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Elite discourses of regional identity in a new regionalism development scheme: The case of the 'Mountain Region' in Norway

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INTRODUCTION

Debates on regional structures, such as questions about territorial boundaries, scale, scope of tasks and responsibilities and decision making structure, have characterised Norwegian politics in recent years (Bukve et al. 2004; NOU:19 (2004); Selstad 2003; St.meld.nr. 25 (2004-2005); St.meld.nr. 12 (2006-2007)), as is also the case in many other western countries (see Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2000; MacLeod & Jones 2001; Hadjimichalis & Hudson 2006, Welch 2002; Wheeler 2002). 'New regionalism' is a term that has been coined to describe the tendency of changing the scale of public action, such as governance structures, economic policies, welfare and civic society (Keating et al. 2003). Politicians and researchers alike increasingly seem to identify 'regions' as the proper way to organise society and improve governance.

In Norway 'new regionalism' is not only reflected in the recent political debate about Norway's reform in regional governance (NOU 1992:15; NOU 2000:22; NOU 2004:19; Selstad 2004; St.meld.nr. 12 (2006-2007)), but also in a myriad of different regional

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organisations. In what the Norwegian geographer Tor Selstad (2003) has described as the 1990s '*regionale røre*' ('regional mess'), municipalities have chosen to cooperate with regional agencies or councils to achieve development alongside the establishment of quasi-private public-service businesses which extend across municipal borders. The recent push for municipality mergers (NOU 1992:15, St.prp.nr. 64 (2003-2004), NOU 2004:19; Frisvoll 2005,) and for a new political-administrative organisation at the meso-scale (NOU 2000:22; Frisvoll 2004) is also a feature of this 'new regionalism' in Norwegian politics. Adding to the confusion are a number of regional organisations which today have their own specific, but often overlapping territorial borders (for example, Norway's Health Care regions, transport agencies and political county administrative bodies). This 'regional mess' does not seem to be a challenge that is exclusive to Norway:

'Against the backdrop of fragmented local public and private bodies, the centralisation of power, the confusion caused by "institutional congestion" of *ad hoc* bottom-up arrangements currently in place, and the lack of direct accountability, some commentators have already gone as far as to call the changes in England a "missed opportunity".' (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2000, 713).

Much of 'new regionalism' and the debate that has followed in its wake have been informed by 'economic' perspectives on government (Keating et al. 2003), although its ideas and remedies also have other origins. We would argue that this focus on funding, with its aim amongst other things of identifying the most efficient structures of governance and economic policies, has in no insignificant part informed the Norwegian approach to 'new regionalism'. In this paper we criticise such a perspective by pointing to its lack of incorporation of 'soft

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factors', for example, popular recognition of, and popular participation in, the implementation of new regionalism schemes. When 'soft factors' are included in the literature and development schemes, it is often through naive understandings of social capital and culture (a claim that will be assessed later in this paper). It is argued in this paper that popular recognition of a new regionalist scheme is crucial for its success, particularly when it rests upon democratic control, as is the case with regional development initiatives in which democratically elected municipal-level politicians are represented. This is achieved with the help of an analytical approach derived from the work of Paasi (1986, 1996, 2002), which allows for a deconstruction of these, from a decision maker's point of view, "irrational" and unintentional 'soft factors' in the implementation of new regionalist development schemes.

Using Paasi's two-decade old approach is far from being groundbreaking today as it has found its way into studies far from the Finnish context in which it was conceived. One noteworthy example is Lysgård's (2001) study of the attempts to regionalise a Mid-Nordic region, where Paasi's framework is theoretically fortified with the inclusion of Lefebvre's model for the social production of space (1991) and Foucault's works (1982, 1994, 1995) on power. Building upon Lysgård's work we analyse one empirical case, the 'Mountain Region', which represents an attempt to create a new type of governmental structure between the meso-scale government level (i.e. counties) and the local government level (i.e. municipalities or communes). Where Lysgård studied such an attempt across national borders, we investigate an attempt within the nation state. Here such attempts, at least on paper, appear to have a greater chance of succeeding as they do not have to fight the strong institutional, economic and cognitive standing of the nation state.

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In this paper, we investigate whether new democratic or semi-democratic regional organisations require identification among the local population in order to be successful. We show how too simplistic an understanding of the social processes and the inherent power-aspects involved in the implementation of the new regionalist development scheme 'Mountain Region' adversely influences the undertaking. We show that a more complex relational and contextual understanding is required, one in which regionalisation is not only recognised as a process diffusing across time-space, but one that also takes place asymmetrically across society's social fabric, and one where 'soft factors' such as 'regional identity' are not overlooked.

NEW REGIONALISM: THE ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

After being close to extinction within academic disciplines such as geography (Lysgård 2001), regions have seen somewhat of a comeback under the catchphrase 'new regionalism', enjoying a much broader academic and political appeal than within geography alone. Keating et al. (2003) list five reasons underlying new regionalism's phoenix-like rise from its academic ashes: the crisis of the state as territorial management and spatial economic policies; the constellation of effects captured by the term 'globalisation'; the rise of new forms of social regulation; new forms of spatially-based production; and the resurgence of cultural regionalism. Thus 'region' has become a 'buzz-word' for prosperity and development in most countries. For example, in the UK, Labour's regional reform in the late 1990s set up Regional Development Agencies (e.g. Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2000; Whitehead 2003; Baker &

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Wong 2006; Cowell & Owens 2006). Similarly, this 'new regionalism' is on the agenda in the USA (e.g. Wheeler 2002), European nation states (e.g. Hettne 2005), New Zealand (e.g. Welch 2002) and the former East European countries (e.g. McMaster 2006).

Many of the ideas and direct influence on policy-making originate from the economic academic literature (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2000; Hadjimichalis & Hudson 2006). From the 1980s onwards, a network research tradition on the organisation of production systems emerged in the economic literature. This network research tradition, cherishing Putnam's (1993) ideas on social capital and economic development, stated that small, networked firms helped set the regions in which they were located on a pathway towards stable, long-term development (Amin & Thrift 1994; Storper & Scott 1995; Malmberg 1996; Maskell et al. 1998; Asheim & Isaksen 2000). The ideas from this network research tradition swiftly diffused through economic geography and the field of planning, and was subsequently taken up by authorities as a key strategy to enrich development (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2000; Hadjimichalis & Hudson 2006).

Influences from the network research tradition are well illustrated in research funded by the Norwegian Research Council's Regional Development Program (see Amdam & Bukve 2004; Arbo & Gammelsæter 2004; Onsager & Selstad 2004). Likewise, evidence of the popularity of this approach in Norway can also be found in policy documents and statements made by politicians and high ranking bureaucrats from the late 1990s onwards (for example, see St.meld.nr. 25 (2005-2006); St.meld.nr. 12 (2006-2007)).

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This diffusion of concepts and ideas from the network research tradition into regional studies and the field of planning (and others) has largely been unchallenged. Hadjimichalis & Hudson (2006) reprimand geographers and planners for having

‘(...) uncritically imported this idea from the business literature without questioning its validity or its implications. (...) many (mainly Anglophone) scholars blithely skated over the absence of well-grounded empirical evidence to support the extravagant claims that were often made for networked forms’ (p.861).

Hadjimichalis & Hudson (2006, 861-862) were especially concerned with the way that social and cultural aspects have been taken into account by the network research tradition without supporting empirical evidence. They identify a naïve treatment of ‘society’ and ‘culture’ which ignores issues of social cost, and that social and cultural aspects can have negative effects.

Another important critique raised is the neglect of power issues in network-informed regional studies. In new regional governance structures emphasising private-public-civic network governance, power issues clearly ought to be of concern:

‘(...) policy networks often reflect and embody structural inequalities within society along class, gender, and racial lines. These inequalities not only influence who is included and who is excluded from networks, but also affect access to, and control of, resources and thus the actions of network actors.’(Leitner et al. 2002, 281).

Few researchers have explored the ways in which these networks are embedded in local class, gender and age relations, or the apparent power asymmetries between them. This is underscored by the incorporation by new governance or new public management of decision-

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making into policy networks of appointed elites, resulting in accountability challenges (Østerud 2005; Hadjimichalis & Hudson 2006; Kane & Patapan 2006; Newberry & Pallot 2006). In such networks, governance decisions could be detached from the process through which democratic control is exercised, leading to tensions (Jönsson et al. 2000) which could ultimately cripple attempts at implementing a working regional organisation of an area's society, economy and governance.

A further problem, relating to the naïve treatment of concepts such as culture and social capital, is that the new regionalism orthodoxy based on the network research tradition exhibits little imaginative understanding of local structures of feeling, place-based identities, and 'cultures of hybridity' (MacLeod and Jones 2001). This is a crucial oversight as local actors have emphasised the need for taking identity issues into account when establishing new political-administrative regions. If, for instance, new municipal entities are to be successful, people living there need to relate to the new construct. However, the relationship between identity and the legitimacy of local and regional governmental institutions has not been addressed to any extent (Frisvoll & Almås 2004).

The simplistic treatment of 'social' and 'cultural' issues found in network-informed regional studies has not only led to a renunciation of the state and its institutions by neo-liberal economic entrepreneurs, politicians, planners, researchers and others, but also to the neglect of other collective representatives of community (Hadjimichalis 2006). This neglect is reflected in the accusations recently made by scholars that planners and state-level authorities need to approach regional development with greater sensitivity to local perspectives in order to establish legitimacy (see Tewdwr-Jones et al. 2006).

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The strong influence from the network tradition of 'new regionalism' faces some challenges in attempts to achieve legitimate and locally acceptable regional organisation. The propensity to script 'the region' unreflectively and treat it as a pre-given boundary found in much contemporary academic discourse and political strategy must, in our view, account for many of the challenges of implementation that regional organisations face in Norway and other European countries. A network-inspired way of thinking about regions invites researchers and practitioners to fetishise space and to reify places, as if they themselves are the active agents (MacLeod 1999; 2001). As highlighted in studies on the politics of scale and boundary formation which are influenced by humanistic and Marxist perspectives, demarcations such as regions and cities are historically constructed, culturally contested, and politically charged rather than existentially given and neutral (MacLeod & Jones 2001) as much of the network literature asserts. It is more fruitful to view the definition of a regional entity as a discursive subject for both tacit and non-discursive knowledge in the 'process of regionalisation' (Giddens 1984). Such an approach enables the scrutinising of actors' aims and intentions when attempting to create 'new' regions, and also allows a perspective of the region as constituted by patterns of social interaction and power.

Here we examine one key aspect of this interface: whether new regional democratic/semi-democratic organisations require identification among the local population in order to be successful. In exploring this issue, we first define the analytical and conceptual tools of 'regional identity' and 'the institutionalisation of regions', before we deal with the peculiarities of the Norwegian context. Then we turn to our case study - the 'Mountain Region' and its administrative body, the Mountain Region Council. Following a description

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of the area, we turn our attention to the region's institutionalisation process before discussing the relationship between identity and the institutionalisation of the Mountain Region.

‘EMERGING REGIONS’ FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ‘REGIONAL IDENTITY’

The academic literature abounds with different concepts of ‘region’. Homogeneous regions, cultural regions, identity regions and cognitive regions revolve around ‘identity’ as a defining force. Historical regions, administrative regions, landscape regions, economic regions and functional regions are defined by spatial patterns of interaction (Fossåskaret 1996; Lysgård 2004a; Salomonsson 1996; Veggeland 1992). Likewise, the concept of identity has multiple meanings and interpretations leading to a series of complex theoretical debates within the social sciences. Despite the difficulty in presenting an absolute definition of elusive concepts such as ‘region’ and ‘identity’ these two concepts are useful when exploring how various social actors interpret regionalism and interlinked concepts of identity. Here we will clarify our understanding and application of the concepts used in this paper: ‘region’, ‘regional identity’ and ‘institutionalisation of regions’.

‘Region’: defined with temporal, social and cultural sensitivity

‘Region’ can be seen as a socially-produced spatial category, meaning that a region is a perceived demarcation of, among other things, social, political, economic and cultural processes that change over time. Such an understanding opens two broad approaches to the

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study of regions: first, studying regions as processes, focusing on the underlying (structural) driving forces behind the formation and reformation of the regions (regionalisation); second, studying 'region' as a spatial category in the population's consciousness, focusing on how the phenomenon of 'region', constructed through social processes results in a concrete category in people's minds (Peet 1998; Lysgård 2004a; 2004b). As mentioned in the previous section, important power aspects are largely abandoned within the prevalent network economy regional research tradition. For instance, approaching the subject of regions from a spatial perspective alone ignores the influence that inhabitants' regional consciousness has on regional formation processes. Conversely, a focus on only the spatial categories in people's consciousness risks losing the dynamic nature of the social production of such categories. Paasi's (1986; 1999) definition of region, although contested by some (MacLeod & Jones 2001), brings relief from this predicament. For Paasi – attempting to bridge humanistic and Marxist perspectives – a region is not a spatial level per se, but symbolic of an explicit collective representation of institutional practices:

'[A region is] a concrete dynamic manifestation of social (natural, cultural, economic, political etc.) processes that affect and are affected by changes in spatial structures over time' (Paasi 1986, 110).

The distinction Paasi makes between 'place' and 'region', although criticised by some geographers for his 'un-geographical' understanding (MacLeod & Jones 2001), is central for understanding Paasi's ideas on regionalisation. The difference between 'place' and 'region' is with a Paasian understanding not one of scale, as it usually is in geography. 'Place' is not a locale on a certain spatial scale, neither is region. For Paasi the distinction between place and

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region is one of individual and collective practices. A place is a concept used to illustrate individuals' everyday lives. The place as a socio-spatial entity is thus relatively short-lived and is lost with the individual's life to which it bears reference. A region, however, represents a socio-spatial unit into which inhabitants are socialised as a part of society's reproduction. A region cannot be reduced to the history of an individual or a sense of place, as a region is an explicit collective representation of institutional practises. It has thus a longer historical duration and represents a 'higher-scale history' than place (Paasi 1986; MacLeod & Jones 2001). Lysgård's (2001) use of 'narratives' can illuminate this point further. Narratives are constructions that inhabit the conceptual space between the individual's perception of the meaning of social practices and the same social practices' collective meaning. In other words, what is usually termed a 'place' in geographical terms, e.g. a city, is with a Paasian framework a 'region', if it is the city's continuation as a collective understanding one is referring. A new regional construct can likewise be a 'place' if it only exists in one person's mind.

The position bringing salvation to the above-mentioned predicament is Paasi's appreciation of the institutionalisation of these collective social practises. This provides an abstraction equipped to tackle the mediation between Giddens' (1984) agency and structure (MacLeod & Jones 2001). With such a definition of 'region' it is no longer a time-frozen territorial demarcation or pre-given spatial level, but a reflection of differences in the world and society, as well as ideas about differences (Agnew 1999). Class, religion, ethnicity, race, even generation are important in this respect (MacLeod & Jones 2001).

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The sensitivity to the concept of power which is lacking in other regional conceptual frameworks, is partly covered within a Paasian framework. As MacLeod and Jones (2001) note, Paasi provides a scope through which to unravel the many-sided processes within which the institutionalisation of place biographies occurs. These processes are ‘(...) *actively determinate in the regionalisation of society and in the shaping and scaling of political geographies*’ (MacLeod & Jones 2001, 678), and the institutionalisation of collective identities and their binding fabrics (e.g. language and dialect) influences political and cultural hegemony, as well as social demarcation. Inherent here is the abstraction Paasi uses to provide a thicker cultural ambit to his structurationist perspective, namely ‘structures of expectations’, a term which has some parallels with Bourdieu’s (1977) ‘habitus’, and ‘generation’, echoing Giddens’ (1981) argument that the memory traces of the individual incorporate the past experience of the collective (MacLeod & Jones 2001). The official ideological ‘world view’ through which people are addressed as residents or citizens in a particular region (Paasi 1991) and through which the citizens are socialised into the collective socio-spatial consciousness (Paasi 1986) has been labelled, ‘the structures of expectations’.

According to Paasi (1991) ‘structures of expectations’ represent:

‘(...) expressions of the “official” world view of ideology sedimented into the history of a region, not into the immediate experience of people living in it. Through them people are addressed as residents or as citizens of a particular region (...). Telling manifestations of such structures are the ideologies of regionalism and nationalism’ (Paasi 1991, 249-250).

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‘Structures of expectations’ are essential in making the collective representations relevant for individuals that are already sharing the collective representations, or making new individuals part of the collective belief-system, with social sanctioning playing a key role:

‘The collective, institutionally mediated roles expressed in the structures of expectations are essential for the transformation of regions into places, centres of a feeling of belonging to time-space-specific, more or less abstract reference groups and communities. These imaginary groups are crucial as regards social control and hidden power relations (...).’ (Paasi 1991, 250)

‘Structures of expectations’ are important for understanding the relationship between a region and its inhabitants, as well as its outsiders (Paasi 1986). ‘Generation’ is a vital process in the mediation between place and region – especially in arousing the relations between personal place-based life histories and larger scale social histories. Further, ‘generation’ is an important but often neglected factor in the more macro-social regulation of regional consciousness (Paasi 1991). The way in which particular generations succeed one another, and thereby bind people together as ‘imagined communities’, is vital in embedding and reproducing a collective consciousness (MacLeod & Jones 2001), and Paasi (1986) underlines that (lifelong) socialisation is the key to how the ‘structure of expectations’ are re-generated. As shown later in this paper, collective identities can complicate matters for political elites who strive to implement the schemes of new regionalism as collective identity can also be the foundation for opposition and neglect.

However, Paasi’s concept of ‘structures of expectations’ suffer from serious weaknesses. One is that there are no clues to the nature of the structures involved in generating and re-

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generating the 'structures of expectations'. Another is that the concept fails to provide a real framework for illuminating the role of power in the social relations involved in creating, maintaining and transforming the collective representations that is a 'region' in Paasi's understanding. Lysgård (2001) suggests a discursive approach informed by Foucault's theories of power as an alternative.

Based on Foucault's (1982, 1994, 1995) understanding of power, it becomes apparent that the construction of new regional development schemes on a fundamental level is really about authority and force in the power relations that seep through all of society's social practises. The obvious question is: do the political and bureaucratic 'engineers' attempting to construct the Mountain Region possess the authority and power needed to construct and communicate the new construct's narrative in a manner such that it is recognised and accepted by the public as legitimate? Is the narrative accepted on equal terms with other regional narratives that people use in their identity construction) (Lysgård 2001, 74)?

Power is, according to Foucault (1982, 1994, 1995), an aspect present in all social relations that contribute to the recognition and acceptance of certain discourses. Power is what makes some discourses appear legitimate and valid in a given situation. The implication from such an understanding is that power is not something that exists as an object independent of social relations; i.e. power *is* not in it self, it is performed and executed as part of social relations and social practices. Power is thus elusive as an object of study, as its nature is not as an object. Rather it is how societies and subjects are constituted in the tension between power relations and fields of knowledge that can be studied. Power is not to be possessed; rather, networks of unstable and continuously changing social relations express tensions between members of

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society. Opposition, i.e. counter-force, is always part of power relations, as power is never fully located on any of the sides. This implies that the focal point of a study of the regionalisation of the Mountain Region should be the social practices through which the power relations are exercised (Lysgård 2001), such as the scheme's institutions and their relation to the institutions of other regions (i.e. collective socio-spatial entities).

'Regional identity'

With Paasi's distinction between individual practices (place) and experiences on the one hand and collective institutional practices and collective structures of meaning within a time frame that stretches across generations (region) on the other hand, we can make an analytical distinction between the 'identity of a region' on one hand and the 'regional identity of the inhabitants' on the other (Paasi 1986, 1991; Lysgård 2001). The first refers to features in nature, landscape, inhabitants and culture (such as place-names) which can be used in scientific, political or economic discourses to distinguish one region from others. The second deals with the population's regional consciousness, such as their awareness and identification with the region; and whether they live within or outside the region. These identity concepts are closely bound to each other and belong within Paasi's conceptualisation of 'regional identity' (Paasi 1986; 1996; 2002).

Regional identity is a significant element in the construction of regions as meaningful, socio-political spatial structures (Paasi 2002). The concept is particularly useful as not only is it placed within the field of tension between the material, 'objective' and immaterial, 'subjective', dimensions in a region's construction, re-production and transformation, but it

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also mirrors the time-space specific structuration of the multidimensional relations between individuals and society (Paasi 1986; Lysgård 2001).

As with all other identities 'regional identity' (i.e. both a population's regional consciousness and a region's identity) has a way of appearing as essentialistic phenomenon, i.e. identity seems to be 'nature-given', an intrinsic feature of human beings and territorial areas, while actually being contextual due to its never-ending construction in structured social processes that take place in the relationships between individuals and between individuals and their environment. This tendency to appear essentialistic allows identity to be used politically. One example of political use may be the implementation of essentialistic understandings of identity in public narratives. This use is as much a lay activity as an elite activity (Lysgård 2001) and it falls in under Paasi's 'structures of expectations'.

Understanding the relationship between notions of collective identity such as 'regional identity' and the formation of regions in the age of new regionalism is thus important for two reasons. First the region, regional consciousness and region's identity are all social constructs that appear as facts or 'natural'. These are important elements of action contributing to the creation of and the shaping of action. As long as the region and/or the regional consciousness and region's identity play a part in the public discourse of regionalisation, actors can create, maintain and reconfigure a regional 'reality' which also orientates their lives (Paasi 2002; Salomonsson 1996; Selstad 2003). Second, a cultural lag becomes evident in the discourse of shaping the collective representation of the socio-spatial entity. The elites (such as politicians, bureaucrats, business managers) can be seen as more active than most people in the production of new regions and their identity narratives. Politicians, business owners and high-

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level bureaucrats have the power to re-route and re-organise people's lives, and through this to influence the geographical areas to which their regional consciousnesses bears reference. Thus a significant authority dimension becomes apparent as some individuals, social classes or groups are more active, or, at least on paper, possess the ability to muster more power in the production of new regions and their narratives. This sets the scene for conflict relating to definitions of territorial unity and its identity narrative (Häkli 1994; Paasi 1986; 1996; Smith 1993, Lysgård 2001). The shaping of identity will always be politically charged and imply value choices, not from an essence legitimating action from what is 'natural', but as part of a political intention to achieve power and hegemony (Lysgård 2001, 64).

'Regional institutionalisation'

Regional institutionalisation is a key concept in Paasi's framework, and is closely linked to 'regional identity' (or regional consciousness). This is because institutionalisation creates a discourse about regional identity, while at the same time it depends upon a discourse of regional identity (Paasi 1986; 1991; 2002).

Paasi points to four stages in his deconstruction of regional institutionalisation. In the empirical world the order of these may vary; different stages may occur at the same time and with a different degree of concretisation and intensity (Paasi 1986; 1996; MacLeod and Jones 2001; Lysgård 2004a). The more of the content in Paasi's four stages that are present at a given moment in time, the closer the region is to being an institutionalised spatial unity (Lysgård 2004a).

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The first stage is *the creation of the territorial shape* and refers to the localisation of social practice through the drawing of borders between 'our' territory and 'the other's' territory. In other words, it is the definition of borders that binds certain social practices to an area. An idea of where the region's borders are located is established within the population. The second stage is the *formulation of the region by using concepts and symbols*. This stage refers to the development of a 'region's identity', such as through the use of concepts and symbols that distinguish the region from other regions. An example is the creation of symbolic identity through naming the region and designing logos. Events such as festivals and historical games are often 'locally-branded' hallmarks that are regarded as 'unique' to that particular territory. The *establishment of institutions* is the third stage. Here the formal establishment of institutions such as the mass media, educational systems and health care, together with establishing the region in non-local institutions like the economy, national legislation and national politics, takes place. This institution-building also has a socio-cultural side to it; that of making the local population think of the region as an important entity. Reproducing the region through social practices over time is, together with the reproduction of notions about 'us' and 'them', essential in institution-making. The fourth and final stage identified by Paasi (1986) is the *establishment of a socio-spatial awareness* within society, both within and outside the region. The region is established and accepted as a territory with a distinctive quality or hallmark which plays a part in a larger national and international system of regional formations. At this stage, the region has fully established an identity mirroring both the region's identity and the regional identity (Paasi 1986; Lysgård 2004a).

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THE NORWEGIAN CONTEXT AND THE CASE STUDY AREA

Norwegian democracy has a long history of stability. In an international comparative perspective, Norway's society is characterised by a striking egalitarianism, a strong public sector, a culture of cooperative institutions which merges private with public interests, and a strong cultural embedding of the periphery, which is reflected in Norway's governmental and social structures. However, Norway is also subject to globalisation and new regionalism's neo-liberal reforms. Norway's governmental levels are accordingly changing. The traditional three tiers of government (state, county and municipality) have since the 1990s been under considerable pressure to change, especially at the local and meso levels. This is partly due to changes in the core-periphery power balance, but also because of neo-liberal ideas, new regionalisation and the European Union, in the markets of which Norway, although a non-member, is a participant (Baldersheim & Fimreite 2005; Østerud 2005). It was in this contextual backdrop that the 'Mountain Region' was formed.

The Mountain Region case study

Figure 1 shows the case study area. There were nine municipalities (spanning two counties) involved in the 'Mountain Region' at the time of study (autumn 2002): Tydal, Holtålen, Røros (Sør-Trøndelag County), and Os, Tolga, Tynset, Folldal, Alvdal and Rendalen (Hedmark County). Multiple socio-spatial entities in a Paasian sense with established identity narratives exist within the study area. The municipalities, villages and counties represent three sets of socio-spatial entities with their own clear identity narratives. A further socio-spatial entity is Trøndelag, with strong identity narratives attributed to it.

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Located in central Norway, it comprises two counties Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag.

Another socio-spatial entity is the Nord-Østerdalen, with which most of the inhabitants in the six southern municipalities identify, according to our informants. These 'regions' and their respective identity narratives dominate the regional hierarchy in the study area.

So far, restructuring the area's economy from a mixed mining and agricultural community into a late-modern welfare society primarily based on an expanding service industry has been successful (Rye & Winge 2002, Almås 2003). Although the number of inhabitants has been fairly stable in the area as a whole the past 20 years, there has been a dramatic decline in the most peripheral municipalities and communities. Tydal, Folldal and Rendalen have all experienced depopulation, while the study area's two towns, Tynset and Røros have experienced population growth (Rye & Winge 2002).

The Mountain Region has, like other rural regions, also changed profoundly both socially and culturally. These changes may be briefly summarised as a levelling out of historical differences between rural and urban regions, bringing a 'national' culture to the 'periphery'. Today, there are relatively small differences in variables such as living conditions, educational level, and cultural consumption between urban and rural populations in Norway (Hompland 1991; Almås 1999; Almås et al 2008).

STUDYING REGIONAL IDENTITY: THE EMPIRICAL DATA MATERIAL

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The data material presented in this paper was collected in September and October 2002 as part of an EU-funded research project 'Restructuring in marginal rural areas' (RESTRIM). Although the data are now a few years old, we believe that they still make a relevant contribution to the debate on 'new regionalism', especially the information gathered on culture and social aspects as a hindrance for the development of regions – aspects neglected in most research on regional schemes in 'new regionalism' according to recent criticism (e.g. Hadjimichalis 2006; Hadjimichalis & Hudson 2006).

The study team conducted several interviews with key informants and observed various meetings between actors involved in regional development in the case study area. The interviewees were sampled according to a 'strategic' logic (Thagaard 2003), whereby actors were selected who occupied key positions within the field of study, thus providing insight into the research topic from as many angles as possible. Given the research question about the development of regional identity, we further chose actors who had taken part in or observed the regionalisation processes in the region during recent decades.

The interviewees represented a variety of positions in the Mountain Region. The present and former directors of the Mountain Region Council provided factual information on the regionalisation process, but also presented (and represented) the 'official' discursive positions of those most positive to stronger regionalisation. A number of interviews with local politicians and bureaucrats (six interviews) from the nine municipalities gave similar insights, revealing discursive positions that represented more sceptical attitudes towards stronger integration between the municipalities. The same applies to the three interviews with actors

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from the business sector, representing firms that promote products from the region (tourism and 'local' food products).

All interviews followed a semi-structured interview format however, we encouraged an informal setting where the interviewees were allowed to take the lead in the dialogue. Key questions were asked about their own attitudes towards the regionalisation process and how this influenced their activities, for example, as a mayor in a municipality or when promoting local products externally. In addition, we used these interviews to gather factual information on developments in the region and informants' perspectives of the political-democratic system in the study area.

We also interviewed three journalists from three different newspapers within the study area. All were working in the geographical area covered by the present study, although, two of them were reporting for newspapers published outside the study area. They reflected on how they and their newspapers employ the term 'Mountain Region' when reporting, including how such terminology was understood and accepted by the readership. The journalists, who had met a large number of inhabitants through their work, were also an informative source on how lay people relate to the Mountain Region more generally – and were particularly valuable in providing insights into key conflicts during the process of regionalisation.

Two meetings were also overtly observed. One was a meeting of the Mountain Region Council, where mayors, deputy mayors and other key municipality politicians were taking part in the new regionalist development scheme. Some 30 significant actors participated in these meetings, discussing issues such as regional development and integration in the area.

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We were able both to observe the formal proceedings and to follow this up with informal discussions with some of the participants. The second meeting was a gathering of nine municipal bureaucrats in charge of economic development in the study area discussing how they best could promote business development within the Mountain Region.

Furthermore, we conducted an analysis of the local newspaper, *Arbeidets Rett* ('Labour's Justice'). The paper is issued three times a week with a circulation of ca 7,300 copies, and is widely read in all parts of the study area, except for the Tydal and Rendalen municipalities which are perceived as being located outside of the newspaper's main market. All newspaper issues from January 1992 to September 2002, and all issues in January between 1985 and 1991, were examined for the usage of the term 'Mountain Region' or for reporting from the work of the Mountain Region Council. Articles containing these keywords were analysed. Finally, we collected relevant material from the Council's archives from its commencement in 1995. We accessed important documents telling the tale of the processes of formalising a Mountain Region. Examples of such documents were a mid-term evaluation commissioned by Hedmark County, and each of the municipalities' assessment of the regional scheme.

Taken together, the material allows for an in-depth interrogation of the regional identity and the processes of regionalisation of the Mountain Region. The interviews were conducted with key actors in the region, representing a wide spectre of positions in regional politics (government, economics, and civil society). As such, the material contains information on the views of both those encouraging – and responsible for – the development of a stronger, more institutionalised Mountain Region, as well as those contesting these developments. The material primarily represents the accounts of the regional elites, while the reflections of the

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lay population are absent. However, the material still allows for an appreciation of how the general public related to the regionalisation process, as this was an aspect which most of the informants actively reflected upon as part of their involvement in the regionalisation processes. For example, the journalists' usage of 'the Mountain Region' in the newspapers reflects the term's tacit acceptance among their readerships. Similarly, the mayors' negotiations of their municipalities' involvement in the regionalisation process necessarily had to be in tune in with the sentiments of their electorate. The interview data and other material identifies the dominant narratives in operation in the region.

THE REGIONALISATION OF THE MOUNTAIN REGION

The creation of territorial shape

The local development actors perceive the Mountain Region as constituted by two 'functional regions', a view receiving scientific support (Juvkam 2002). One of these 'functional regions' is situated in the southern part of the area, with the town of Tynset as the centre, and the other in the northern part of the area, with the town of Røros as the centre. The Mountain Region as a regional development initiative is an example of how local development actors – here, the local public actors – engage in the development of their local communities by reshaping interaction patterns and the structures of their policies and development agencies. Locally, these processes have resulted in a fusion of the Mountain Region as one functional region. Since the formal establishment of the 'Mountain Region' in 1995, the social and economic integration of the two functional regions has been pursued by

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local development actors. This is especially clear in the practices of commuting, which was already widespread by the early 1990s. Local politicians and bureaucrats have encouraged this trend in order, among other things, to modernise the public services to meet the needs from a more mobile population. At the time of the study, the informants judged that intra-Mountain Region commuting had doubled since the mid 1990s.

Various forms of inter-municipal interaction between the nine member municipalities also existed before the Mountain Region was formally established, typically in cases where the municipalities had to present a 'united front' against the central authorities. But are also examples of efforts to coordinate economic development at a supra-municipality scale before the establishment of the Mountain Region. These interactions were characteristically ad hoc and usually took place outside of the formal political and administrative channels (i.e. municipalities and counties). Following the establishment of the Mountain Region, a formal and enduring political and bureaucratic channel has been developed at a supra-municipality scale.

The decline of the municipal economy is also an often-cited reason as to why many actors sought integration of the social, political, administrative and economic functions within the territory that later came to be defined as the Mountain Region. Municipalities are often hard-pressed to find ways of reducing their budgets, with one popular strategy being to integrate service supply with the neighbouring municipality. This has often been employed as the main argument for the creation of the Mountain Region, both during its establishment and during the mid-term evaluation processes commissioned by Hedmark County. Some informants claimed that the Mountain Region would never have been established if the municipalities had

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not experienced the financial squeeze at the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s. As summarised by one interviewee:

‘The funding of the municipal budgets was so harsh that they really had to stand together. It is too costly for the municipalities to solve the problems on their own. Cooperation would have been much more difficult to achieve if the municipalities had not been in such a tight economic situation.’

The spatial interaction in the Mountain Region has been influenced by the fact that the member municipalities are situated in two different counties (see Figure 1). This applied to the public services administered by the counties, such as upper secondary schools, and until recently, hospital services. This meant that the population – especially those living close to the county borders – found themselves in a position where they could not freely use the services closest to their homes. The Mountain Region as a regional development initiative has succeeded in diminishing the county borders as a barrier for education and health care, thus strengthening the social interaction within the territory constituted as the Mountain Region.

The creation of the region's terminology and symbols

In the process of institutionalisation, there was also a stage where concepts and symbols said to represent the region were created. In 1987, the name ‘Mountain Region’ did not exist as a proper name with a territorial reference to this particular area. The population had probably a vague understanding of living in a part of Norway that could be characterised as a mountain district because of the area's topographical features. When the local newspaper *Arbeidets Rett* referred to the area they used the terms ‘mountain district’ and ‘the mountain

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municipalities'. At the end of the 1980s, the newspaper's slogan used on its front-page was '*Arbeidets rett – lokalavis for Røros, Nord-Østerdalen og Gauldalen*' ['Labour Justice – the local newspaper for Røros, Nord-Østerdalen and Gauldalen'], using the main town's name along with the names of two distinct topographical features in the area; the two valleys, Østerdalen and Gauldalen. Today most of the inhabitants have heard of the term, 'Mountain Region', and many of them know roughly which municipalities the name refers to, as it is frequently used by the local newspaper as a territorial reference in its reporting.

The construction of this name is closely connected to the formation of the Mountain Region's institutions. The local newspaper was a significant actor in the name's introduction. The first edition of the newspaper following the establishment of one of the Mountain Region's institutions in 1995 proudly stated that it would be the local 'newspaper for the Mountain Region'.

Leading up to this, *Arbeidets rett* seems to have increased its usage of the term 'Mountain Region' as an indicator of the 'locality'. Most articles were introduced with a place-name indicating where the reported 'event' took place. During the late 1990s, however, more and more articles were located by the place label 'Mountain Region' rather than the area's local place-names. For example, the newspaper started to write about the hunting season in the 'Mountain Region' instead of the traditional practice of using the municipalities' names (e.g. *Arbeidets rett*, October 3, 2001, p. 7). This reflects what informants described as the newspaper's new strategy of reporting at the 'regional', rather than the local or municipality scale as it had previously. Things that previously 'happened' in the municipalities would now be considered as 'regional' occurrences. Examples of this are the reporting of annual

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population statistics. In January 1990, for example, the newspaper reported a decrease in the population 'in the region' the previous year ('we became fewer in 1989') in contrast to 1988 when the 'population in the region increased' (*Arbeidets rett*, January 3, 1990, p. 7). Another article published the same month investigated the gendered power structures 'in the region'. The paper concluded that 'most of the decision-making bodies in the region are composed of men only' (*Arbeidets rett*, January 17, 1990, p.1). Another example is the annual publication of the list of the 'wealthiest people', which is based on the official tax registers in the respective municipalities. While the newspaper earlier used to print lists of the wealthiest persons in Tydal, Holtålen, Røros and so forth, the newspaper began to published a list of the richest persons in the Mountain Region in 2000 (e.g. *Arbeidets rett*, October 15, 2001, p. 8-9).

Thus, media seem to take an active role in supporting new regional narratives, as also shown in other studies (e.g. Paasi 1986, Lysgård 2001). A new region with a larger territorial shape, if it is able to consolidate its hegemony, will also mean a larger territory in which the newspaper can sell its newspapers (Paasi 1986).

The region also has its own logo. At the time of study it was symbolising a mountain tree, referring to the area's harsh mountainous conditions (Figure 2). No other logos that refer to the 'region's identity' had been established in the Mountain Region at the time of study.

The establishment of institutions

The establishment of the Mountain Region 's territorial shape is not a question of a territory spontaneously emerging from a population. Social practices, for instance interaction, are key elements in establishing territorial shape, creating consciousness, solidarity and a

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notion of a territorial entity within the population. A reorganisation of social institutions such as political and bureaucratic bodies, educational institutions and the health sector followed the formation of the Mountain Region.

The Mountain Region Council, formally established in 1995 after five years of increasing cooperation between the municipalities in the area, is a key institution in the construction of the 'Mountain Region'. The Council started out with eight of the municipalities in the region, while the ninth (Rendalen) joined three years later. The two counties of Sør-Trøndelag and Hedmark played an important role in instigating the process that resulted in the founding of the Council. Hedmark later became formal participant and Sør-Trøndelag as observer in the Council. The Council has no executive powers but is in principle given the task of co-ordinating the policies of municipality councils. This occurs both internally within the region (e.g. making development plans) and externally (lobbying toward county and national authorities). Its governing body is not a result of ordinary elections but is made up of the two top politicians and the chief executive manager of all municipalities and counties. Its work is carried out by a staff of three persons, including a part-time secretary, paid by Hedmark County. In 2001, its budget (exclusive of labour costs) was 750,000 Euro, with most of this contributed by the participating municipalities.

The establishment of the Council came about after a committee set up by the two counties delivered a report on regional development and municipal cooperation in 1993. They recommended the establishment of a regional council to formalise and strengthen cooperation between the municipalities. The main argument for setting up the Council was to exploit more fully the pre-existing cooperation within the region. The committee also recommended a

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merging of local development agencies set up by the municipalities into one new regional development agency.

The reception of the proposed consolidation of local authorities in a new Mountain Region was mixed. Some greeted the proposal with enthusiasm, while others were more lukewarm in their comments. For example, the mayor of Holtålen municipality wanted to carry on with a more *ad hoc* way of organising the co-operation between the municipalities, giving them freedom to collaborate depending upon the issue in question. If a regional council were to be created, the sceptics claimed, it should not include all of the proposed municipalities. The region would potentially cover too much geographical ground and social diversity. As the mayor of Tydal argued:

‘There is a big gap between the geographical extremes [of the proposed region]. We [from Tydal] feel that the things going on in the southern part of the region have little to do with our situation’.

In the period from 1995 onwards, the Mountain Region Council carried out a large number of projects in order to meet the expectations created during its formation phase. Generally, however, the Council continued to work in line with the already established practices, focusing on lobbying central authorities, coordinating local development strategies, and initiating inter-municipal cooperation projects – the latter with varied success, due to conflicts between the municipalities. Nevertheless, by 2000, there were a substantial number of services which were supplied at an inter-municipal basis, covering all or most of the nine municipalities. It is important to note that some of these projects seem to have been initiated from outside of the operating mandate of the Council. In our view, this reflects a resistance to

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the Mountain Region project as reflected by the comments of the Tydal mayor and the fact that some intra-municipal service provision took place outside of the Mountain Region's institutional umbrella.

The Council also initiated a great number of projects with the objective of enhancing the economic competitiveness of the region. These might best be described as 'true' regional projects, as they were not about the coordination of the traditional tasks of the municipalities (i.e. supply of public services) but rather, sought to develop new projects and networks. The most visible initiative was the establishment of decentralised higher education in the region, located in Tynset and Røros, which gave residents the possibility to improve their formal qualifications, thereby increasing the general educational level within the region.

In addition, both the Council meetings and the informal discussions between the meetings seem to have stimulated the building of closer networks between the municipal political leaders. This also applied to the bureaucratic leaders, especially as a result of the establishment of two semi-formal networks; one for chief managers and one for economic development officers in the municipalities. The Mountain Region Council has further tried to enhance the creation of a number of other networks, both public and private, across the municipal borders within the Mountain Region.

Another important element here according to Paasi (1986) is the establishment of the region in non-local institutions. The Mountain Region has achieved this – both at meso-scale and national governmental levels – in that a joint report from the two county administrations recommended the formal establishment of the Mountain Region's Council. Furthermore

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Hedmark County provides the Council's funding. However, there is an imbalance in the two counties' participation as Sør-Trøndelag County only participates as an observer, contributing to a reservation towards some of the regional organisation's initiatives by the northern municipalities' politicians and bureaucrats. At the time of our study, Sør-Trøndelag County weakened even further their institutional incorporation into the Mountain Region, signalling that they were about to establish an alternative regional development plan. These activities provoked little controversy among the participating members of the Mountain Region Council or the wider public. Nationally the Local Governmental Act allows for the formation of regional Councils such as the Mountain Region Council, but places restrictions on the degree of autonomy. The Act states that the municipality councils have the last say on how much of their authority is transferred to the regional councils (LOV-1992-09-25-107).

This became a significant hurdle for the institutionalisation of the Mountain Region, as its institutions were not established without opposition within the area's municipality councils. Some feared that having a council coordinating some aspects of the municipal bureaucracy implied the establishment of an administrative body by stealth – effectively replacing the nine existing municipalities. Because of such sentiments the proposal to establish the Mountain Region's Council received a mixed response, as is often the case with such new proposals in rural Norway. Popular attachments to the local level of authority can be strong in rural Norway (Frisvoll and Almås 2004). However, some actors, such as those within the economic sector, welcomed the proposal with the justification that a larger regional political and administrative unit would achieve more, and be more cost-efficient, than nine separate municipal administrations.

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This stage has an important socio-cultural aspect to it – namely, to establish, maintain and strengthen regional identity. According to one informant, enhancing regional identity has never been an explicit goal for the work of the regional Council. Still, some actors, especially the former director of the Council, had taken this into consideration and attempted to fortify a sense of regional identity among those taking part in the work of the Council and the general public. The ex-director noted that he often observed an unwillingness to support the work of the Council, as well as other inter-municipal projects, which he ascribed to a lack of ability to think ‘regionally’ and thus also to act ‘regionally’. Still, the fact seems to be that neither the Mountain Region nor the regional Council have managed to attract much attention among lower-level municipal politicians and bureaucrats, and even less among the general public. Several informants claimed that this was one of the main shortcomings during the first years – that people did not relate to the Council, or even know about its work. Thus, it lacked a base of legitimacy which in hindsight was required to carry out its work efficiently.

In the establishment of such institutions power aspects lurk just beneath the surface. Lysgård’s (2001, 249) model of dynamic power-fields is an improvement in this respect on the third stage of Passis model, which do not systematic deal with power relations. Lysgård found two ‘power-axes’ in his study of the regionalisation of the Mid-Nordic region: one of the axes bridged ‘neglect’ and ‘intervention’, while the other bridged ‘opposition’ and ‘support’ (Figure 3). Adapted to the regionalisation of the Mountain Region the model helps us understand the power relations involved.

Figure 3 about here

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In Figure 3 key actors in the establishment of the Mountain Region's institutions are placed according to their position on Lysgård's axes. It should be noted that actors' placement within the diagram is not fixed over time. Looking at Sør-Trøndelag County's position, we see that when the Mountain Region Council was established, the County ranked highly both on support and intervention. This may be as a result of the initial 'ownership' of the project as the County, together with Hedmark County, originally launched the idea of a regional council and initiated its implementation. However, it is now apparent that Sør-Trøndelag is drifting towards 'neglect' as it makes no financial contribution - leaving Hedmark County to provide the funding. Furthermore, interviews with the mayors indicated that the County was planning to launch its own regional development scheme. Another observation is that the municipalities' political leaders are not a homogenous group, as they are spread out along the support/opposition axis. Since they attend the Mountain Region Council on a regular basis they can be conceptually placed towards intervention on the neglect/intervention axis. Some municipality politicians below the level of mayor/deputy mayor belong on the opposition side on the support/opposition axis, stretching towards intervention. This is evident in the data, for instance, the ex-leader of the council made a remark about their scepticism of the Council's work. According to the *Local Government Act* a regional council can only advise a municipality council, manage certain tasks or decide on certain issues on behalf of it if it is trusted with the task by the municipal council. This is an important observation as institutional recognition outside the new regional construct is an important aspect of Paasi's theory. The Mountain Region is thus not fully accepted as a region in Norway's regional hierarchy.

The establishment of regional consciousness

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In Paasi's fourth stage, the region is accepted as a territorial area with both a distinctive regional quality and a role in a larger system of regional formations. The Mountain Region has by no means reached this stage. In our study, we found that there were numerous traditional regional identities (socio-spatial consciousness) opposing and overlapping each other in this area. One of these identity dimensions is between the 'regional identities' associated with the two counties, while another is between the regional consciousnesses attached to 'Trøndelag' and 'Nord-Østerdalen'. Yet others are between the municipalities, between the villages, between the villages and the towns, and between the two towns in the area. This makes for a complex picture of different aspects of regional consciousnesses, with the 'Mountain Region' adding a further, 'manufactured', identity construction. It is mostly the local politicians, the local bureaucrats – especially those who have the right to attend the Mountain Region Council – and the local newspaper, who seem to use 'Mountain Region' terminology on a daily basis. This practice assumes that the residents of the region understand the new geographical references.

According to our informants, successful regional projects such as the regional health care system, the decentralised higher education departments and the organisation of the upper secondary schools may have also played a crucial role in making the local public aware of the Mountain Region. To what degree residents of the region possess a notion of a distinctive regional quality – meaning both the region's identity and the regional identity – is unclear.

Despite these ingrained place-based identities, one of the journalists explained the newspaper's choice to identify itself as the paper for the 'Mountain Region':

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‘We wanted to make people see beyond the border of their own municipality. The readership is very concerned with themselves, their orientation only goes as far as the tip of their noses.’

This discourse was also distinct in the regional forum of the municipal bureaucrats who were in charge of economic development. During these meetings, the following statements were typical:

‘We just have to stop thinking in terms of the municipalities. That time is gone.’

‘The economic sector relates to the region they [the firms] operate within. (...) The municipalities have to admit that the world moves on. So we [the municipality administrations] have to, too.’

But have the Mountain Region and its institutions succeeded in convincing the population to relate to the ‘Mountain Region’ rather than their own hamlets and municipalities?

In 1987, the ‘Mountain Region’ did not exist as an expression. At the time of study, 16 years later, most people in the region are – based on our informants’ experience – familiar with the concept, knowing that it denotes the area where they live and having an approximate idea of its borders. The term ‘Mountain Region’ and the regional collective notion it bears reference to cannot be understood as being a central part of the inhabitants’ identities, since they seldom seem to think of themselves explicitly as living in the Mountain Region. The data clearly indicate, however, that the term serves as a geographical reference point for some social groups in the region, especially those involved in rural development work and the region’s institutions. It seems reasonable to claim that a new Mountain Region regional identity has been created among ‘regional’ elites; its identity narrative remains weak outside

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of these core actors. In order to justify such a claim, we have to further expand the diagram of the power-axes. This brings us to the often over-looked 'soft factors'.

Restraining the institutionalisation of the Mountain Region?

Although the Mountain Region place-name is well established among politicians and bureaucrats, there is evidence that this regional scheme is being resisted. For instance, in Hedmark County's mid-term evaluation of the 'Mountain Region' and its regional Council, the conclusion was drawn that the regional initiative was struggling in key areas. Some of the member municipalities were threatening to withdraw; the regional initiative lacked legitimacy within its member municipalities' councils and lower-level public officers; and the traditional hegemonic collective representations of institutionalised practises (the municipalities) was still very much apparent, making it difficult to embrace a new regional vision.

In discussing the term 'Mountain Region, one politician expressed that:

'No one associates anything to that name. Where is it? That is why we must discuss the place-name.'

According to her experience the identity which the place-name refers to is not recognised as something that exists. If it did, people would know where it was, and the place-name would be unproblematic and there would be no need "*to discuss the place-name*". The political elite's solution to deal with the political use of the competing "essentialistic" identity narratives has been, as a journalist informant pointed out in our interview with him, to

'(...) rise above emotional feelings and traditional attachments in order to solve the practical problems'.

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This may not, however, have been the appropriate strategy. As noted earlier, Hadjimichalis & Hudson (2006) criticised the new regionalists for either overlooking socio-cultural aspects or for uncritically treating them as inherently positive. The Mountain Region initiative is a good example of how ignoring socio-cultural differences (such as class, generation, status and regional identity) can undermine the political objectives in implementing new regionalist schemes. It is precisely the competition between the Mountain Region's frail regional identity and the already strong and vital collective representations and narratives that challenges the regional initiative. In order to justify this claim, we turn to the Mountain Region's 'structure of expectations'.

Structures of expectations

The Mountain Region's key structures of expectations are the local newspaper *Arbeidets rett*, and the Mountain Region Council. Local actors driving the 'structures of expectation', include municipality politicians attending the Council; municipal bureaucrats with the right to attend Council fora; regional bureaucrats employed by the Council; business owners and managers; and the local newspaper's journalists.

The Mountain Region Council is obviously important in conveying an 'official' world view of the 'Mountain Region' into the everyday experiences of the people living there. However, the mid-term evaluation conducted by Hedmark County concluded that the Council has not paid enough attention to its function in communicating the new region's identity narratives. A main conclusion of the report was that the Council had succeeded in coordinating its policy towards the central authorities. There was also satisfaction with the

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Council's work on strengthening the networks between politicians and bureaucrats in the different member municipalities. The evaluation stated that much of the Council's work in 'marketing the region internally' has been done by the local newspaper. The newspaper's motivation however, was not solely a grand 'new regionalist' idea of a united 'Mountain Region'. Rather, a more self-serving agenda to increase its market was clearly part of its promotion of the new regional sentiments. At the time that the term 'Mountain Region' was coined, the paper was widely read in all parts of the Mountain region's territory, except in municipalities of Tydal and Rendalen. Adapting to the new territorial shape gives the newspaper the potential to reach a wider readership, thus increasing sales. Furthermore, a regional agenda within the area's political circles would also imply more news to report and comment upon. In fact, one informant employed by the paper even claimed that it was the newspaper – not the Council – that coined the 'Mountain Region' term:

'It was somewhat arbitrary that the concept turned up, actually. One of the section leaders [in the newspaper] proposed to employ [the term "Mountain Region"] in the masthead.'

High-ranking politicians and bureaucrats on the Council's boards and committees are also important actors in commanding the structures of expectations. Since they work with Mountain Region issues on day to day basis, it would be a fair assumption that it is among these regional elites that the regional consciousness towards a 'Mountain Region' and its identity narrative is most prominent.

The term 'Mountain Region' has also been employed by the private sector to some extent. For example the organisation, 'Food from the Mountain Region', which was set up in 1999 to

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coordinate the production and marketing of local food products, is an example of a private business using the term as a label to provide its products with a geographical identity. This is an example of a how the local business community (food producers and manufacturers located within the Mountain Region's territorial shape) are trying to exploit the new regional narrative for commercial interests. Another instance of the regional narrative permeating businesses and other organisations was evident in discussions about the formation of a 'Mountain Region Business Association'. Advertisements promoting businesses and services often refer to their geographical location as the 'Mountain Region'. Another example is the refuse company which is called the 'Mountain Region Inter-municipal Refuse Company'.

It is, however, more difficult to assess to what degree other actors in the region employ the term. At this stage, we have only been able to ascertain this through interviews with bureaucratic and political elites via their own perceptions of the extent of the institutionalisation of a regional consciousness; however, some analytical claims can be made. In the aforementioned evaluation report negative remarks were made regarding the Council's efforts – and failure – to 'market' the region, both internally and externally. The mid-term evaluation remarked that the

'(...) council has not done enough [to create a notion of regional unity among the Mountain Region's population]: Still many do not know what the Council does. Many do not feel they belong to the Mountain Region – but to their own hamlet only. Externally it has done too little marketing. The Mountain Region is still a very weak 'brand' outside the region. Very few know where the Mountain Region lies, and what characterises the region.'

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Here we see that the evaluators from Hedmark County were dissatisfied with the Mountain Region identity narrative's standing among the Mountain Region's residents (and outsiders). The evaluators mirror some of the concerns highlighted in Paasi's work. 'Many do not feel they belong to the Mountain Region' suggests that the evaluator failed to find a collective adoption of the regional narrative that one would have expected if the population shared a common regional consciousness of the Mountain Region. Further, that 'The Mountain Region is still a very weak "brand" outside the region' and 'Very few know where the Mountain Region lies and what characterises the region' bears witness of – at least as far as the evaluator was concerned – a weak 'identity of the region' among the general public.

The relative extensive use of the Mountain Region term in the *Arbeidets rett*, however, suggests that the term is at least known and accepted by their readers as a reference identifying the geography of the paper's reporting. This impression is also supported by journalists from other newspapers who report from the region. There is also some evidence that suggests that the collective representation of the 'Mountain Region' has begun to seep into the minds of residents of the area. For instance, some informants claimed that the 'Mountain Region' term has begun to find its way into everyday language, suggesting that the terminology is no longer solely a politico-administrative and media term. However, the informants claiming this were all stakeholders in the regionalisation of the 'Mountain Region'. It is difficult to know whether they were overstating the effect of their work in reaction to the negative outcome of the evaluation regarding the Council's communication of identity narratives. Nevertheless, another informant explained that that it would make sense to discuss issues such as summer dairy farming or mining activity with his friends using the term

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'Mountain Region' as a geographic reference. Other informants reserved the term 'Mountain Region' for 'official' work related use only.

Our data indicates that the 'Mountain Region', and its associated regional identity have a somewhat ambiguous status, and have not generally been accepted as part of everyday vocabulary and collective representations of the institutional practices in the area. The narrative is mainly used by the Mountain Region's political and bureaucratic elite and the local newspaper on a day to day basis. However, the interviews with informants from both the Council and the newspaper indicate that some of these actors tend to reserve the term for official use, not making the identity narrative a part of their private everyday lives. This finding also supports our claim that the Mountain Region identity narrative is weak among the general public. The organisation "Food from the Mountain Region", together with a few other private business ventures, seems to have adopted the narrative as part of their business strategy. Conversely, the general public seems to be reproducing the traditional collective socio-spatial representations and identity narratives. The newspaper, however, has succeeded in establishing the term 'Mountain Region' as a place-name among the public, although it is largely the newspaper and the political and bureaucratic elites that actively use it as such.

If this is put into the power diagram outlined above we find that "Food from the Mountain Region" and other business actors that have adopted the new regional narrative can be located on the right side of the diagram, ranking high on 'support' and relatively high on 'intervention', as does the local newspaper. In the case of locals, their positioning would clearly be placed towards 'neglect' (see Figure 4). But is this neglect an expression of the same counter-force that Lysgård (2001) found in his analysis of the regionalisation of the

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Mid-Nordic region? We suspect it is. Looking at the power diagram in Figure 4 we see a striking discrepancy between the placement of the political elites, which have democratic accountability towards the general public, and the general public that passes judgement on the political elites' actions. It seems that such new regional constructs regionalise at different speeds across society's social fabric. An interpretation of the general public's neglect of the regional construct is that it is precisely an expression of a counter-force.

Figure 4 to be placed about here.

Traditional regional consciousnesses as a check to the social and cultural embedding of the Mountain Region

It is apparent that if the general public is neglecting the new region, then people do not hold a collective representation of the new construction's institutionalised practices. Rather, other collective representations or other regions dominate over the Mountain Region's narratives in the hierarchy of regions.

One reason provided by Salamonsson (1996) for the weakness of the Mountain Region and its regional identity is that it represents a new element among the historical regional identities. Such consciousness takes shape very slowly over a long period of time. The historical regional identities have their own 'structures of expectations'. Embedded in the social reproduction of traditional regional identities are various forms of social sanctioning which hinder the development of new regional consciousnesses. One informant gave a very lively account of the hegemonic region's resilient 'structure of expectations' when she told how

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people from one hamlet in Tolga were afraid they would be ostracised if they were shopping in Tynset rather than in their local shops:

‘People from Vingelen [a hamlet located in Tolga] walk crooked between the shops’ shelves in Tynset in fear of meeting someone from their home hamlet’.

Similarly, another informant claimed that Alvdal firms would not buy services from a Tynset firm because in principle they prefer to support local firms. Such examples of what is popularly referred to as ‘local patriotism’ reveal strong and active ‘structures of expectations’, sanctioning and socialising people into activities that will reproduce the hegemonic region’s institutionalised practices and collective representations.

This also flows into political decision-making. One informant recognised that there is not much credit to be gained among the local electorate by improving living conditions in the Mountain Region in general, and even less to be gained from improving living conditions in the neighbouring municipality. Another informant, a mayor of one of the municipalities in the Mountain Region, reveals that the hegemonic region’s ‘structures of expectations’ have seeped into her political consciousness, as she stated:

‘A mayor of Røros municipality is never going to cheer on Tynset municipality. He is elected to cheer on Røros-men, not Tynset-men.’

This quote signifies a belief that Røros and Tynset are perceived as two distinct and competing territorial units rather than being part of the same territory, i.e. they are part of two separate regional narratives, or part of two separate collective representations of institutionalised practices. In such a socio-spatial setting, voters are less likely to re-elect

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politicians who argue for the well-being of the neighbouring municipality as this does not fit with the voters' idea of what their politicians should put their resources into, thus reproducing and strengthening traditional notions of distinct and competing territorial areas. If voters, however, do feel solidarity with inhabitants across the traditional territorial borders – perceiving that they are in the 'same boat' and thus themselves would benefit from the well-being of their neighbours – they may be more likely to re-elect politicians who think outside their own municipality (Frisvoll & Almås 2004). The sense of being in the 'same boat' indicates that people perceive that they are part of the same collective representation, i.e. part of the same region.

In democratic regional initiatives such as the Mountain Region, a strong regional identity reflecting the regional initiative is clearly imperative if the new construct is to be maintained and subsequently reproduced and strengthened. Without such attempts at solidifying the new region's narrative into the public psyche, politicians aiming to execute their grand regional visions may be punished by the voters at the next election. According to two municipal officers, the fear of being punished for their Mountain Region work was real, as they observed that the politicians' will to promote the Mountain Region seemed to follow the election cycles. According to these informants 'the local politicians work harder for their own municipalities and hamlets when the local elections approach. There can be lots of talking about the regional cooperation and the Mountain Region the first year after an election, but when there are two years to go to the next election, their talk about the regional cooperation becomes silent'.

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It seems clear that the Mountain Region's poor regional identity is partly due to the political elites' democratic accountability. The political elite, believing in the 'new regionalist' mantra as a splendid governmental tool for today's issues, perceive the need for creating a 'Mountain Region'. However, being democratically elected, they answer to the public for their political actions. In perceiving the general public's neglect of their attempt to regionalise, they do not possess the power needed to overcome the counter-forces inherent in the (silent) opposition toward the new collective representation of institutionalised practices suggested by the "regional engineers".

One core challenge, suggested by Frisvoll & Almås (2004), is that the municipality is a 'region' itself in the hierarchy of regions and regional narratives. Municipalities are hegemonic collective representations of institutionalised practices and strong narratives in themselves. It is these collective representations and narratives we believe are significant in restraining the regionalisation of the Mountain Region as they contribute to the reproduction of hegemonic 'structures of expectations' and identity narratives. The socialisation that takes place through the structuration of social relations constituted by the organisation of social services that the municipalities provide is pivotal. Frisvoll & Almås (2004) point especially to the municipalities' organisation of the secondary school districts as central for the socialisation of new collective regional consciousnesses. No such arenas have been created in the Mountain Region's process of regionalisation with the general public in mind. The new region's arenas for socialisation and reproducing of the narratives are fora where only the political and bureaucratic elites have access.

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The Norwegian State's position towards such regional initiatives must also bear responsibility for the lack of appropriate public arenas through which to consolidate regional identity. As noted earlier, the Local Government Act does not allow any autonomy without the blessing of the municipality councils, and key socialising institutions such as schools remain within the remit of the municipal councils. For the individual municipality politician or bureaucrat, the municipality as a 'region' is also important in checking the regionalisation of the Mountain Region. Traditional collective representations and narratives remain present in politicians' work, particularly as politicians are sensitive to the will of their constituents. The hegemonic region's 'structure of expectation' acts in cooperation with the political elite's democratic accountability, as a backlash or a safeguard securing the reproduction of the traditional hegemonic region's collective representations and institutionalised practices. Historical regional identities keep the development of the Mountain Region in check.

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion is that new regional democratic or semi-democratic organisations such as the 'Mountain Region' need identification among the local population to be successful and enduring. In 'new regionalist' regional development schemes, such 'soft factors' are easily overlooked with the potential to undermine the whole project.

In this paper we have demonstrated that too simplistic an understanding of the social processes and inherent power-aspects involved in the implementation of this new regionalist development scheme jeopardises the undertaking. Development actors and decision-makers in new regionalist schemes lack a focus on 'soft factors' such as 'regional identity'. The regional

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engineers constructing the Mountain Region failed to appreciate the pseudo-essentialistic nature of identity. The construction of arenas where the old narratives become irrelevant would give the new narratives arenas where they could not only be communicated effectively, but also become an aspect of the socialisation of place-based identity. This would have been a way of challenging the traditional hegemony in the hierarchy of regional identities. However, no guarantees can be made, as all identities, even regional identities, have a way of appearing somewhat essentialistic, something that can be used both as a strategic argument for hegemonic power or for counter-power (Lysgård 2001; Bondi 1993). New constructs tend to appear as unnatural and artificial, while the old ones, due to their essentialistic appearance, appear as natural, authentic and appropriate.

What seems clear from our analysis is that if hegemony of regional identities is not challenged by an identity narrative corresponding to the new regional scheme, the scheme will be treated as irrelevant by its population. Hence, there would be little to gain for elected municipal politicians in championing the new region's institutions. The consequence may then be that the new region and its institutions will simply dwindle into insignificance.

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Figures

Figure 1

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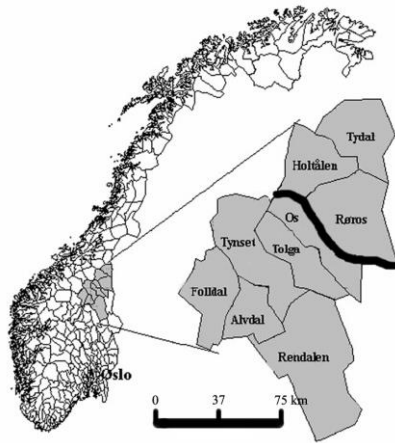
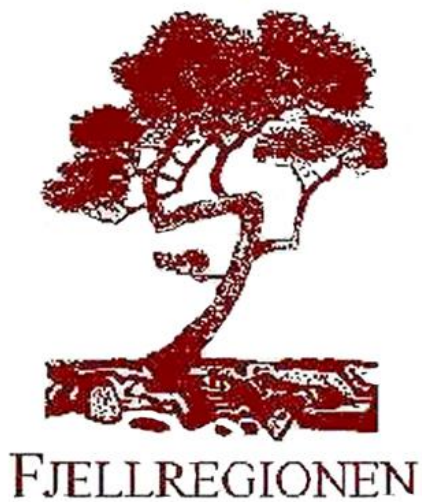


Figure2



Frisvoll, S., & Rye, J. F. (2009). Elite discourses of regional identity in a new regionalism development scheme: The case of the 'Mountain Region' in Norway. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift-Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 63(3), 175-190.
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Figure 3

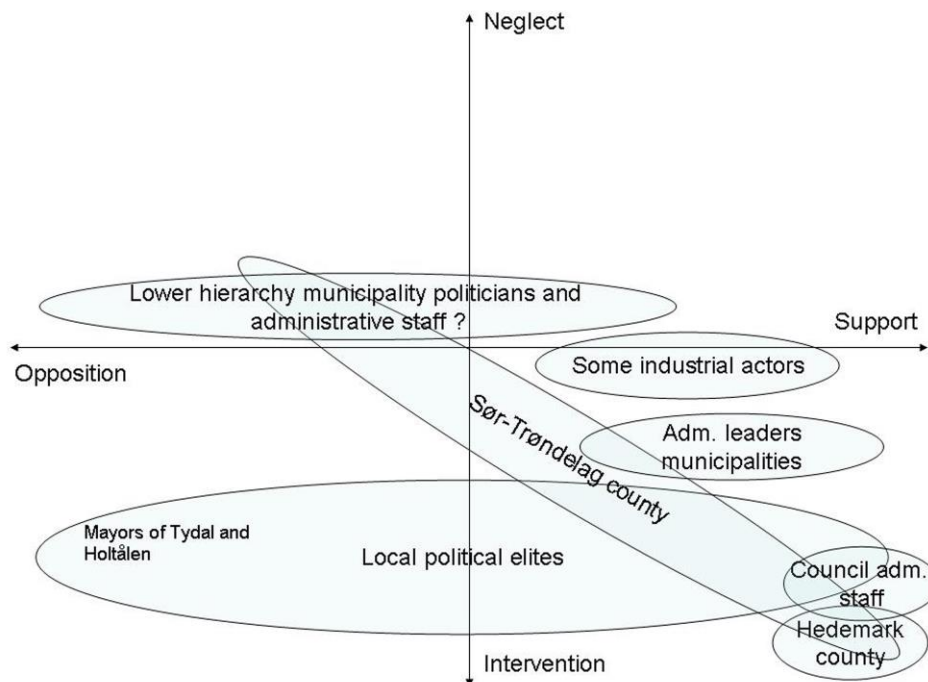


Figure 4

