



## The Uplands after neoliberalism? – The role of the small farm in rural sustainability

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### A B S T R A C T

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The modernist project foresaw no role for small farms, but this can no longer be regarded as axiomatic as neoliberalism enters what Peck et al. call its “zombie phase”. This paper asks what contribution small farms in the uplands can make to societies’ goals, what role they might play in the sustainability of rural communities in such regions, and how this contribution might be supported by state policies. In Scotland and in Norway these questions have recently been the subject of policy debates which appear to offer exceptions or alternatives to neoliberal universalism, and these are considered specifically in this paper. In each case support for small farms is seen as necessary to maintain ‘lights in the windows’ of remoter rural areas. Moreover, each highlights the vital role of the state in offering not only financial support but also in regulating land transfers and occupancy. It is argued that the dismantling of such regulatory powers depletes the state’s ability to manage the tensions between continuity and change which are at the heart of sustainable rural development. The paper concludes that small farms can persist and can contribute to rural sustainability in ways that have been infrequently recognised under neoliberalism.

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### 1. Introduction

Doctrines of high modernism and neoliberalism have emphasised the virtues of economic efficiency, economies of scale and specialisation, while calling for deregulation and a minimalist state. Structural change in agriculture, leading to larger and more specialised holdings, was viewed as both inevitable and desirable even though this might empty many rural areas of people. If there was any role for the state in the doctrines of high modernism it was restricted to ensuring the efficient operation of markets, defining (but not challenging) property rights, hastening this process through ‘structural policies’, and addressing isolated instances of ‘market failure’. Such has been the hegemonic ascendancy of these doctrines that state intervention in many countries still has to be justified in such terms, but perhaps in late modernity – and especially after the near-collapse of banking systems around the world in 2008 – this may no longer be considered axiomatic. Peck et al. (2010) have argued that neoliberalism has lost all intellectual and moral credibility as a result of the banking crisis and ensuing sovereign debt crisis, but staggers on in its “zombie phase” because

of entrenched political power. In this context, might there now be scope for alternative visions of the future, in which small farms might be seen to make a worthwhile contribution to rural sustainability? In formulating rural development policies in Europe, the potential contribution of small farms and property controls and regulations have largely been overlooked. Yet in upland areas, small family farms have proved highly resilient: despite severe structural pressures they continue to make important contributions to society’s objectives. This combination of extreme pressures, high societal value and small farms’ resilience suggests upland areas may be a promising site for alternative visions of the future to emerge.

Much has been written over the years about the difficulties faced by hill farmers and mountain communities. While emphasising the diversity of mountain areas in Europe, Dax (2008, 21–2) summarises these challenges in terms of: fragility of ecosystems; production difficulties in land use; poor access to infrastructure and communications; difficulties of public service provision; demographic ageing and depopulation; over-reliance on tourism; and a loss of cultural heritage. Hill farming, in particular, is characterised by small family farms which have to cope with steep gradients, a short growing season, extreme weather conditions, an absence of alternative production possibilities, high transportation costs and often a lack of political power within national farm lobbies and a sparsely populated, peripheral location.

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On the other hand, many upland areas make important contributions to society, and have the potential to offer more, for example in relation to carbon stocks and renewable energy (Bonn et al., 2009). Dax (2008, 13) observes that “mountain regions are both fragile ecosystems and also an important source of water, energy and biological diversity. They are a source of key resources such as minerals, forest and agricultural products, as well as being ‘consumption landscapes’ for tourism and recreation.” These landscapes also need to be seen in relation to their cultural heritage and their role in national and regional self-understanding and identity (Soliva et al., 2008; Daugstad et al., 2006). Moreover, the highly valued “cultural landscapes in these territories develop and change over time as a result of the inter-play of socio-economic, cultural and natural factors... Since changes are often irreversible, any change and interference demands careful consideration” (Dax, 2008, 13). A recent report on the future of England’s upland communities has elaborated both the challenges and the potential contributions of such areas in more detail (CRC 2010).

Despite this growing recognition that Europe’s uplands represent land use systems of crucial importance for maintaining ecosystems, semi-natural biodiversity and landscape diversity, these are fragile and dependent upon often relatively marginal and low-intensity land uses and practices. For some regions, their role in carbon storage and management in relation to climate change is also crucial. Avoiding drainage of peatlands, reduction of intensity of tillage on croplands, restoring peatlands and perhaps grasslands, and maintaining low-intensive land use management, may be crucial (Woods, 2005; Dawson and Smith, 2007; Grønlund et al., 2008, 2010). For a variety of reasons, explored below, many upland areas’ farming and land use systems are under severe pressure, with abandonment a real threat in numerous areas, while at the same time upland communities are experiencing profound social, demographic and economic changes (Price, 1999). Gentrification processes and the second home market, especially that linked to smallholdings, and the (lack of) regulations concerning property sales and transfers are important factors in the ongoing development and restructuring of European upland areas. In Scotland and Norway these issues have become central in the recent debate. While the agricultural structure and the legislation and regulations concerning these smallholdings have been seen as a hindrance for rationalization, modernization and development, it is timely to consider the role of small farms in the sustainability of upland communities, and the contribution of the uplands more generally to broader objectives – national, European and global.

The purpose of this paper is then to consider the questions of what contribution small farms and crofts in the uplands can make to societies’ goals, what role they might play in the sustainability of rural communities in such regions, and how this contribution might be supported by state policies emerging from the shadows of neoliberalism. In Scotland and in Norway these questions have recently been the subject of policy debates, and these two instances are considered specifically in this paper. These are the debates surrounding Scotland’s Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, and the call by 51 municipalities in Norway for a national Mountain Policy. In reviewing these, we drew on existing documents, such as evidence, surveys and reports associated with the Crofting Inquiry and relevant Norwegian research. The document analysis was focused on the different approaches to, and justifications proposed for, regulation.

In each case support for small farms is seen as necessary to maintain ‘lights in the windows’ of remoter rural areas, and regulations and legislation enable the state to persist in supporting small farms. Drawing on these examples, the paper discusses what sustainability might mean in localised and practical terms, and considers what policies might be appropriate to support rural and

environmental sustainability in the uplands. The focus of the paper is therefore on the role of the state in pursuing rural sustainability in the uplands, both through its financial support of farming and its role as regulator.

It will be helpful first to review relevant literature on the survival of small and family farms; on sustainability and ‘potential’; and on policy and the role of the state.

## 2. Points of departure

### 2.1. *The survival of small and family farms*

The family farm’s survival has been theorised in various ways over the past two centuries, and it is important to keep these debates in mind. Both neo-classical economists and classical sociologists tend to maintain the nineteenth century belief that the family farm is destined to be eliminated in the forward march of agrarian capitalism (Newby, 1987). Increased technical efficiency deriving from economies of scale was expected progressively to eliminate the family farm through its inability to compete with agribusiness, in much the same way that corner shops have fallen victim to supermarket chains. But family farms and the peasantry did not disappear and so, by the twentieth century, it was “the persistence, rather than the disappearance, of the family farm which required explanation” (Newby et al., 1981). Kautsky (1899), and later Chayanov (1966) proposed such explanations in terms of farm families’ different motivations, social relations, the limits of their labour power and their propensity for self-exploitation, but essentially these still regarded the persistence of family farms as anomalous. Even the debate in the 1970s surrounding simple commodity production was cast in these terms, as was much of the structuralist political economy literature of the 1980s and 1990s, which again focused primarily on how capital penetrates farming (eg. Marsden et al., 1986) so exerting pressure to intensify and expand in order to survive.

Long (1990) provided a thorough critique of these theories. Amongst his criticisms, the most relevant here are (1) that such theories deny a strategic and active role for family farms (and farm families); and (2) that there is a tendency to ignore or devalue the role of the State in either reinforcing or mediating the effects of economic forces. These points are especially pertinent when seeking an understanding of the strategies of farm families in the uplands. As McHenry has pointed out (1994) “hill and livestock farming is perhaps the least entangled in the commoditisation process, being less intensive and requiring less capital investment than other farming enterprises. At the same time these farms are most subject to and dependent on agricultural policy for their survival, in terms of the contribution of direct support to income, at least”.

A number of later studies have taken a quite different point of departure, understanding family farms as much more than Marxian petty commodity production and instead viewing the farm, the household and the business as fundamentally intertwined, and attributing considerable agency to the families in negotiating change. Following Long’s actor-oriented approach, Van der Ploeg (1993, 2000) developed the concept of ‘farming styles’, viewing structural forces as negotiable and circumventible as farmers develop active strategies and associated technologies to pursue their goals. Mooney’s (1988) concept of the “ideal of craftsmanship”, and Shucksmith’s (1993) and Crowley’s (2006) use of Bourdieu’s theory of practice are further instances. Gray’s work (1998) on family farms in the Scottish borders develops the concept of consubstantial relations between household, property and business, such that these become united in a common substance that is transmitted/sustained over generations. Johnsen (2001) found New

Zealand farm families' experience of change in the 1980s to be contingent upon their consubstantial relationship with, and sense of place vested within, the farm as well as the biophysical, economic and cultural fabrics of the local context. In Norway, studies found a feeling of duty towards previous and future generations, the notion of being stewards not owners of the land and farm, and name and blood ties (eg. Daugstad, 1999; Daugstad et al., 2006; Flemsæter and Setten, 2009). Pluriactivity has meant that various types of income have enabled staying on the farm.

## 2.2. Sustainability, multifunctionality and the 'potential' of rural areas

Often the case for supporting hill farming is couched in terms of its *multifunctionality*. The concept of multifunctionality was developed in the late 1990s to encapsulate the reorientation of the agricultural sector towards the provision of environmental and other public goods. The inclusion of agricultural policies within world trade negotiations threatened the dismantling of agricultural protectionism and stimulated farming lobbies and many governments to seek new justifications for remunerating farmers. Thus, Bryden (2007) suggests, whatever its intrinsic merits, 'multifunctionality' is now viewed politically as the defence of a protectionist EU agricultural policy.<sup>2</sup> Powerful interests within the bureaucracies, farmers unions and elsewhere are engaged in the social and political construction of its meaning, and deploy this in pursuit of their own interests (Shucksmith, 2009). Moreover, the rise of the concept of multifunctionality has been pivotal in enabling the capture of the term 'rural development' by environmentalists and farming interests, so frustrating any shift from sectoral to territorial policies (Saraceno, 2009; Marsden and Sonnino, 2008).

Equally in vogue in political circles is the concept of *sustainability*, whether in terms of sustainable development, sustainable communities or simply 'saving the planet'. Sustainability is a contested and chaotic concept, often accused of meaning everything and nothing, and used to justify almost anything (Robinson, 2008). Indeed, one could argue that its popularity derives precisely from its ambiguity, in that this permits apparent concurrence between essentially opposing interests. O'Riordan (1989) has noted that "sustainability is becoming accepted as the mediating term which bridges the gap between developers and environmentalists. Its beguiling simplicity and apparently self-evident meaning have obscured its inherent ambiguity".

Dominant discourses of sustainability have their roots in principles of equity between and within generations (World Commission on Environment and Pollution, 1987) and of transfrontier responsibility. The concept has been developed subsequently to embrace social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability, and sometimes an institutional dimension. Notwithstanding this, the concept remains a social construction in which power relations are implicit, and it is incumbent on researchers to seek to reveal these power relations and to study the arenas in which its meaning is contested and power thereby conferred. Furthermore, because of its integrative and holistic nature, Bryden and Shucksmith (2001) have argued that we must incorporate all three dimensions of sustainability into a discussion of appropriate institutional structures of governance, with attention given to issues of accountability, legitimacy, inclusion and empowerment in deliberatively determining what sustainability means. As Robinson (2008, 34) notes, citing Sneddon (2000, 525), when considering sustainability in a specific context, we can ask more precisely "what exactly is being sustained,

at what scale, by and for whom, and using what institutional mechanisms?" These refinements of our earlier questions will be borne in mind in Section 3 when discussing recent debates in Scotland and Norway.

The third concept to be considered in this section is that of "potential". The European Commission's Territorial Cohesion Green Paper (CEC 2008) attempts to arbitrate between competing discourses of economic competitiveness and social solidarity by proposing a conception of 'territorial cohesion' in terms of each place being enabled and supported to realise its potential. "Territorial cohesion is about ensuring the harmonious development of all these places and about making sure that their citizens are able to make the most of inherent features of these territories" (CEC 2008, 3). This resonates with discourses of place-shaping and neo-endogenous rural development (Shucksmith, 2009), and the OECD's New Rural Paradigm (2005, 59) which advocates "a multi-sectoral, place-based approach that aims to identify and exploit the varied development potential of rural areas". But how is 'potential' related to sustainability?

From one perspective, the concept of 'potential' fulfils a role here as a bridging concept whose very ambiguity (like that of sustainability above) permits concurrence between essentially opposing interests. In this sense it may be empty of meaning until discursive forces are mobilized to inhabit the concept and mould it to suit their interests. The politics of the Territorial Cohesion Green Paper encourages this reading, seeking as it did to reconcile differences between those who interpret territorial cohesion in terms of the Lisbon agenda of competitiveness and those who understand it as solidarity between regions. 'Potential' may allow either interpretation. More positively, this ambiguity could also allow the possibility for place-based communities to determine their own goals for development, such that 'potential' might be seen not simply as economic growth.

A more radical interpretation of 'potential' might be in terms of the immanent potentialities of rural places to continually 'become' and to foster multiple emergent possibilities. In this sense, the concept of potential encourages us to anticipate multiple futures, immanent to the present (and past). It may be concerned with "opening up visions of alternatives, rather than closing down on 'a' vision of 'a' better city or society; it is about what moves us to hope for, and to cultivate, alternative possibilities; and it is about establishing the conditions for the development of alternatives" (Fournier, 2002, 192). Potential in this sense is pluralistic, acknowledging multiple voices and visions, and emergent in that it encourages new ideas, opportunities and possibilities to emerge and to be woven into the trajectory of changing places. This relates to concepts of sustainability in so far as place-shaping involves processes which permit flexibility and adaptation to challenges and opportunities as they arise, but which at the same time maintain or open up options and choices for future generations.

## 2.3. Policy and the role of the state

It was noted above that farm families in the uplands tend to be particularly dependent on the state for their incomes, whether through production-related subsidies or more recently through direct payments. Indeed the state may offer support for upland economies and societies more generally, notably through public services and infrastructure. Many of these forms of support have been called into question with the ascendancy of neoliberal ideologies, and often there has been a requirement for 'market failure' to be established as justification for continuation of support. Within Europe, at least, this has tended to privilege environmental public goods in policy development rather than other aspects of the

<sup>2</sup> It is also deployed by Norway, Switzerland, Korea and Japan among other countries in the WTO negotiations.

Uplands, and some writers have viewed this as adoption of a post-productivist paradigm.

Tilzey and Potter (2008) explore the concept of post-productivism, pointing out that this is located within an 'embedded neoliberalism' "which juxtaposes market productivism and a limited set of agri-environmental and rural development measures to foster 'post-productivism'" (p.47). They point to strong regional consequences of the increasing market-orientation of the CAP, notably between lowland areas dominated by productivist industrial-style farming and marginal and upland areas where farmers' livelihoods are threatened. "Clearly this is not a socially or economically sustainable situation and there must also be question-marks over the long-term environmental benefits that can be realized without a vibrant farming community" (Robinson, 2008: 5). Tilzey and Potter conclude that different types of policy intervention will be required to move towards greater sustainability, but that these "are considered increasingly illegitimate under neoliberal reform" (Robinson, 2008:5–6). "The result is likely to be an enhanced duality in rural space between a dominant market productivism and a subaltern and marginalised post-productivism, the whole subordinate to a neoliberal discourse of competitiveness and entrepreneurialism" (Tilzey and Potter, 2008, 46).

Neoliberal agendas have impinged too on other policies affecting upland agriculture, in many countries notably through weakening of the legislation and regulations concerning transfer and sales of small farm holdings. It is remarkable how little this aspect of deregulation has been commented on in the academic literature, as regulations over farm land transfers have been dismantled around the world, but it is apparent that these legislative changes interact with market forces in diverse and contradictory ways, often facilitating the conversion of smallholdings to second home use. In Norway and in the Scottish crofting areas such regulations have survived and are discussed below.

Alongside these tendencies, others (eg. Bryden and Hart, 2004) have argued for a new approach to rural development policy. As noted above, the OECD (2005) has advocated a New Rural Paradigm which transcends the agribusiness and the post-productivist approaches by moving towards a multi-sectoral, territorial approach where the state's role is not to subsidise but to invest and to build capacity for endogenous action. Marsden (2003) has also proposed a third model beyond the agri-industrial and post-productivist models, namely a rural development model based on the shifting reconfigurations of integrated food networks.

This paper turns now to review recent debates in Scotland and Norway, which appear to offer exceptions to neoliberal universalism. In particular, it is instructive to consider to what extent these instances, rooted in local cultures, values and movements, might be seen not only as exceptions but as alternatives to neoliberal rule (Peck et al., 2010, 96).

### 3. Recent debates in Scotland and Norway

#### 3.1. Crofting communities in Scotland

##### 3.1.1. Historical and geographical context

A croft is popularly, if mischievously, defined as 'a small piece of land entirely surrounded by regulations', a comment which highlights at once its relevance to the themes of this article, namely regulation and the role of small farms. Crofts are small strips of land rented or owned by a family unit, and generally worked alongside shares in common grazings. They have their own distinct code of law and are specific to the Highlands of Scotland – the so-called 'crofting counties', most of which are mountains and islands, classified as 'severely disadvantaged areas' by the EU. Their origins lie in the process generally known as the Clearances through which

Highland landlords evicted people to make way for sheep ranching, moving them either overseas or on to poor, marginal land. Tenanted smallholdings (crofts) were created deliberately too small for crofters to subsist so that they would have to offer wage labour to their landlords. Subsequent poverty and famine led to legislation in 1886 which defined the legal status of crofters and gave resident crofters security of tenure, the right to a fair rent, the value of their own improvements and the right to pass the tenancy on to a family successor (Hunter, 1976). Landlords retain valuable sporting and development rights but receive little rental income. Land settlement in the early years of the Twentieth Century created further crofts and returned land to some families who had been dispossessed (Fig. 1).

Over the following decades, these provisions allowed marked improvements in standards of living, though the Highlands and Islands remained far from prosperous. From the 1940s, in the context of post-war food shortages, the Government viewed the 'crofting problem' as, in essence, an agricultural one, arising from the small size of the holdings. Deregulation was anticipated but an inquiry, the Taylor Committee, proposed a new, highly interventionist Crofters Commission whose "main function should be to stimulate the development of crofting communities in all possible ways", especially through the gradual reallocation of land from less active to more active crofters and through promoting the ancillary occupations necessary to provide a reasonable living. Despite this the Government's focus on agriculture led to the new Crofters Commission instead being given a basic task of reviving agriculture,

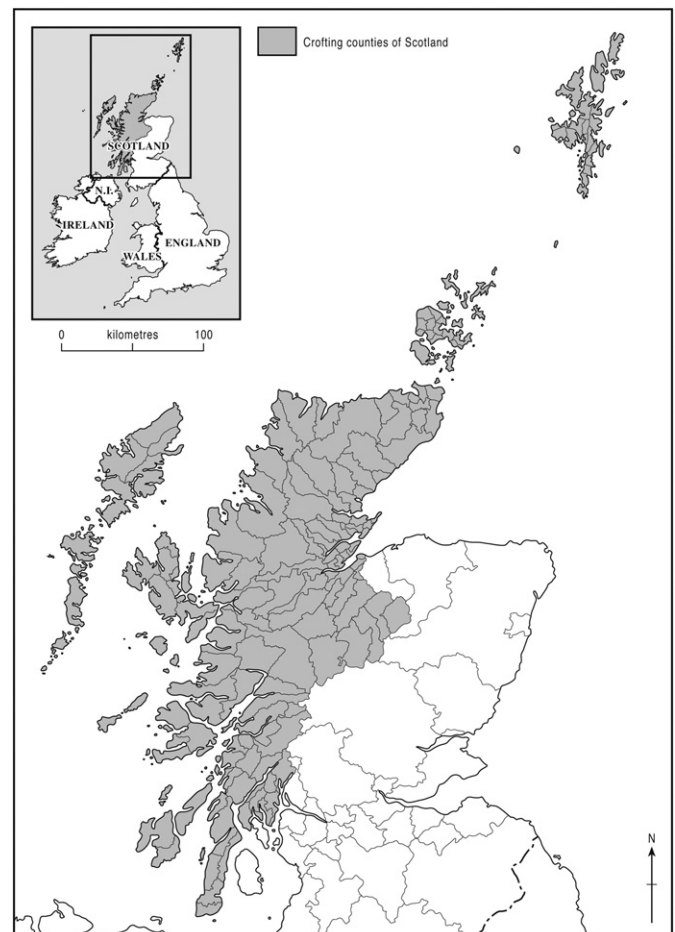


Fig. 1. The Crofting Counties of Scotland.



alongside a tortuous burden of administration and regulation (Hunter, 1991). This set the Crofters Commission and the Scottish Office on course towards proposals for the amalgamation of crofts to form “viable units”, which were rebuffed by the Federation of Crofters Unions in the early 1960s (Hunter, 1991).

The alternative view, that crofters should rely on ancillary income rather than become full-time farmers, then prevailed. A Highlands and Islands Development Board was established in 1965 to promote economic development. But the Crofters Commission argued this was insufficient: in their view, crofters had to become owner-occupiers to access capital for diversification. The Crofting Reform Act 1976 duly gave crofters the right to buy the landlord’s interest in their crofts and a debate has raged ever since between those who argue that this is necessary to allow crofters to diversify their enterprises and those who see this as creating a free market in crofts which will lead to the demise of crofting (see *Crofters Commission, 2005*). Meanwhile, support has grown for community ownership of croft land, harking back to pre-modern days when land was held in common as well as to contemporary models of community asset-based rural development (*Carnegie Trust, 2009*). Since 1992 many crofters have collectively become landlords of both their inbye and common grazings (through community trusts), while individually remaining tenants of these trusts, a process facilitated by the Land Reform Act 2003 (Bryden and Geisler, 2007). Finally, the Crofting Reform etc Act 2007 sought to address the emerging market in crofts, but this proved too controversial and so the Government established a further inquiry to review crofting, to develop a vision for its future, and to make recommendations (*Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, 2008*).<sup>3</sup> These formed the basis for the Crofting Reform etc Act 2010.

A number of themes emerge from this brief review. First, crofting legislation and regulation mediate between the interests of crofting as a system, crofters as individuals and place-based crofting communities. Some see a croft as an individual or family asset to dispose of as they wish because they or their family have lived on the croft and/or worked the croft land for generations. Others argue that crofting is a system of land tenure which has associated practices – social and cultural as well as agricultural and environmental – which should be protected and sustained for future generations because they are collectively beneficial. Those who hold this view see the disposal of crofts solely on the basis of individual gain as gradually eroding crofting and placing its continuation at risk. Second, there is a debate between those who see the future of crofting in terms of agriculture and amalgamation of holdings, and those who see its future in terms of non-agricultural sources of income and occupational pluralism. The predominant agricultural use of the land is for extensive livestock production, mainly sheep, but this offers poor returns and has been supplemented by off-farm employment from the beginning. Third, another debate divides those who see the future of crofting in an Irish-style – or Norwegian-style – model of individualised owner-occupation and those who advocate a more collectivised model of community-owned estates and crofting tenants. This debate is often couched in terms of capitalist penetration, deregulation and neoliberalism as against state intervention and regulation. Finally, there is a debate between those who see the future of crofting as lying in the hands of others – nationally appointed agencies, civil servants, absentee landowners – (on the grounds that crofters lack the necessary ability or cannot be trusted to govern their peers impartially) and those who advocate crofters themselves taking responsibility for the future of crofting and crofting communities.

<sup>3</sup> The Committee of Inquiry on Crofting is often abbreviated to the Crofting Inquiry or the Shucksmith Report.

### 3.1.2. Agricultural support

One question raised in the introduction to this paper is to what extent agricultural support assists small farms in upland areas. A strength of small farms and crofts is that they are less dependent on support since most of their income comes from off-farm sources (see below), but agricultural support is still important in enabling land management which contributes to society’s objectives. The relationship with the land is central to crofting. Working the land is at the heart of what it means to be a crofter, and agricultural practices are fundamental to the cultural heritage. As one crofter told the Crofting Inquiry, “the sheep were the glue which bound communities together”.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, environmental conditions in the crofting counties are nationally significant in terms of species, habitats and landscapes. A much higher percentage of their area, compared to other parts of Scotland, is designated under environmental legislation. Crofting areas also contain extensive peatlands, that function as carbon sinks, making the continued low-intensity management of these areas important to moderating the risk of climate change and to safeguarding landscape and biodiversity (see *Dawson and Smith, 2007, 180*). Historically, stewardship of the land has been an integral part of agricultural activity, although on average crofters derive less than 20% of their income from agriculture and the remuneration from this compares poorly with their other economic activities (*Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, 2008*).

Unsurprisingly, agricultural practices and land use in crofting areas are changing. The Crofting Inquiry found evidence of a reduction in traditional land management, neglect, simplification of crofting to single enterprises, hay-making giving way to silage and both under-grazing and overgrazing, all linked in turn to a reduction in the environmental benefits associated with traditional practices. Analysis of census data for crofting areas (*SEERAD 2007*) shows sharp declines in the cropped area of land (down 49% from 1982–2007) and in livestock numbers. Declining incomes for crofters from hill sheep and more full-time employment off the croft are also leading to changes in sheep management (Yuill and Cook, 2007). In particular, less available labour results in declining use of hill grazings with sheep likely to be managed more intensively on inbye land or apportioned hill grazings. This can have negative environmental impacts due to overgrazing of inbye/apportionments and under-grazing of abandoned common grazings. The abandonment of common grazing also threatens the communal practices and their social benefits (*Burton et al., 2008; Brown, 2007*).

These trends have been driven by changes in agricultural subsidies and grants, fluctuating exchange rates<sup>5</sup> and a fall in prices. European funding from the 1970–90s generally encouraged farmers and crofters to increase livestock numbers and more recently has led to sharp reductions as support was ‘decoupled’<sup>6</sup> and no longer related to how much is produced. A number of agri-environment schemes are designed to encourage environmentally beneficial land management practices, but the majority of farmers and crofters do not participate in these schemes, partly because of the bureaucracy and regulations involved. Increasingly the demands for online application and reporting reduce the attractiveness for small units. Indeed in 2005, only 29% of crofters

<sup>4</sup> *Committee of Inquiry on Crofting (2008)*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> As the value of the pound fell during 2008–10, so the value of EU subsidies paid in euros to UK farmers rose again.

<sup>6</sup> Support was formerly paid through a variety of subsidy schemes primarily on the basis of cropped area or livestock numbers. Under the Single Farm Payment scheme, the money is now received in return for maintaining minimum standards of husbandry. This separation of the payment and the agricultural activity is known as decoupling.

and 30% of non-crofters who claimed Single Farm Payment (SFP) were recipients of agri-environment scheme payments (SEERAD, 2007). The agri-environment schemes were criticised by the Crofting Inquiry as poorly targeted.<sup>7</sup>

It is apparent that agricultural support under the CAP is less effective than it might be in assisting the survival of small farms or in nurturing crofting practices that protect the land and secure wider environmental and cultural objectives. Indeed there is a risk that current changes in policy will lead to the loss of the landscape and environmental benefits of crofting, and to the loss of an internationally significant cultural heritage.

### 3.1.3. Regulation and deregulation: absenteeism and neglect

A second key issue for this paper is regulation of land use and occupancy. Absenteeism and the neglect of land, together with market pressures for the purchase of crofts as purely residences, are matters of heated debate in relation to crofting. Crofters are required to reside within 16 km of their croft (raised to 32 km in 2010), and to work the land in accordance with standard conditions, but in recent years these obligations have not often been enforced by the regulatory agency, the Crofters Commission. Partly this is because of the changing economics of farming, as described above. Cropping has all but vanished. Extensive livestock is declining, with many grazings being abandoned and communal practices threatened. In 2004, 50–60% of crofts were carrying no livestock whatever. Many people giving evidence to the Crofting Inquiry complained about what they saw as neglect of the land, arguing that these unused crofts should be made available to others who would put them to use, whether active neighbours who wish to increase the size of their holding, or new crofters.

In relation to absenteeism, nearly 1800 of the total 17,700 registered crofts are classified by the Crofters Commission as 'absentees', with proportions varying from around 16% in Barra and Harris, and around 14% on the West Coast, to as little as 2% in Shetland and Orkney (SEERAD 2007). This absenteeism derives partly from the tendency of young people to leave the area to work and to pursue a career, only later inheriting the family croft at an average age of around 50, then perhaps using it as a holiday home until deciding at retirement whether or not to return. Such instances tend to be looked on favourably by many within crofting communities, so long as the land is sub-let so it can be worked, even though it breaches the statutory regulations. However, in recent years it has become common practice to sell crofts for substantial sums as holiday homes to people who live elsewhere. Apart from exacerbating the problem of absenteeism and neglect, this is seen as weakening crofting communities, putting services at risk, and making houses and crofts unaffordable to the next generation of potential crofters.

Addressing these issues brings us back to the tension between individual rights and the interests of the community, now and in the future. Absenteeism and neglect were the most frequently mentioned issues in the evidence submitted to the Crofting Inquiry in 2007, along with the need to help the younger generation into crofting so as to sustain crofting for future generations. Yet attempts to address these issues, even in sensitive ways, tend to provoke strong resistance as people see their individual freedoms curtailed and the market value of their assets constrained. The Scottish Parliament came down on the side of stricter regulation in the Crofting Reform etc Act 2010, giving the newly democratised Crofting Commission stronger powers to tackle absenteeism and neglect.

### 3.1.4. Agricultural policy or rural policy?

As mentioned above, there has been a long-running debate about whether crofts should be amalgamated to form viable agri-cultural holdings or if they should continue to follow a pluriactive tradition, drawing most of their income from off-farm employment. While it had generally been recognised that amalgamation of holdings on the necessary scale would empty the countryside of people, nevertheless crofting has continued to be viewed by policy makers (and especially civil servants) as essentially small-scale farming.

The pluriactive tradition is crucial to the retention of the population in crofting and to the survival of smallholding. The vast bulk of crofters' incomes are earned off the croft, despite the fact that they spend 40% of their time, on average, working on the croft. Thus crofters tend to farm for symbolic reasons, related to community and identity, rather than for primarily financial reasons. This history of multiple economic activities is crucial for crofting families to maintain competitiveness in a globalising economy, but the question remains as to how to promote economic activities that are both lucrative and compatible with a crofting lifestyle.

One of the reasons for establishing the Crofting Inquiry was the recognition that there was no long-term vision for the future of crofting to guide policy. However, Scotland does have policy statements on sustainable rural communities, highlighted in a recent OECD review (OECD 2008). The central theme of these is empowering communities to envision their futures, building their capacity and supporting them in developing and implementing strategies in pursuit of their hopes for the future. In the context of the Scottish Highlands this was the rationale for radical land reform legislation in 2003, which gave rural communities collectively the power to buy the landlord's interest in their estates and to bring these into community ownership, with funding from the lottery and strong support from a Community Land Unit within Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), a quasi-private economic development agency of the Scottish Government (Bryden and Geisler, 2007; Mackenzie, 2006). Yet, in the main, crofting is characterised not by empowered local communities but by centralised control and clientalism. This raises issues both of governance and of capacity-building (or capacity-revealing).

This is not to say there is no institutional capacity in the crofting areas. In the last few years, as noted above, communities in some areas (notably the Western Isles) have mobilised, with the considerable help of HIE's Community Land Unit, to acquire the ownership of their landlords' estates. According to Bryden and Geisler (2007), the Community Land Unit and Scottish Land Fund have been "vital tools for community empowerment and enterprise in fragile rural areas of Scotland – for example, since acquisition about 13 new enterprises have started on Gigha and the number of families and children on the island has increased significantly. A small local housing enterprise has started, and housing improvements in the existing housing stock are under way." Now, three wind turbines produce electricity which is sold by the Gigha community to the national grid. Such wind-farms are becoming a common community enterprise on such estates, offering hope of sustainable rural development in several senses. More than half the land area of the Western Isles is now in community ownership.

In Harris and Lewis, community ownership has fuelled enthusiasm and optimism, although developing a sufficient income base is a crucial challenge. Members of these crofting communities are now engaged collectively in formulating strategies for their future, no longer passive in the face of others' decisions. Wind farm development is frequently seen as one avenue for the new community-owned trusts, although this remains controversial. Affordable housing is seen as another central issue, and as a potential source of revenue through offering land to housing providers. Crofting is

<sup>7</sup> Crofting land management is also supported annually by crofting grants of £3.26m from the Scottish Government.

widely seen as effective in retaining a population in these remote upland and island communities, drawing income from a variety of sources (Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, 2008).

Mackenzie (2006) sees this community-centred land reform not only as a movement towards collective ownership with strong historical resonances but also as the removal of land from circuits of global capital, in turn permitting a re-visioning of the political possibilities of place and a commitment to social justice and sustainability. In this respect it represents a “radical break with neoliberal universalism” (Peck et al., 2010, 111). But a key question remains of how many communities are likely to mobilise in this way, and what might be the role of the State and other actors in building/revealing their capacity to act and otherwise supporting them. It is still a small minority of crofting communities which have mobilised in this way, and policy – despite the commitment to objectives of sustainable rural development – continues to prioritise agricultural support related to size of farm over investments in community and economic development.

Recently, the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting’s report (2008) suggested a series of measures to extend the ‘place-shaping’, neo-endogenous rural development approach beyond those areas in which community buy-outs had occurred. Briefly, the Inquiry report proposed community empowerment in respect of both regulation and development, supported by generative state action and by refocused managerial technologies which would operate to encourage local strategies. At the heart of its recommendations were proposals for *township development committees*, supported by HIE’s ‘Growth at the Edge’ team, to engage in deliberative place-shaping and for their community-led strategies to have to be reflected in decisions made by local planning authorities and other bodies. In this way, the state would both support and incentivise local mobilisation. Meanwhile, regulation would be in the hands of locally-elected area boards rather than an appointed Crofters Commission, and these boards would be given stronger powers to address absenteeism and neglect through requiring residency and active land management. Alongside these changes in governance, other recommendations sought to refocus agricultural, economic development, housing and planning policies towards support for locally-agreed strategies. These proposals led, after considerable debate and controversy, to the Crofting Reform etc Act 2010, which strengthened regulation of the transfer and occupancy of land, established a new map-based register of crofts, and introduced elections for a revamped Crofting Commission (SEERAD, 2008; Edwards, 2010). The proposals for township-based development were not enacted.

### 3.2. Small-scale farming in upland Norway

While Scotland’s Highlands and Islands have had targeted and distinctive policies for a long time, Norway’s policies have been relatively undifferentiated in terms of its mountain and upland areas. However, agricultural policies in the post-war period have nevertheless acted as an important instrument of rural and regional policy. There have been no distinct policies for specific regions, but instead there have been 1) *differentiated payment levels* for production in different parts of the country, partly compensating for steep and unfavourable conditions, and 2) a “*canalisation policy*” based on the principle of relative comparative advantage, allowing relatively higher payments for dairy and beef production in upland and fjord regions and in Northern Norway, while the better and more central areas have been encouraged to produce grain (Almås, 2004). This geographical specialisation of production has contributed to maintaining activity in large parts of the country, and partly explains the lack of targeted measures and designations compared to EU countries. However, agriculture and associated land use systems are under heavy pressure, as described below.

In response to lobbying from municipalities in the ‘Mountain region’ (Fjellregionen), the Norwegian government recently recognised a need for new policies targeted specifically towards upland and mountain communities (Soria Moria declaration, 2005; St.prp nr.65, 2003). The role of small-scale and part-time farming is central to this Mountain region initiative. We will therefore discuss in this section the role of small farms in Norwegian agricultural policies; the Mountain region cooperation’s initiative for a specific Mountain policy, and some aspects of legislation and regulations of Norwegian farm land and properties (Fig. 2).

#### 3.2.1. Historical and geographical context

Norway is a mountainous country with 36% of the land above 600 m. Only 3% of the land area is arable, and Norway is only 50% self sufficient in terms of calories. Thus maintaining farm land and agricultural production has been an important objective of national policies. While agriculture constitutes less than 3% of national employment, it is still a crucial source of income and employment in upland regions – in some areas contributing up to 25% of local employment (Regionrådet, 2008; Rønningen et al., 2005). While the EU classifies over 90% of mainland Norway as mountainous, a recent Norwegian government commissioned report on identifying mountain areas and municipalities in Mid and Southern Norway (Arnesen et al., 2010) defined 42% as mountainous areas.

In international terms, Norwegian farms are small, with an average farm size of 30 ha. The small-scale structure reflects the land and topography, and also a history of partition of farms in western and northern Norway, the history of the *husmann* system (akin to Scottish crofts) and more recent land settlement (*bur-eisingsbruk*), as well as agricultural policies, legislation and regulations, and a tradition and ideology of widespread ownership of

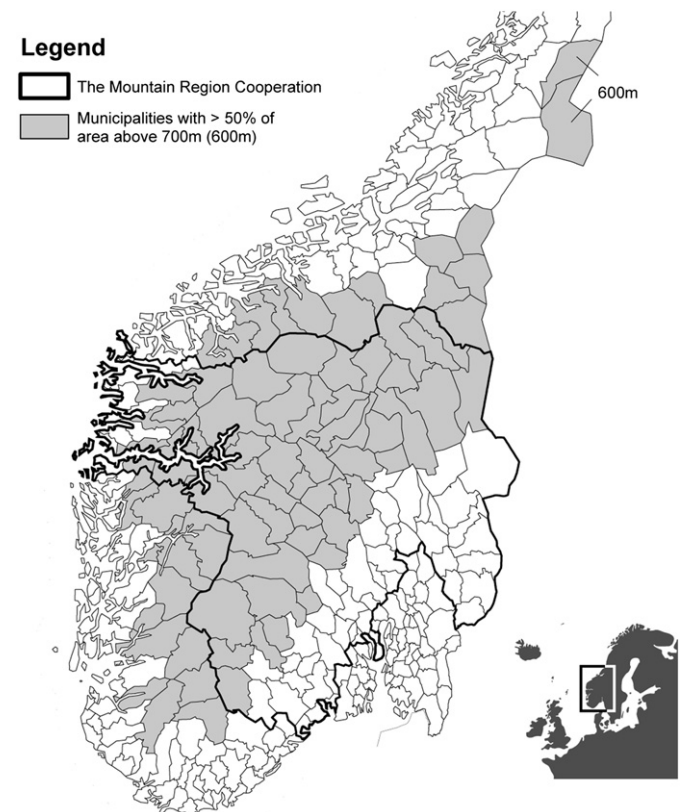


Fig. 2. The mountain region cooperation in Norway. (Map produced by eMap ([www.emap.no](http://www.emap.no)) based on N5000 of the Norwegian Mapping Authority, Arnesen et al., 2010:38, and [www.fjellregionsamarbeidet.no](http://www.fjellregionsamarbeidet.no)).



land. However, as in Scotland and elsewhere, post-war policies discouraged smallholders, promoting instead size, efficiency and productivity. Through the Land Law of 1955 a scheme of farm structure rationalization was undertaken, aimed at eliminating smallholdings and transferring their arable land to neighbouring farms. The family farm was the “model and increased production the main goal” (Almås, 2004: 348–349). A family farm was then understood as a unit that could provide work and income for an ordinary family, without other sources of income.

Yet for much of the country, Norwegian farm households have drawn on a variety of income sources – from forestry, fisheries, handicrafts etc. For upland regions, mountain summer farming has been important. Productivist agricultural policies in Norway saw pluriactivity as hampering efficient, modern agriculture. The aims were full-time farming and getting rid of pluriactivity, but this never fully succeeded (Jones and Rønningen, 2007). Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune (2008) observed the strong trend towards increasing off-farm work by farmers and farm women, to the extent that two thirds of net farm household income from farmer and spouse was off-farm income in 2003 (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008; Statistics Norway, 2009a). Today, only 21% of farms have no registered income from outside agriculture (Logstein, 2010). The off-farm income, including non-agricultural income from farm based activities (such as green care, farm tourism etc) is highest in the central and better agricultural areas, which at the same time also receive an increasing share of the agricultural subsidies (NILF, 2009).

### 3.2.2. Agricultural support

Norwegian agricultural policies may be described as multifunctional, ambitious – and contradictory, somehow seeking to reconcile production and efficiency aims, income aims, rural settlement and viability aims and environmental aims. Through structural and technology means it has pursued increased production, farm income and food security. Contributing to settlement and rural viability, ‘living rural communities’ all over the country have been an important policy objective throughout the post-war period. Since the late 1980s there has been an increasing focus on maintenance of cultural landscapes, cultural heritage and biodiversity (Rønningen et al., 2005; Almås, 2004). Biennial polls show that these multifunctional policies have surprisingly broad support from the general public – approximately 75% support the current agricultural subsidy level, and 85% want to keep the amount of agriculture at its present level (Norwegian Monitor, 2009, 2007; Federation of Norwegian Agricultural Co-operatives, 2010). Nevertheless, high food prices are a constant matter for debate<sup>8</sup>, as are some of the legal measures linked to land regulations. How successful governments have been in achieving these goals is also disputed, although a common view is that without these policies and measures, Norway’s rural and especially upland landscapes would be more like those of neighbouring Sweden – depopulated and taken over by forest.

The legitimacy of Norwegian agricultural policies and subsidies during the last 15 years must be seen as linked to a ‘social contract’ which implicitly requires farmers to provide a well-kept cultural landscape as a collective good and viable rural communities (Almås, 2004). Mountain and upland farmed areas are crucial in the representation of Norwegian agriculture as environmentally friendly, low intensity and managing cultural landscapes and cultural heritage, typically mountain summer farms and the often

well-kept wooden buildings. These features are at the same time at the core of Norwegian identity and representation (see Daugstad et al., 2006).

However, fewer and fewer farmers remain to secure these multifunctional objectives and landscapes, and as mentioned, the larger farmers in more central areas receive the lion’s share of agricultural support. Trends in Norway’s uplands need to be seen in the context of national developments. In 1950, 213,000 farms were defined as actively used (over 0.5 ha), but today there are only about 46,500 ‘active farms’, whose taxable agricultural income of at least NOK 20,000 pa entitles them to subsidies (NILF, 2007; Norwegian Agricultural Authority, 2009). Most of the total of 157,000 registered farm holdings with dwelling houses are not defined as active farms and are therefore ineligible for support. Amongst farms which do not qualify as ‘active’, most of the better land is let out to neighbours. Indeed, 40% of all farmland is in ‘neighbour tenancies’ which tend to be viewed as an obstacle to achieving a more efficient agricultural structure, provoking calls for relaxing controls on farmland transfer and sales (see below). While some farms continue to be occupied as dwellings, 22% are now unoccupied – used only as second homes or left to decay (Statistics Norway, 2009a).

The rationale for restricting subsidies, and also most of the agri-environmental payments, only to ‘active farmers’ has been to exclude hobby farmers, because the Government’s policy is that farm units should be agriculturally viable and operated as farms, even though most farms in Norway earn most of their household income from outside farming. Moreover, the most valuable or threatened land in terms of biodiversity or other landscape values tends to be found on the less intensively operated farms which are not reached by policy. A review by the government board of auditors (Riksrevisjonen, 2006) shows much of the conservation value in Norwegian protected areas is endangered, largely because they are treated as ‘wild nature’ when in fact they are semi-natural, cultural landscapes in need of management (ie. continued low-intensive land use, such as grazing, mowing or mountain summer farming). So agricultural decline, with associated land abandonment, overgrowth, forest and scrub invasion, especially in areas of traditionally low-intensive farming systems, is recognised as a major threat to biodiversity, cultural heritage, and even to some extent to recreational interests in Norway. Many threatened red list species are linked to semi-natural farming areas (Fremstad and Moen, 2001; Olsson et al., 2004).

As in Scotland’s crofting areas, then, agricultural support is targeted away from the small farms which nevertheless contribute so much to society’s objectives in terms of cultural landscapes, biodiversity and other ecosystem services.

### 3.2.3. Agricultural or rural policy – or mountain policy? The mountain region cooperation

The Mountain Region Cooperation (*Fjellregionsamarbeidet*) (see Regionrådet for fjellregionen, 2008; *Fjellregionsamarbeidet*, 2009) is a political cooperation network, currently consisting of 51 of Norway’s 430 municipalities from 7 mountain regions in 5 of the 19 regional counties. It includes various types of regional partnership in Mid and Southern Norway. The population of the region is about 162,000 of a Norwegian total of 4.7 million. The mountain region is hampered by long distances to regional centres, a relatively poor infrastructure, outmigration of young people, an ageing population, and an important but vulnerable agriculture. Overall it experienced a 6.2% fall in population from 1990–2010 (Sørli, 2010).

The Mountain region views measures for agriculture as central to this new mountain policy, emphasising the importance of *part-time farming* as a means of strengthening settlement and encouraging return-migration. They advocate the further development of

<sup>8</sup> Food prices are high, but nevertheless the Norwegian food basket is among the cheapest in the world – about 11% of household expenditures when related to income level (Statistics Norway, 2009b) 28.



smallholdings and mixed farm systems to make mountain farming more robust, contrary to the general focus on making farms larger and more 'efficient'. Developing new products based on local resources is seen as important, and full-time and part-time farms are seen as mutually dependent. Bioenergy production, local food, rural tourism as well as investment in infrastructure such as broadband are highlighted. Another aim of the initiative is to seek a legal basis to allow the region to tax consumption of public benefits – collective goods – in tourism by taxing various services to tourists. Furthermore, they advocate more delegation of power and responsibility, especially in relation to the large protected areas in the mountain region, in order to improve the possibilities for developing tourism within or adjacent to national parks. Greater influence on the management of the increasing stocks of large carnivores (wolf, bear, lynx and wolverine) is another, more controversial part of their ambition, reflecting a split between the dominant urban middle class' environmental views and those of groups within rural communities who face the practical consequences of such policies. Sheep farming, utilising hill pastures and outfields (*utmark*), represents a major farming system for the uplands, but this is suffering high losses to carnivores (Blekesaune and Rønningen, 2010). Above all, this set of policies is presented together as a *mountain policy*, and not as separate agricultural, conservation or rural development policies.

Compared to Scotland, Norway has a stronger structure of well developed regional and municipal levels with a large degree of planning and decision-making powers. A reform recently delegated more power to regional and local levels over especially agricultural and environmental issues (Forbord and Holm, 2007), which makes the demands of the Mountain Region Cooperation for stronger influence in these matters especially relevant.

A recent White Paper for regional policies (St.meld no. 25, 2009) does to some extent address these demands, but rejects the call for a legal basis for taxation of collective goods. The principle of general public access - *Allemannsrett* ('every man's right') includes the freedom to roam, pick berries, mushrooms etc in the countryside both on private and state owned land, with few exceptions. It is an ancient Nordic institution that has been formalised in the Outdoor Act (*Friluftsloven*, 1957-06-28) and is as important for recreation and sports as for Norwegians' self-understanding and identity. However, the commodification of the countryside linked to tourism development and diversification of rural income means that many of the new income-deriving activities are based on utilisation or exploitation of these collective rights. There may also be reservations about separate policies for upland areas in a long country full of marginalised, scattered communities, and scepticism too about over-reliance on local development projects and rural tourism. Nevertheless, there is a core challenge signalled by this initiative: namely that 'rational', full-time farming cannot ensure viable upland communities. This echoes a main theme of the Crofting Inquiry report in Scotland.

At the core of understanding the potentialities of upland, rural futures is the crucial role of land and land use. In the Norwegian case rural sustainability involves a combination of on- and off-farm work, rural/farm tourism, fishing and hunting both for own recreation as well as for commercialisation, energy production, and the provision of environmental services (landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity and carbon storage). The survival of animal husbandry practices using grazing resources in the outfields (rough grazing) is seen as crucial for these environmental services, as well as for minimising risks linked to climate change and food security. In turn this implies that food production should continue throughout the country. The underlying issue is that upland areas have a value and a right to survive in a socio-cultural respect, even though the arguments deployed are mainly linked to environmental values, food security, energy and other economic issues.

### 3.2.4. "Light in the windows" – state regulation, absenteeism and second homes

Regulation of land use and occupancy is another major theme in these debates, as it is with crofting in Scotland. Norway with its 4.7 million inhabitants has about 430,000 cabins or second homes, many of these in mountain and upland areas. These are mainly located in 'nature', outside ordinary dwelling or village areas, and increasingly within designated cabin areas. While outmigration remains dominant, many people would like to return to rural communities, mostly aspiring to holiday homes but there is a demand for smallholdings for permanent homes with small-scale farming activities. Blekesaune et al. (2010) have analysed the "dream of a smallholding" and found that over 25% in a representative survey of Norwegian consumers were "interested" in buying a smallholding, though only 4% had relatively concrete plans. Blekesaune et al. differentiate these potential buyers into three groups of 'aspiring farmers', 'country-life lovers' (seeking a rural residency with more land than an ordinary garden), and recreation seekers (second home buyers). Several municipalities in the mountain region have campaigns to register empty smallholdings, to contact absentee owners to encourage them to sell, as well as to offer information both to young people who left the area and to foreigners, looking for more 'space and nature'. One has also looked into the possibility of splitting up farms in order to create more smallholdings.

Although estate agents and scientific studies confirm there is a demand, buying a farm or a smallholding is not easy in Norway. There is relatively strict legislation and regulation controlling farm sales, notably price control on agricultural property, an obligation to settle on the property and farm the cultivated land (administered by municipalities), and preferential rights favouring family/kinship. The aims are to avoid property speculation, to avoid absentee ownership, to avoid undue concentration of property ownership and to maintain a 'socially responsible price', all in pursuit of agricultural and rural policy objectives such as continued recruitment to agriculture, good resource management and the viability of rural areas. The relevant legislation is found in *The Land Law of 1995-05-12 (Jordlova) (last amendment 2009-06-19)*, *The Allodial Act of 1974-06-28 (Odelsloven)* and *the Concession Law of, 2003-11-28 (Konsesjonsloven – on concession in the acquisition of real property)* (see Forbord and Storstad, 2008; Almås, 2004; Rygg and Skarpnes, 2002; Karlsen, 2006; Flemsæter, 2009). The Concession Law aims at preventing farm abandonment and rural depopulation. Any new farm owner must live on the farm and farm the land, for a certain minimum period, in order to get a concession for farms above a certain size. The Allodial Act (*Odelsloven*), gives priority to the oldest child, then other family members, at a regulated price. 83% of farm ownership was inheritance-based in 2004 (Rye and Storstad, 2004). The Land Law has strong restrictions on splitting up farm holdings, the rationale being to maintain viable farm units.

Critics argue that children feel obliged to take over the family farm under this system, to the exclusion of people with more resources and greater motivation. Since requirements of residency and working the land have been less strictly enforced for allodial transfers (ie. within the family), the number of passive, absentee owners has increased markedly in recent decades (Karlsen, 2006:69). Critics also claim that the allodial principle prevents innovation and adaptation to a changing world (Aanesland and Holm, 2002). On the other hand, since allodial law was amended in 1975 it has encouraged daughters to take over farms (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008), and this is seen as an important contribution to gender equality and recruitment of young women to rural areas. Price controls are also criticised on the grounds that the regulated price reduces incentives to sell. However, studies show that non-economic motivation may be a much more important reason for not selling small farms, and hence for absenteeism and

neglect. Personal attachment, family history, kinship, sibling ownership, or 'keeping the name on the land' (Norwegian family names are often farm and place names – [Karlsen, 2006](#); [Flemsæter, 2009](#); [Flemsæter and Setten, 2009](#)) may be far more important than purely economic motivations. Clearly the sense of an obligation both to past and future generations still appears to be an important part of farmers' identity ([Rønningen et al., 2005](#); [Daugstad et al., 2006](#)), for good or ill.

It is important to acknowledge the presence of a two-level price market in Norway, meaning that properties defined as farms may be available at a lower price than holdings defined as second homes. In attractive areas for second homes, which include many of the mountain region communities, this is an important factor. In spite of criticism, this system is argued to reduce absentee ownership and the turning of rural property into investment objects. It means that one has legal instruments to prevent or regulate the turning of current or potentially full-time rural dwellings into second homes.

Nevertheless, the legislation has been changed and adapted to the structural changes in agriculture several times. In June 2009 the size definition of farms changed such that 19,000 smallholdings are no longer covered by this legislation and may now be sold on the open market as second homes.

A common argument is that it must be better to get in people with money who can restore the properties and maintain the cultural heritage they represent, having light in the windows part-time. Yet, [Forbord and Storstad \(2008\)](#) conclude that fewer farms would have had permanent settlement, if these regulations did not exist, and they point out that within certain areas, these regulations may be very important. Generally, ordinary houses in rural areas have been available at a lower price than second homes, and in general at a much lower price than in urban areas. However, these houses are increasingly used as second homes, making the housing situation more difficult also in many Norwegian rural communities, which may begin to resemble the British situation. Too many absentee owners are problematic for rural communities in terms of their viability, and for sustaining social structures.

In short, these debates concerning agricultural policies and farm property legislation in Norway show that promoting efficient, full-time farm units is hampering multifunctional objectives of agricultural policies and overall rural viability objectives. Further, the loss of instruments for regulating rural property use and ownership reduces the local state's ability to realise these areas' potentials in terms of their sustainable economic, environmental and socio-cultural development. The main challenge for regulation is to enable growth and change while sustaining what made upland areas valuable in the first place.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

A number of themes emerge from recent debates in Scotland and Norway. Prominent among these is the role of the state, and of agricultural policies and state regulation in particular, in fostering sustainable rural communities. These reflect "hybrid assemblages" of neoliberalism and other social formations ([Peck et al., 2010, 96](#)) in these countries.

##### 4.1. Agricultural support

The dominant neoliberal hegemony of the past decades has required that any state support or regulation should be justified in terms of 'market failure', and indeed maintenance of the cultural and natural heritage has been accepted in these terms as a 'public good' which the market would fail to provide. By extension, the economic and social systems which enable this provision may also

be advanced as qualifying for state support and regulation, including affordable housing, for example. People in the uplands of both Scotland and Norway maintain public goods, including the natural and cultural heritage, landscape, biodiversity and a range of other elements. Moreover, this is fundamental to tourism which is a vital element of these areas' economies. The interaction with and interdependency of what is essentially a managed countryside, its production and reproduction is crucial.

In both the Scottish crofting areas and the Norwegian upland areas, state subsidies are crucial in supporting these systems, yet in each case the subsidies are poorly targeted from a neoliberal or post-productivist rationale. Legitimacy of agricultural policies in Norway has during the last 20 years relied upon the notion of agriculture producing beautiful cultural landscapes, based on small-scale, low intensity, environmentally-friendly farming systems which support sustainable rural communities, yet agri-environmental policies and payments are mainly directed towards larger farms, defined as 'active', while many of the most valuable areas of biodiversity and cultural heritage and landscapes are managed by smallholdings which hardly qualify for support, and in any case struggle for survival. In Scotland too, for clientalist reasons, less favoured area payments and other support measures are targeted towards areas which have less natural and cultural heritage value, and smallholders and crofters find it harder to qualify for support through competitive agri-environmental schemes. It appears that in each case clientalism permits the receipt of subsidies by larger farms to be legitimated under the cloak of small upland farms' multifunctionality, so modifying neoliberalising tendencies. This may also reflect a continuing cultural attachment to productivism amongst policy communities, at odds with neoliberalising tendencies and multifunctionality objectives.

Too often, policy is therefore geared towards an ideal of full-time agricultural holdings, treating smallholdings as obstacles to productivist agriculture, rather than recognising their potential role in terms of rural sustainability.

##### 4.2. Regulation

More positively, despite the neoliberal hegemony, in each of these two countries land use and occupation continues to be regulated in the interest of rural sustainability. In Norway and in Scotland's crofting areas residency requirements are used to dampen land speculation, to prevent small farms being turned into second homes, and to prevent absenteeism and neglect of the land. Smallholdings are attractive for residential or leisure use in both countries, but unregulated transfer to such uses is believed to lead to mismanagement of land and loss of the natural and cultural heritage. Around the world regulations over the ownership, occupancy and acquisition of farms have been dismantled during the last few decades as part of wider deregulation and liberalisation, but with all their weaknesses these can be important instruments of rural policy. Indeed the recent Crofting Inquiry proposed strengthening of these regulations to achieve a better balance between individual gains and longer-term collective interests, and new laws have now been introduced to this end. Seen in the context of subsidies that constitute part of a social contract between farmer and society, one could argue that these properties are managed on behalf of future generations, not only for the benefit of the present farmer or even the current crofting community. Farmers' own understanding of their role as stewards of the land, managing it for generations to come, and not foremost for their own profit, may be instructive when considering what kinds of regulations and institutions are appropriate to the sustainability of these upland areas.

A fundamental challenge in fostering sustainable rural communities, in economic, social and environmental terms, is to

manage the tension between change and continuity (Arnason et al., 2009). For example, many rural communities seek to attract immigrants and return migrants (who bring new ideas, start businesses, and maintain the viability of services) but fear an attendant displacement of local people and practices, especially those fundamental to cultural and environmental sustainability. Deregulation has depleted the state's ability to manage these tensions in the interests of sustainability, so heightening such difficulties. This lack of control is exemplified as much by acquisition of crofts and small farms by absentee owners today, as it was by the Highland Clearances of the nineteenth century. It is apparent that the state, and its partners in multi-level governance, require stronger powers and a fuller set of policy 'tools' with which to seek to manage these tensions. In this respect, the crofting and small farm areas of Scotland and Norway do offer exceptions to neoliberal universalism. But might these experiences go so far as to "spur the postneoliberal imagination"? (Peck et al., 2010, 111).

#### 4.3. Beyond neoliberalism?

Many commentators see the international financial crisis of 2008–10 as having exploded the neoliberal hegemony of recent decades, revealing starkly the inadequacy of the doctrine that the free market is superior to state intervention. As the new 'masters of the universe', the bankers, ran to nation states for their salvation, the banking crisis overturned the hegemonic belief that the state is 'bad', and challenged the longstanding imperative to 'roll back the state'. Might this loss of neoliberalism's intellectual and moral credibility now enable us to think about sustainability and the potential of rural places in terms other than those of market failure and public goods, and to adopt alternative perspectives through which state support and regulation may be justified? These might include, for instance, seeing sustainable rural communities or cultural and environmental heritages as valuable in themselves rather than in economic terms; or considering whether people have a *right* to work together to sustain their communities.

Peck et al. (2010, 112) have argued that notwithstanding the loss of neoliberalism's intellectual and moral authority, neoliberalism is so politically and institutionally entrenched that it will survive in a zombie phase, "in which residual neoliberal impulses are sustained not by intellectual or moral leadership, or even by hegemonic forces, but by underlying macroeconomic and macroinstitutional conditions". While such a climate will constrain the transformative potential of progressive postneoliberal alternatives, it offers opportunities for "the (re)mobilisation, recognition and valuation of multiple, local forms of development, rooted in local cultures, values and movements – what might be called the progressively variegated economy" (Peck et al., 2010, 111) which offer radical alternatives to neoliberalism on an intellectual and moral level. It is in this sense that the examples of Scottish crofting and Norway's uplands may be most interesting.

Two further, specific aspects may be highlighted from these two countries' experiences. The first is that in each case small farm holdings provide a base from which rural households are able to sustain their livelihoods through pluriactivity, keeping 'lights in the windows' and retaining populations in areas from which they would surely have been lost if farm amalgamation had proceeded. This was acknowledged in the debates about the future of crofting in the late 1950s, and was underlined again by research conducted across Europe in the 1980s (Bryden et al., 1993), but is still forgotten too often in agricultural and rural policy formulation. Support for pluriactive small farms may be seen as central to an alternative, postneoliberal future for upland communities.

Another common issue emerging from these two countries concerns the potential or potentiality of these places. The uplands

of Norway and Scotland are in the process of significant change, subject to a variety of pressures enumerated above, but in each case there is a range of stakeholders (social actors) who are concerned about that place's future and indeed who wish to see it realise its 'potential', in the sense expressed by the European Commission or by the OECD. These actors often have different, and perhaps conflicting, ideas of a place's potential, and at one level this raises questions of governance and of how different ideas and interests can be resolved. Many have proposed deliberative place-shaping or neo-endogenous rural development models (eg. Shucksmith, 2010) to enable collective, inclusive visions and strategies to be developed, and this approach is exemplified by the proposals of the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting in 2008. On another level, this also suggests the importance of maintaining alternative potentialities, rather than closing down and resolving outcomes. It could be argued that sustainability necessitates keeping open the potential of rural areas to become different things in the future, according to changing circumstances and values which were not well recognised by neoliberalism. Potentiality means keeping options open, social and economic as much as environmental, allowing differences and variety so that future generations have possibilities of reaching *their* sustainability aims.

This review has shown how, with state support and regulatory frameworks, small farms can not only persist but can make a central contribution to the sustainability of rural places, economically, socially, culturally and environmentally, fulfilling an implicit social contract with generations to come. In Norway and Scotland these reflect "hybrid assemblages" of neoliberalism and other social formations, but they also have the potential to offer alternative, progressive, postneoliberal forms of development in upland areas in the future, constituting (as Mackenzie, 2006 has argued) a radical break with neoliberal universalism. Essential elements of such an approach include regulation which manages tensions between continuity and change, and between individual interests and the collective good; developmental incentives and support which pursue sustainability through the *agency* of people and institutions at all levels, and particularly within rural communities; and managerial technologies which seek to harmonise sectoral policies (such as the CAP) with local potentiality. Such ideas may continue to struggle for realisation as neoliberalism enters its zombie phase, but small farms' role in rural sustainability should be recognised as a progressive, postneoliberal alternative rather than as a pre-modern obstacle to economic efficiency and productivity.

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