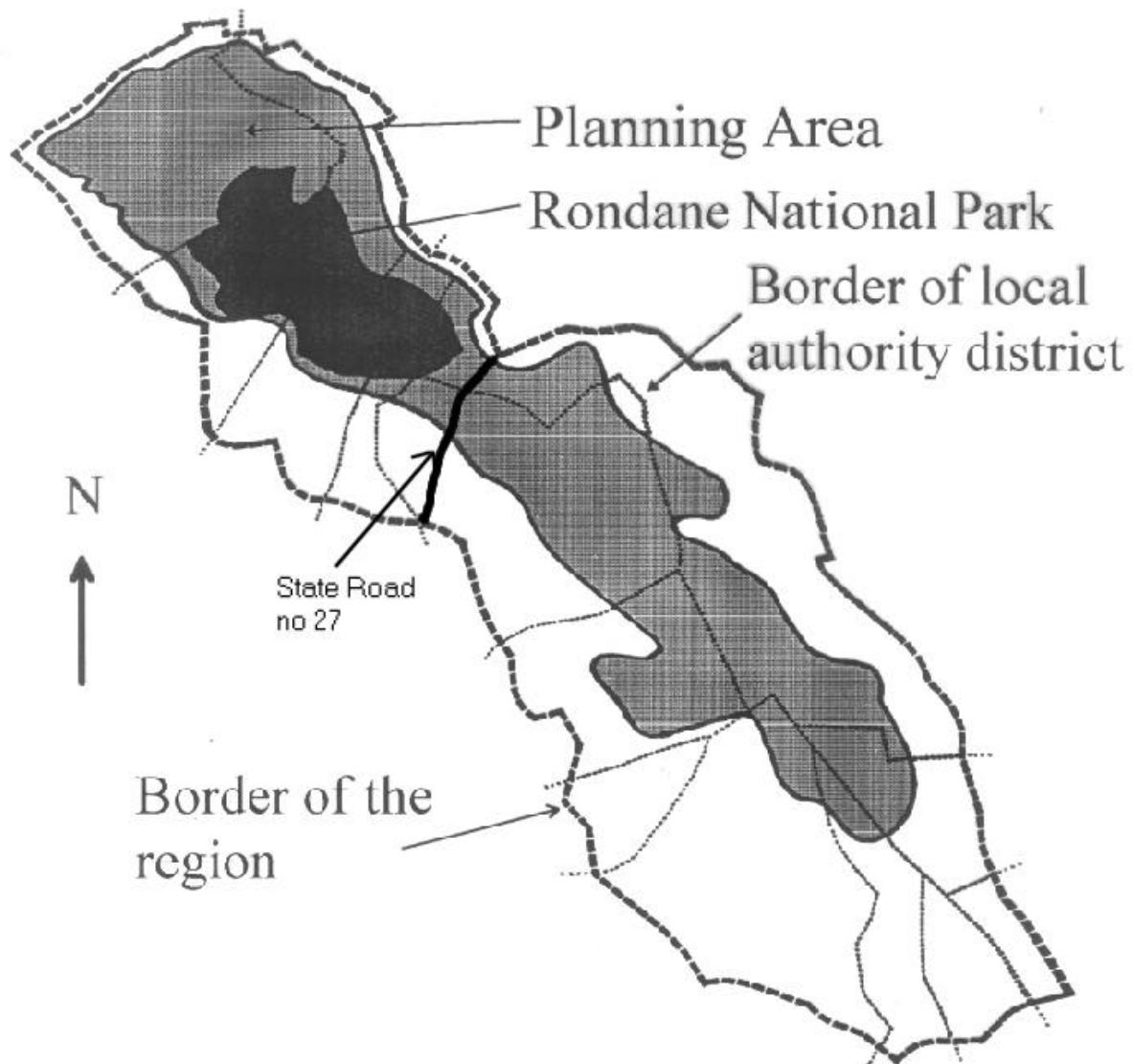


Figure 2. An overview of the Rondane region.



In 1987 one of the local authority districts contacted the other local authority districts in order to establish coordinated planning in Rondane as to maintain the living areas of the wild reindeer. Some local authority districts wanted to co-operate, while others did not even answer the request. However, two of the local authority districts, the county governors (which represent the state) and the county councils (which are publicly elected) continued their efforts to initiate a region-wide planning and management policy in order to maintain the living areas of the wild reindeer. Their prime tool became a partial county plan, because it gave reason for a continuous judgement concerning the balance between further development and the needs of the wild reindeer. The second alternative was an enlargement of the Rondane National Park, but at that time such a proposal was regarded as too controversial.

Meanwhile the conflicts in Rondane reached a peak due to a proposed development of an area with a ski-lift and many cabins in Stor-Elvdal. The county governor in Hedmark made an objection to that plan, and the Ministry of Environment supported the objection. Due to the earlier initiative, and the latest conflicts in Stor-Elvdal, the county councils of Hedmark and Oppland were instructed by the Ministry in 1990 to prepare a partial county plan for the Rondane Region.

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE PLANNING AND BUILDING ACT

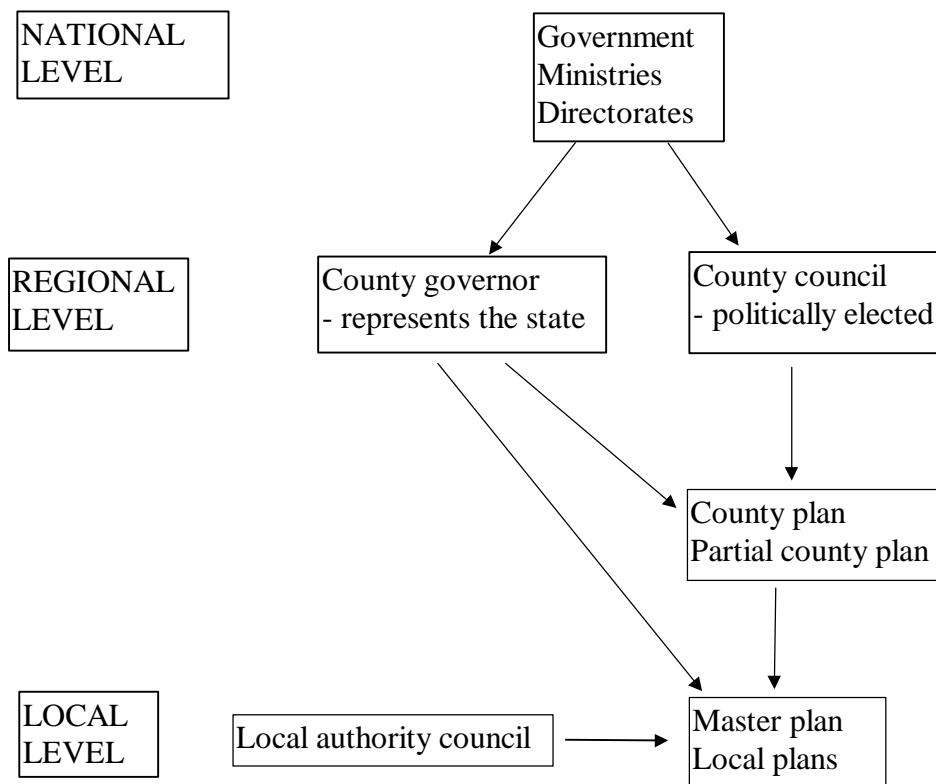
The Planning and Building Act constitutes the legal frame for spatial planning. The local authorities are responsible for the planning in their district. Plans for local authority districts may cover the entire district (master plan), or larger parts of it (partial master plan). At the time of the public hearing of a plan the county governor and the county council can make comments and objections to it. Objections have to be resolved before a plan is lawfully approved. The main features of the administrative system of Norwegian and types of plans at different administrative levels is shown in figure 3.

At the regional level the county council is responsible for the preparation of county plans and partial county plans, which are supposed to serve as a foundation for the coordination of amongst others, the county councils and the local authorities. County plans are binding for the activities of the county council, but are simply guidelines for the planning of local authority districts and the state. Nevertheless, local authority planning conflicting with partial county plans may give reason for comments and objections from the county governor and the county council.

Since the partial county plans are not legally binding, they are intended to function by influencing the master plans. The master plans contain zones for developmental purposes and zones for agricultural use, nature and outdoor recreation. The latter ones cover large areas and are used in order to restrict, or abandon further impacts within an area. The local authorities may give dispensation for activities not conflicting with the main purpose of the zone.

Agricultural activity, as construction of cabins for agricultural purposes, is allowed for in that zone. This highlights that the Planning and Building Act does not protect nature in the same way as the Nature Conservation Act, as some defenders of the Planning and Building Act and opposers to the Nature Conservation Act claim.

Figure 3. The administrative system of Norway and major types of plans according to the Planning and Building Act.



Another means for coordinated planning in the Rondane Region was «national guidelines for planning», which are regarded as a stronger means than partial county plans. The reasons for the Ministry's selection of partial county planning as the tool were probably the previous suggestions from the local and regional authorities, and that the major trend in the system of local governance at that time headed in such a direction (Naustdalslid 1992). White Paper no. 29 (1988-89), «A policy for regional development», emphasised the importance of county planning as a means for sustainable development. This coincides with the idea that political involvement in the planning process, especially by the local authority districts, increases their obligation towards plans (Jansen 1991, Carew-Reid et. al 1994).

By basing the planning upon the Planning and Building Act it was implicitly assumed that if the local authorities did not use the partial county plan for mutual coordination, the county-level authorities had to enforce the intention of the plan by the use of objections. The county councils had a special obligation, because of the plan being a partial county plan.

METHODOLOGY

It was not possible to investigate the planning in every local authority district, so I concentrated upon 6 local authority districts in the northern and middle part of the region, where every proposed plan since 1990 was investigated. They encompass large areas of the region, and are situated at each side of the county border, which enabled me to investigate planning across the borders of local authority districts and counties.

Most of the research was conducted in 1995, which was quite soon after the approval of the plan. Supplementary research was done in 1996 and 1997, which updated the material considerably. The research data consisted of notes and letters from the local authority administrations and the county-level authorities, reports from meetings, draft plans, public and official comments to the plans, approved plans etc. Other research data came from systematic interviews in accordance with an interview guide, whereby 50 persons were interviewed. They represented the local authority districts, the county governors, the county councils, the Public Roads Administration, the Directorate for Nature Management, the Ministry of Environment, the wild reindeer authorities, the mountain boards and the advisory board. The documents and interviews gave me a good overview of the appraisals in these organisations, and an overview of the situation in the local authority districts not especially investigated.

In addition, I made my own appraisal of the material, which is specified in the following presentation. My appraisal of the preparation of the partial county plan was based upon the Ministry's guidelines for that process, and the Planning and Building Act paragraphs concerning participation in the planning process. My appraisal of the document presenting the partial county plan was based upon the Ministry's guidelines, and a professional judgement of the plans content. My assessment of the local authorities planning after the approval of the partial county plan, was based upon the partial county plan, the Ministry's letter of approval, and a professional judgement of how local plans may impose upon the wild reindeer.

Concerning the effects of the partial county plan upon local authority planning, I tried to investigate whether or not the local authority districts founded their planning upon the Rondane Plan, irrespectively of county-level involvement. Another question was whether or not the effects of the plan primarily were caused by the efforts of the county governor and the county council by the means of information, comments and objections. The effect of the advisory board, which was a organisational invention, was the third concern.

The interviews and the written material gave me a good overview of the preparation of the partial county plan and its effects concerning subsequent planning and management. Nevertheless, my evaluation is exposed for uncertainties: One being the possibility to isolate the cause of the partial county plan relative to other factors, for instance the general interest to take care of the wild reindeer areas. Another uncertainty is the time lag. There is reason to believe that the full effect of the Rondane Plan will not be seen immediately, due to the need for it to be incorporated into the implementing organisations. On the contrary, as time passes, the effect of the partial county plan may diminish relevant to other factors, for example the effect of the proposed enlargement of the Rondane National Park. The general answer to such matters is to be aware of them in the evaluation of the material.

THE PROCESS OF PREPARING THE PARTIAL COUNTY PLAN

In December 1990, the two county councils were formally instructed to prepare the partial county plan. A committee representing the local authority districts, the county councils and the county governors was, together with a secretariat, to steer the preparation of the plan. Both county councils functioned as a secretariat, and some officials were supposed to do that job in addition to their ordinary duties.

The main goal of the plan was to ensure the maintenance of the living areas of the wild reindeer, but also to balance between the need for development and protection. This was to be done through the preparation of guidelines concerning the planning of roads, cabins, mining, tourism development etc. within a «planning area» (cf. figure 2), which was supposed to encompass the wild reindeer areas.

In December 1990 the steering committee invited the local authorities to participate in the planning. By the means of intermediary persons in the local authority districts, excursions and regional meetings, the committee throughout 1991 tried to involve the local authorities and other actors into the preparation of the plan. In spite of good intentions, it seems that the planning was not a major question in every local authority district: The interviews and the list of participants at the regional meetings showed that the committee did not manage to involve the most important officials and politicians in the local authority districts, despite being especially invited. In addition, some local authority districts were sometimes not represented at all.

The Ministry's guidelines for the preparation of the plan were unclear as to whether the planning area was to be the mountain areas, or the living areas of the wild reindeer. Generally such areas coincide, but in the southern part of the region the wild reindeer forage in wooden areas. After some hesitation, the steering committee decided the planning area should be the living area of the wild reindeer, independent of natural geographic delimitation's.

In September 1991 the partial county plan was at a public hearing. All 12 local authority districts and the county councils were satisfied with the plan. The county governors of Hedmark and Oppland, and the Directorate for Nature Management were not satisfied. They wanted a plan with stricter guidelines, and were uncertain as to whether or not the plan would play any significant role. Their reasoning were based on former experiences with county planning as a weak tool for the directing of planning, but, they were satisfied with the intentions of using the Planning and Building Act in order to coordinate the planning of the wild reindeer areas.

The County Councils approved the Rondane Plan, with some adaptations. At the national level the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Industry disagreed whether or not State Road no. 27 was allowed to be cleared in the winter. The fear that an open road during the winter could be a physical obstruction for the wild reindeer, and causing increased disturbance due to the «opening» of the area, were the concern of the Ministry of Environment. An open road in the winter, as a means for the development of the region, was important for the Ministry of Industry, which also argued that the plan did show any negative effects for the wild reindeer due to the road. The Ministry of Industry won that fight.

On the 5th of October 1992, the government approved the plan. In the letter of approval, the Ministry of Environment wrote that the plan fulfilled their intentions. Still, they had some comments which were added to the plan: One addition was that the plan's guidelines were to rule the development outside of the «planning area», if an impact was suspected of having negative effects upon the wild reindeer. In addition, the implementation of the plan was to be guided by an advisory board representing the same authorities as the former steering committee. Clearing of State Road no. 27 was to be allowed, if the wild reindeer was not obstructed, or disturbed by increased human activity.

JUDGEMENTS OF THE PARTIAL COUNTY PLAN

In my opinion the document presenting the partial county plan is well arranged, and the maps are easy to read. Quite few respondents had read the document. Their knowledge about the plan was based upon a large map published by the county councils. The map showed the extension of the planning area, and the planning guidelines were printed on it. Most people considered it as very informative. Despite the planning document being well prepared, the lack of a balanced presentation of positive and negative effects of clearing State Road no. 27 must be commented upon: Positive effects for development were overemphasised, whereas negative effects were hardly mentioned. The reason was probably that the mayors of the two most affected local authority districts had their seats in the steering committee, and strongly favoured an open road in the winter.

Whereas the partial county plan is based upon the Planning and Building Act, the management of the wild reindeer herd is based upon the Wildlife Act, where the concept «accountable land» is important. Accountable land is the area agreed upon as the living areas of the wild reindeer, and it is the foundation for the number of animals every local authority district is allowed to announce for hunting. Ideally, the accountable land and the planning area should coincide, and generally did.

Because the area used by the reindeer usually depends upon the size of the herd, the number of wild reindeer became a theme in the planning process. The reason was probably that some local authorities feared that too many animals could lead to an enlargement of the planning area. During the planning process the actors agreed upon the number of animals decided upon by the managers of the wild reindeer herd.

A majority of the respondents meant that the partial county plan fulfilled the ministry's intentions for the plan, but they feared negative effects of clearing State Road no. 27 for snow. The partial county plan was seen as an important tool in the effort to ensure the wild reindeer areas. The importance of a plan covering up the whole region, irrespectively of the borders of counties and local authority districts, was emphasised.

THE EFFECTS OF THE PARTIAL COUNTY PLAN

The county-level authorities caused the effects of the Rondane Plan

In the beginning most of the local authority districts did not use the partial county plan as a foundation for their planning, but gradually the influence of the plan increased. The reason was that the county council and the county governor used it as a foundation for comments and objections. Although the partial county plan is binding for the county councils, the county governors, to a larger extent than the county councils, made objections and based them upon the plan. In some areas, an additional argument was that there were conflicts with the proposed enlargement of the Rondane National Park. The county council, to a larger extent than the county governors, allowed for impacts, or did not consider the Rondane Plan at all.

The local authority districts have not used the partial county plan as a foundation for mutual coordination. Coordination of planning across borders came about due to the county-level authorities comments, and especially objections. Because the partial county plan reflects a

«national» concern for the wild reindeer, the county level authorities were given an extra right of appeal concerning plans. After some hesitation, the Ministry of Environment seems now to support such appeals, being more restrictive to impacts than in the early years of the plan. The mountain boards and non-governmental organisations also used the Rondane Plan as an argument against developmental proposals: Increased local authority awareness of the partial county plan was not caused by a feeling of obligation towards the plan, but because they were forced to consider it. The wild reindeer has been on the political agenda for many years, but it seems as the partial county plan has brought about a greater awareness. Still, it is doubtful whether the local politicians sense of responsibility regarding the wild reindeer has increased or not.

The effects of the Rondane Plan within the planning area, and outside of it

In the master plans, the «planning area» is generally designated as zones for agricultural use, nature and outdoor recreation, which ought to limit the number of new impacts. The respondents in the local authority districts claimed that few, or no, dispensations were allowed for in such zones. That can be proved in some cases. Nevertheless, my material shows that impacts also have been allowed for in such zones: In one case the damming of a small lake, in another case the clearing for a parking lot and in a third case the building of a cabin. As single cases they are of little importance, but they represent a «step-by-step» policy, which is a basic problem in Rondane.

The clearing of State Road no. 27 in the winter was based upon a prohibition against parking and stopping of cars close to the important migration route at the highest point of the road. The implementation of the prohibition was a complicated matter, and it seems that the county councils did not take enough responsibility for that case. Nevertheless, the efforts, which involved traffic control by the police, seem to have succeeded: Both the parking and the skiing, with the road as a point of departure, were reduced.

Much of the disturbance into the wild reindeer areas are caused by people using them with private cabins, hotels or parking lots as points of departure. My material indicates that the areas close to the «planning area» are still quite intensively developed for private cabins and commercial tourism: Despite the partial county plan, the potential disturbance of the wild reindeer has increased considerably, but in some areas the planned number of cabins closest to the planning area was reduced, or totally abolished.

The planning area is delimited by a distinct line, which in some local authority districts was interpreted as a such. In others, it was looked upon as an illustration of the areas under consideration. Now it seems to be interpreted as an indication of a zone for potential influence upon the wild reindeer.

Several respondents claimed that the county councils did not base their efforts upon the intentions of the partial county plan as much as expected. One example was when the political county council wanted to develop an area for private cabins in the middle of the planning area, even though the guidelines strongly opposed such activity. The proposal was later withdrawn. Another case was the county councils allowance for the use of motorised vehicles in the winter within the planning area, even though it conflicted with the guidelines.

The role and effect of the advisory board

Compared to the Ministry's short description of the board's functions, it seems to have fulfilled its advisory role. The county councils have, to a large extent, followed the board's advise, whereby it has influenced the implementation of the partial county plan. Additionally, the board has initiated discussions and meetings with other actors. Evaluated in the perspective of development versus protection, the board seems to favour development.

Those respondents who were aware of the advisory board judged its function differently: Some were satisfied, others were dissatisfied. The representatives of the board did also judge it differently: Those representing the local authority districts and the county councils had some negative comments on it, but were generally satisfied. The representatives of the county councils claimed that the board made their work easier, because it judged the cases before the county councils made their comments. Additionally, the existence of a board caused a more continuous focus upon the partial county plan, and ensured coordination across the county border.

The representatives of the county governors were dissatisfied because the board all too often accepted considerable impacts. Additionally, the board increased the bureaucracy, because the county governors and the county councils still had to make statements in planning cases. Since the majority of the board members represented the local authority councils and the county councils, which usually agreed in planning cases, the county governor representatives were in the minority. In some cases, the board took a poll, but some representatives claimed it absurd that an advisory board with a non-representative composition took polls. The aim of the advisory board was to advise the county councils, but its comments could also impose the statements of the county governors, which its representatives disliked. The secretariat of the advisory board did not function well, and its competence in wild reindeer questions was low. In addition, the local authority district representatives were accused of favouring their own districts.

Rondane National Park and the Partial County Plan for Rondane

A plan for an enlargement of the areas protected according to the Nature Conservation Act in Rondane was launched by the Parliament in 1995. The subject of the enlargement was to maintain the living areas of the wild reindeer, protected as a national park or as landscape protection areas (subject to less strict rules than national parks). The Parliament pointed out that the land use adjacent to those areas had to be coordinated by the means of the Planning and Building Act, but without mentioning the partial county plan. Coordination of land use according to the Nature Conservation Act and the Planning and Building Act was not a theme in the question of enlarging the protected areas.

DISCUSSION

The preparation of the partial county plan was based upon the idea that involvement led to responsibility for the implementation of the Rondane Plan. The partial county plan was adopted in the councils of all 12 local authority districts, and the preparation in accordance to the Ministry's guidelines. Still, the steering committee and the secretariat did not succeed to get the local authorities involved enough. The cause may be their procedures for involving the local authority districts. Those politicians and officials who wanted to participate in the planning had great possibilities for doing so, but the planning process was not organised in

such a manner that the less motivated local authority districts became involved: There were no meetings in the local authority districts, no local referee groups etc. Many respondents got no clear idea of what a partial county plan was, and how it could be used in the planning. One respondent said that if he knew the plan would be used as an argument in favour of objections, he would have been more involved.

My material indicates that the preparation process of the partial county plan was allowed to little time for the maturing of the questions at stake. In addition, the officials were supposed to do their ordinary job while functioning as a secretariat, which left them with too little time for the secretariat. Dividing the secretariat was probably not a good idea. Last, but not least, some of the local authority districts were probably not interested in a coordinated planning to maintain the living areas of the wild reindeer. Remember that some did not even answered the request for co-operation in 1987.

With this in mind, it is not strange that few local authority districts used the partial county plan as a foundation for their own planning, and proposed fewer impacts in order to maintain the wild reindeer areas. The implementation depended upon the county-level authorities, and the county governors were more interested in using it as an argument against planning proposals than the county councils. This coincides with the general picture of their involvement in local authority planning in Norway: The county governor, especially the environmental division, is more inclined to raise objection to plans than the county council (Bråtå and Harvold 1991, Holsen 1996). The explanation is often that within the county council objections have to be approved by the politicians, who feel a responsibility towards the local districts. Since the county council is often criticised in Norway, the politicians want to secure the support of the local authorities, and therefore hesitate to raise objections. Another aspect is that the partial county plan is not a conservation plan, but is supposed to allow for some development in Rondane, especially outside of the planning area.

The advisory board, especially by giving advise to the county council, influenced the implementation of the partial county plan. The advice of the board was inclined to favour impacts, probably because the majority represented the local authorities and the county councils. Nevertheless, since the Rondane Plan allows for some impacts, it can be hard to draw the line for what is acceptable or not. It is difficult to prove a clear effect of coordination across the county border due to the board's advice.

Within the board, its members ought to agree the upon planning cases. Later on, when the cases are treated as part of the ordinary planning, as stated in the Planning and Building Act, their institutions are formally free to judge the cases according to their role in the planning system. Due to the former statements of the board that freedom may be restricted, whereby the majority of the board's members, the local authority districts and the county councils, may restrict the possible options of the county governor. On the other hand, the county governor through the board, may also impose the statements of the county council. The board ensures a focus upon the wild reindeer problem and the partial county plan, and has perhaps played a role in keeping them on the agenda. Still, the advisory board has a formal diffuse position, giving certain persons a great deal of undetectable power.

My material indicates a need for more information and communication between the different actors, across administrative levels and borders. There seems to be a need for a forum or board where people can come together and discuss the future of the Rondane Region. In my opinion, some kind of board ought to exist, but its duties should be concentrated upon the function of a discussion forum, and leave the local authority districts and the county-level authorities to their role as defined in the Planning and Building Act.

The planning institutions, the local authority districts, the county governors, the county councils etc. are a part of larger regimes. In Rondane at least three regimes can be identified: The first one has to do with the Wild Life Act and the second one has to do with the Nature Conservation Act. Both regimes dates back to the 1950's. Generally speaking the most important institutions in these two regimes have been linked to the state, giving less power to the local authority councils. Major actors today are the county governors and their environmental divisions, and the Directorate for Nature Management. The third regime is the youngest one, from the middle of the 1960's, and has to do with the Planning and Building Act. The main actors being the local authority districts and the county councils (Bråtå, in. prep.)

Throughout the years, the area of responsibility between the regimes has converged. An illustrative example is that generally speaking, most of the same area will be covered both by the enlarged Rondane National Park and the partial county plan. Therefore coordination is needed, and the best solution is probably to declare the most important areas as a national park, and the surrounding areas as part of the partial county plan. This would ensure a coordinated planning of the area around the national park, where most of the impacts leading to disturbance of the wild reindeer have their source. Such a coordination would probably be «easiest» for the national park areas, because their rules and the guidelines of the partial county plan are so different. Areas designated as landscape protection areas may be more difficult to integrate with a partial county plan, because the land use allowed there may be too similar to the one accepted in the partial county plan.

Today the principal actors cooperate across the «regimes», and they, as the county governors are involved in several of them. Still, further coordination is needed across the regimes, but who shall do the coordination? Can we anticipate that the actors within the regimes will voluntarily reduce their principal area of influence, and thereby their power?

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