Is culture-led redevelopment relevant for rural planners? The risk of adopting urban theories in rural settings

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In the paper, the author argues that cultural strategies and theories about urban planning may be irrelevant or even counterproductive outside urban and suburban contexts. In many rural settings the problem is not the destruction of the cultural heritage or how to counterbalance the influence from corporate interests, but rather the absence of such interests in the first place. From a study of two rural municipalities in southern Norway, the author demonstrates that culture-led strategies may be more of a distraction than an instrument for creating economic growth. Measured by the common goals for rural development in Norway, the cultural strategy has only been a success in one of the cases, whereas in the other case ideas about culture-led redevelopment have not prevented economic and demographic decline. The author concludes that while culture can be instrumental in creating growth in rural municipalities, it might also hamper their development.

Keywords: cultural planning; rural planning; rural redevelopment; local economy; cultural heritage; Norwegian

Introduction

Critics claim that planning has become a narrow practice that is unable to capture either the forces that energize the making of society or the complexity of deliberative processes. Urban planners are therefore urged to develop more context-sensitive practices that reflect ‘multiple stakeholder’s interests, needs and wants’ (Pløger 2014, p. 107). In this paper I suggest that there is a need for a planning theory that is better aligned with the challenges faced by rural municipalities. For example, whereas urban planners are expected to counterbalance the influence from corporate interests, the challenge in rural settings might be that such forces are absent. Sensitivity in rural planning could stimulate engagement and enable a more strategic and proactive role for planners, but there is also a need to reflect on the risk that such efforts entail in settings where job creation is a question of local economic survival.

The question of sensitivity in planning is a point of departure in contemporary planning theory. Inspired by such theories, rural municipalities are invited to engage in resource-demanding, participatory consensus-seeking processes, through for
example an increased focus on participation in municipal planning (Fiskaa 2005). This trend is also evident in the cultural planning discourse, in which planners are urged to be more sensitive to culture and conflict in order to make better places (Healey 2010). In Norway, inspired by urban-based theories, even small rural municipalities have taken an interest in culture as a tool for development in local development plans, even when knowledge about the potential and relevance within such places is limited. Based on a study of two municipalities in the valley of Setesdal in the county of Aust-Agder, southern Norway (Figure 1), I present different ways of considering culture as an instrument in the development of place.

As a background for the comparison between the two case municipalities, I first describe why cultural planning has gained influence as a strategy for dealing with rural challenges, both as a trend within planning theory and as a result of the cultural turn in rural studies. Thereafter, I prepare the ground for the main argument – that culture-led redevelopment as a strategy is mainly relevant in urban settings – by pointing out two important differences in the challenges faced by planners in urban and rural contexts. This is followed by an analysis of three differences in the

Figure 1. Setesdal, located in Aust-Agder County, Norway.
cultural strategies in the two municipalities regarding (1) how culture is defined in the municipalities, (2) the way planners intervene in the construction of culture, and (3) the way cultural conflicts are dealt with. From this analysis, five dimensions emerge, along which the two municipalities perform very differently, both demonstrating that cultural policies are not necessarily a positive contribution to rural planning, and leading to suggestions for a successful way of dealing with the cultural conundrum in rural planning.

**Why cultural planning?**

The turn towards culture in rural planning is partly related to the ‘cultural turn’ in rural studies (Cloke 1997, Bell and Jayne 2010), which encourages more attention to ‘the role of discourse and culture in the construction of rural identities’ (Selfa et al. 2015, p. 64). However, cultural planning has also emerged as a possible answer to the challenges faced by planners and planning theorists in general. Hence, planning not only refers to what formally appointed planning professionals do, but also to what related professionals, such as real estate developers, architects, and city council members plan. It follows that planning theory involves ‘a broad inquiry concerning the roles of the state, the market, and civil society in social and spatial transformation’ (Fainstein and Campbell 2012, p. 2). It is therefore not restricted to the Lefebvrian formal representation of space, as opposed to spaces of representation and spatial practices, which is why it is not the ‘enemy’ – the state’s strategic instrument for the manipulation of reality – but rather concerns the production of space in general (Lefebvre [1974] 1991). It is about ‘developing the good city and region within the constraints of a capitalist political economy and varying political systems’ (Fainstein and Campbell 2012, p. 1).

Spatial planning in Western societies has been criticized for being reactive rather than proactive: ‘Planners are responding, in Britain at least, to new socio-spatial realities. But they are not yet helping to shape ways of thinking about them’ (Graham and Healey 1999, p. 641). Planners are more often than not located at the periphery of the ‘force field’ of local development instead of being the force that draws other networks towards it (Healey et al. 1999). This general critique of the instrumental engineering model in Western planning is also very much articulated in Norway (Falleth and Saglie 2012, Nordahl 2012, Tennøy 2012, Hanssen and Falleth 2014).

Of the many attempts to replace the instrumental engineering model with a non-Euclidian mode of planning (Friedmann 1993), the Habermasian communicative turn insists that planning is a process of ‘making sense together’ (Eriksen 1999, Forester 1999, Harvold 2002, Innes and Booher 2010, Sager 2013). In communicative planning, conflicting ideas about place development should be integrated through consensus-seeking processes. In contemporary planning theory the aim is to counter the process by which the ‘system world’ of the state administrative apparatus (steered by power) and the economy (steered by money) privilege their own imperatives over those of the ‘lifeworld’ (Nørager 1985, Habermas 1987, Eriksen 1999). In this regard, the ‘lifeworld’ (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Schutz 1967) is the horizon of meaning in which the actors already move. This is what Habermas called our ‘natural view of the world’ (Nørager 1985, p. 142), whereby implicit knowledge and patterns for interpretation are delivered through culture.
Within this broad conception of culture, cultural planning can be seen as an elaboration or a subdiscipline of communicative planning theory. The interest in cultural planning and the desire to ‘bring social relations, culture and civil society back into focus’ (Healey et al. 1999, p. 121) is an attempt to reveal new forms of communicative interaction: ‘Culture, and specifically the role of culture in spatial planning and place development, has been a hot topic within planning research and practice during the past decade or so’ (Metzger 2011, p. 214).

By 1993, cultural planning was described as ‘emerging’ (Jones 1993) in that ‘[t]he 1990s planning scene has been notable for the emergence and increasing popularity of cultural planning’ and ‘recognizing and enhancing the cultural aspects of daily city life and its places’ (Dowling 1997, p. 23). It has been claimed that currently we are in the midst of a long-term ‘hype’ in which culture is regarded as a key driver of urban development (Kovacs 2011, McDonough and Wekerle 2011, Redaelli 2013, Sacco and Crociata 2013), and in which cultural planning ‘provides a new or different lens for looking at the community, its issues and concerns’ (2010 Legacies Now 2010, p. 2).

Consequently, cultural planning is not limited to the planning of culture (i.e. it is not only concerned with performing and visual arts), but instead entails a cultural approach to planning (Bianchini and Greed 1999, Evans 2001, Abram 2011). In other words, culture is a potential resource for planners who aim to implement more inclusive and better-aligned governance processes. In the debate on the relationship between cultural planning and planning in general it has been noted that planners could learn from cultural planning because that might ‘open up new ways for planners to think’ (Abram 2011, p. xii). In addition, culture ‘is useful for the purposes of developing a critique of urban planning’ (Bianchini and Greed 1999, p. 197). More concretely, Abram and Murdoch (2001, cited in Abram 2011, p. xi) observed in planning processes that ‘arguments about land-use planning became locked into a certain governmental logic’, and they therefore call for an examination of all of the issues that are excluded when the opposed rationalities of planning clash. The challenge is how to incorporate culture into planning practices in which ‘[c]ulture is a kind of black-box explanation for everything we cannot properly understand, everything that is not thought to be rational’ (Abram 2011, p. xi).

Spokespersons for cultural planning have claimed that culture and cultural planning should be given greater attention in development processes, during which we should be more aware of ‘how culture might be integrated in planning by critically rethinking the role of planners and knowledge’ (Hammami 2012a). The potential inherent in considering culture and cultural diversity in planning processes is undisputable and has been addressed in numerous studies, and methods for practising cultural planning abound in the form of handbooks and toolkits (Young and Stevenson 2013). Advocates of cultural planning seem to envision few limits as to what can be achieved in the form of environmental, economic, and social benefits, and most cultural plans are overly optimistic. This is the case in the municipalities examined in this paper, which respectively aim to facilitate ‘the good life in Valle’ (Valle kommune 2011 [my translation]) and to create in Bykle an ‘inclusive society marked by tolerance, adaptability and cooperation’ (Bykle kommune 2013 [my translation]).

However, it is not easy to find documentation of the outcomes of culture-led strategies. There are published analyses of how authorities undertake cultural planning, but often these are limited to the development and implementation of cultural
plans (Jones 1993, Dreeszen 1994, Mills 2003, Kovacs 2010). The effects of such strategies on more general issues are limited to diffusing claims about ‘increased community awareness’ or discussing how these issues ‘could impact secondary concerns’ (Kovacs 2010, 222), partly explained by the fact that ‘positive effects, as a rule, [are] difficult to observe directly’ (Sacco and Crociata 2013, p. 1692). Nevertheless, in Norway, a number of small, medium-large, and large cities, and even county councils have given priority to culture and creativity in their development agendas (Lysgård 2013).

The difference between urban and rural planners

The adoption of cultural planning is part of a more general pattern of policy transfer (Healey 2012, Sanyal et al. 2012), in which also planning practice in Norway follows the shifts in planning theory in Western societies (Harvold and Nordahl 2012). However, planning theory and theories of cultural planning are primarily developed in urban settings, and it is claimed that ‘the international planning research, both in Europe and the US, to a large degree overflows into urban research’ (Kleven et al. 2011, p. 79 [my translation]). As Frank and Reiss (2014, p. 393) indicate, these theories have much less to say about how planning can ‘assist rural areas with issues specific to declining or chronologically poor economies and populations’. There is therefore a need for planning research that addresses the particular challenges faced by rural municipalities, as argued by Frank and Reiss (2014, p. 389): ‘Rural planning scholars have consistently argued that the unique aspects of rural places and peoples necessitate modified or possible radically different, planning practices than those employed in urban and suburban areas.’ In my opinion two rural characteristics stand out in this argument: (1) public planners are more important players in the making of place in rural settings, but also (2) they have a narrower scope of action in relation to investors and entrepreneurs than do their urban colleagues.

With regard to the first rural characteristic, it is important to keep in mind urban–rural differences when it comes to the relative influence of the municipality compared to other local institutions and stakeholders. This is not only because ‘in Norway, local government is highly autonomous’ (Hanssen and Falleth 2014, p. 404), but also because rural areas are normally associated with ‘organizational thinness’ (Jakobsen and Lorentzen 2015): the lack of institutions conducting research and providing education, few specialized suppliers of commercial services, and undeveloped financial infrastructures. The dominant role that the municipality plays in the overall development of rural areas (Normann and Vasström 2012) presents a challenge when putting theory into practice: it is not only challenging to transform general theories into local contexts, but the consequences may even be dire.

With regard to the second rural characteristic, in urban agglomerations the main challenge is more about how to manage growth than about how to help create it; it is about ‘balancing and integrating diverse values’ (Healey 2010, p. 16). However, in rural areas investors and entrepreneurs might not represent the interests that planners should attempt to balance against the values of civil society and place qualities. Instead, they might be the absent or desired crucial drivers of the local economy upon which the survival of the place depends. When the question in urban settings is how to prioritize between different economic enterprises, rural
planners often need to be more pragmatic and willing to compromise on place qualities and distributive justice, for the purpose of stimulating any local economic activity.

The benefits and risks that occur in the transfer from international urban-based planning theories to rural settings in Norway are discussed in the following. Different ways of dealing with culture in planning are used as examples.

**Similar contexts – different development paths**

In the southernmost part of Norway, several valleys run parallel to each other from the mountains in the north to the coast in the south. One of these valleys is Setesdal, which has an open landscape and is separated from its neighbouring valleys in the east and west by large mountainous plateaus. Traditionally, the inhabitants of Setesdal have worked with livestock farming and forestry and lived in small villages on either side of the Otra, which flows from Bykle in the north, down through the valley, and towards Kristiansand on the south coast. Both Bykle Municipality and Valle Municipality are located in the mountainous part of Setesdal, where they serve as tourism areas and resorts (especially for winter tourism and second homes), and host small and medium-sized economic activities, including farming, forestry and timber-based industry. Both municipalities benefit significantly from tax income from hydroelectric power plants that were built in the 1960s and onwards. The two municipalities are located beyond commuting distances from larger towns, and hence they are very much dependent on the local economy.

The empirical evidence from the study on which this paper is based was primarily derived from four focus group interviews. The first interview in each municipality (i.e. held in October 2012 in Valle and January 2013 in Bykle) addressed in general terms the cultural strategies in which the key stakeholders were the mayor, chief municipal executive, and public and private cultural employees. Signature projects were identified from an analysis of these interviews and public and media documents, leading to two further interviews, which were respectively held with representatives of an upper secondary education programme for silversmiths in Valle and the general manager of ‘Destinasjon Hovden [Destination Hovden]’, an umbrella organization for tourism in Bykle. Transcripts of the interviews along with information from planning and media documents and from local historical sources formed a social text, which is analysed in this paper in the light of theories of cultural planning, with the aim of revealing the cultural strategies in the two municipalities.

Despite the contextual similarities between the two municipalities, Bykle has experienced a remarkably stronger demographic and economic growth than Valle. Population growth in Bykle started around 1970, made possible through a strong local economy, and not commuting, like in many communities on the urban fringe. The municipal economy is dominated by income derived from hydropower plants and from services linked to second-home ownership and cross-country and alpine skiing. The skiing season, which lasts 7–8 months from October to May, is markedly longer in the upper part of Bykle Municipality, than in the lowlands towards the coast of Norway, hence the municipality’s attraction as a location for different types of skiing and for second homes. Bykle has the greatest number of second homes per capita in Norway (2.5), most of which are located in Hovden, the northern centre, where one can also find a mountain lift, an ‘aquapark’, hotels, shops,
cafés, and other facilities that have emerged from the developing tourism industry. The company that coordinates tourism in Bykle has 60 members, including hotels, restaurants, landowners, and tourism businesses. Bykle has become the main attraction for foreign tourists to the southern part of Norway, with 50,000–60,000 overnight stays per year (interview 4 April 2014), mainly by foreigners from Denmark and Germany. The destination company is also a contractual partner of the dominant cruise line between southern Norway and Denmark. An upper secondary school education programme in alpine and cross-country skiing, established in 1990, has further strengthened the image of Bykle as a ski resort.

By contrast, tourism is not particularly important in Valle, which is the core area for the traditional dialect and clothing of Setesdal, and where locals pride themselves on the strong tradition of local silversmithing. Many one-person businesses have emerged from the making of traditional filigree silver brooches and buttons, and have gradually began to market these pieces for local customers by signposting houses as the home of a silversmith (sylvsmed). Valle’s population is mainly located in the arable areas in the bottom of the valley, where employment is dominated by agriculture, forestry, craftworking, and the furniture and timber industries.

In the 1960s the population in Bykle was only 35% of that in Valle, but it has since increased to 75%, mainly due to in-migration into Bykle and out-migration from Valle (Statistics Norway). While the number of inhabitants in rural municipalities in the southern part of Norway as a whole has either stabilized or has been growing, as in Bykle, the post-war ‘escape from the countryside’ has continued in Valle, which has seen a population decrease of 13% since 1995 (Statistics Norway). Further, whereas the economy in Bykle Municipality is among the healthiest in Norway, Valle’s economy is struggling.

The manner in which Valle Municipality authorities have addressed culture in their planning strategies does not seem to have been capable of reversing this negative trend, and this is demonstrated in the following comparison of the two municipalities with regard to how culture is understood, how planners intervene in culture, and how cultural differences are dealt with. In addition to revealing distinctive aspects of the cultural strategies in the two cases, the latter three topics together highlight the difference in the way that planners in Valle and Bykle have dealt with culture.

**Defining culture**

There is clearly a difference between the two case municipalities in the way that planners understand culture, since in Bykle culture more or less equates with nature, whereas in Valle it is more limited to cultural heritage. Dowling (1997, p. 25) introduced ‘three specific strategies of contemporary cultural planning’, one of which concerns cultural industries and the attempt to maximize the economic benefits of culture. This strategy dominates in Bykle, where, more than in Valle, culture has ‘been put on the agenda by economic forces’ (Dowling 1997, p. 26), thereby privileging the economic nexus between culture and place. The income from hydroelectric power plants and public investments have been filtered into facilitating winter tourism, whereas traditional culture has been neglected in place branding, except for some smaller projects promoting traditional culture for tourists.
Cultural planning in Bykle represents a focused strategy with the acceptance of a large degree of autonomy for a small group of politicians, planners, landowners, and the hotel manager, who are quite synchronized. The mayor and the chief municipal executive, both of whom have held office for 25–26 years are both landowners in the expanding second-home areas and the hotel owner is an active politician and co-founder of the publicly supported destination company. This has paved the way for a powerful force in the production of space (Halfacree 2006, p. 200; Frisvoll 2012, 2013).

For the strategy in Bykle to be classified as cultural planning, there is a need to apply a wide definition in which ‘culture is what counts as culture for those who participate in it’ (Mercer 1996, p. 61). In the first interview held with a focus group in Bykle, one interviewee stated from the very beginning: ‘In order to succeed we have to take as our departure what nature has endowed us with’ (interview, 24 January 2013). Another interviewee in the same group, who owned a hotel for winter tourists, claimed that ‘culture means nice experiences in nature’, an idea that also mirrors the materiality of Bykle as a place. Both the awareness of the advantage of Bykle as a ski resort and the understanding that consumer demand is a key component of change has caused key stakeholders to turn their attention beyond the municipality’s boundaries. Such a ‘destination strategy’ is adapted to the ‘pleasure-seeking consumer’ (Mitchell 2013, p. 375), and markets nature that is ‘in marked contrast to the setting from which urban residents originate’ (Mitchell 1998, p. 276). In this respect, planners in Bykle are aligned with the literature that criticizes the view that culture ‘has remained marginalised because it has been viewed as something to add to the list of topics that an integrated planning process must address, rather than something which could inform the whole planning process itself’ (Mills 2003, p. 7).

It is in line with the strategy in Bykle when Landry advises that

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\text{culture should shape the technicalities of urban planning and development rather than}
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being seen as a marginal add-on to be considered once the important planning questions like housing, transport and land-use have been dealt with. So a culturally informed perspective should condition how planning as well as economic development or social affairs should be addressed. (Landry 2005, cited in McDonough and Wekerle 2011, p. 28)

Valle’s cultural strategy is much more sectored and limited to cultural heritage than in Bykle. In the overall conviction in the resources inherent in the cultural heritage in Valle, there are traces of the dominating ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in cultural planning theory. This concerns, for example, a proposed Setesdal sylvcenter (Setesdal center for silver crafts [my translation]), a local cluster between businesses and the specialization in silversmithing offered in upper secondary school education. The initiative to establish this centre aimed at both ‘the commoditization of local/regional culture … [that] refers to the creation and valorization of resources that have place identity and that can be marketed directly or used in the marketing of the territory’ and ‘raising the self-confidence of local people and organizations, building confidence in their own capacities to bring about local development, and valorizing local resources’ (Kneafsey 2001, p. 764). By contrast, Bykle Municipality has deliberately abandoned much of this thinking, as exemplified by the hotel manager: ‘I did use traditional clothing [bunad] in exhibitions in the beginning, precisely in order to exploit local culture in tourism, but the guests did not respond to that. They wanted experiences in nature’ (interview, 24 January 2013).
In adhering to Dowling’s categories of cultural planning, Valle resembles a ‘places not spaces’ approach (Dowling 1997, p. 26), in which planners attempt to create sites that have a distinctive, locally grounded identity. This is also evident from the framing of the profile of the upper secondary school in Valle, which has gradually changed from offering more general and non-place-specific courses towards offering courses in traditional music (since 1994) and gold and silversmithing (since 1996).

After specialized education in health and social issues was discontinued, the interviewed former headmaster of the Valle upper secondary school, together with county-level politicians and a representative of the office for secondary education asked ‘What can we have instead?’ (interview, 13 March 2014), and it became ‘natural’ to see a link to the area’s existing gold and silversmithing businesses. It was stated that this education would be tailor-made for Setesdal, and this argument was well received at county level, where a representative stated: ‘This is really something else than a school that only wants to have more student places allocated!’ (interview, 13 March 2014). In other words, the specialization involves both having an overall strategy to make the most of cultural history and paying attention to place qualities, as the former headmaster said: ‘It marks the municipality as even more of a folk music and silversmith municipality’ (interview, 13 March 2014). The education in gold and silversmithing reflects a more general bias towards cultural heritage in Valle.

The definition of culture as cultural heritage has caused cultural planning in Valle to be much more sectored than in Bykle, where culture is not an add-on but where a general understanding of its content and how to exploit it guides the municipality’s overall strategy.

**Intervening in the construction of culture**

In building institutional capacity, Healey (1998) reminds us that planners should reflect upon how they intervene in the construction of place. They must understand and gain knowledge of existing networks and power relationships, and locate the ‘force field’ in which participants seek to act. From this process, planners should then be able to assume a central position. In Bykle Municipality, planners have managed, if not deliberately following Healey’s advice, to intervene successfully in existing networks and have become a ‘force drawing other networks towards it’ (Healey et al. 1999, p. 130). In this manner, they have constructed a local dependence on new networks (the destination strategy), although people’s dependence on other networks was stronger at the outset. Mobilization for the ‘destination strategy’ succeeds because core stakeholders act as ‘change agents’: ‘a critical ingredient in effective mobilization is the “change agent”, leader or “broker” who can both “carry” the collective force for change and position it in significant arenas in order to widen the “cracks” of opportunity’ (Vigar and Healey 2010 [2002]). This in turn connects to how planners approach the process in which culture is constructed. In Bykle, culture is not considered primarily as something that pre-exists planning, but is more than that produced in the planning process itself. Thus, culture is not primarily mapped but constructed, and it does not only exist but is also ‘talked’ into existence.

The above point is made clearer when considering how authorities intervene in local networks in Valle. There is an ambition among planners in Valle to strengthen
and mobilize the community through various initiatives to reinforce aspects of traditional culture. What is missing is the critical ingredient of a being a change agent that can bring these elements together. One example is the failure to exploit the local gold and silversmithing education in order to expand the economic activity around the many silversmiths in Valle. With two exceptions, the silversmiths have been uncooperative and difficult to mobilize with respect to providing apprenticeships for students or contributing to the proposed centre for silver crafts in Setesdal. There have also been very few students recruited locally, and one interviewee commented: ‘the school is probably not [integrated], a bit too little integrated into the local environment, I would say’ (interview, 13 March 2014). There have been no employment spinoffs, except for the teachers at the school. The school is more or less like a cultural island, detached from Valle’s social and economic life.

One reason for this problem is that culture is regarded as separate from planning in the sense that it is considered more as a resource or instrument for planners or as something that pre-exists planning. Successful mobilization requires inhabitants to identify with the regeneration project, but in Valle, instead of placing the role of silversmithing within the frame of the ‘daily life experiences of ordinary citizens’ (Healey 2007, p. 280), cultural planning is about taking the importance of silversmiths for granted and strengthening their traditional culture.

Thus, in much of what has been said and written in Valle, the traditional anthropological notion of culture has emerged in what Abram (2011, p. 8) refers to as ‘a kind of school of living particular to certain social groups’, in which planners adopt the central assumption in Western thinking of an intrinsic link between geographical location and cultural identity. The conception of culture that emerges here is neither Habermas’s continually evolving ‘lifeworld’ as ‘the horizon of meaning wherein the communicatively acting people already manoeuvre’ (Nørager 1985, p. 142 [my translation]), nor is it the relational and social constructivist approach. Culture is more than not an object or a historically given ‘thing’ that is contrasted with modernization.

Part of the process in Valle has been to reveal the identity of the place through ‘cultural mapping’ (Dowling 1997, Evans and Foord 2008) which ‘is about finding the genuine locale, the DNA of the place’ (Lundberg and Hjorth 2011, p. 9 [my translation]). There is an attempt to privilege place over space and to ‘strengthen the identity and solidarity in the local communities where people have their roots’ (Lund 2008, p. 4 [my translation]). The goal is to stimulate attachment to the local environment by emphasizing cultural heritage.

Silversmiths are regarded as a type of ‘stock’ that can be made the most of, in this case for the purpose of strengthening or even rescuing the upper secondary school in Valle. Current everyday culture is not addressed (i.e. not culture in itself), but rather expressions of culture as only part of the ‘surface qualities of place’ (Stephenson 2010, p. 13). Tim Ingold states that academics ‘first observe, and then go on to describe, a world that has already been made – that has already settled into final forms of which we can give a full and objective account’ (Ingold 2011, p. 2). He further comments that the problem, as in the case of Valle, is that they do not ‘join with things in the very processes of their formation and dissolution’ (Ingold 2011, p. 2).

It appears that, partly due to how planners intervene in networks and power relationships (Healey et al. 1999), the locals, including youths, musicians, and most of the silversmiths, are not drawn into the attempt in Valle at ‘building something
superior that can play an important role’ (interview, 13 March 2014). In the case of Valle, treating traditional culture as a resource seems to have hampered development, whereas in the case of Bykle neglecting cultural artefacts seems to have yielded positive results.

**Dealing with difference**

Cultural planning literature emphasizes the importance of respecting cultural variety in cases where successful planning is dependent upon representing ‘diverse communities within the larger community, as defined by ethnicity, sexual orientation and socio-economic status’ (2010 Legacies Now 2010, p. 4). The way that diversity and agonisms are dealt with is clearly different in the two case municipalities: the strategy in Bykle somewhat unromantically breaks with traditional culture, whereas in Valle this culture is still represented.

People in Bykle mainly live in two centres, one in the ski resort of Hovden in the north, and one in the south, where clear cultural differences exist. The agonism between these two places has emerged as Hovden and the southern part have gradually oriented themselves in different geographical directions. Historically, in cultural and economic terms the whole municipality was connected to people in the region of what is now known as the county of Telemark, to the north and east of Setesdal. As the main road from the largest city in the south, Kristiansand, was extended, this orientation gradually shifted, albeit to a less extent in Hovden. Whereas people in Hovden continued to nurture economic and social exchanges with Telemark, farmers further down the valley were influenced by the Setesdal culture.

Today, Hovden is therefore different with respect to its folk music (kveding in the Telemark dialect), traditional clothing (Telemarksbunad instead of Setesdalsbunad) and its Telemark-inspired building tradition. The dialect in Hovden still more closely resembles the Telemark dialect than the Setesdal dialect in the southern centre. This partly explains why the Setesdal culture is less emphasized in Bykle than in Valle. When asked about the conflict between Hovden and the rest of the Municipality, one of the interviewees asked rhetorically, ‘you talk about using culture … but what is the culture that we are supposed to exploit?’ (interview, 24 January 2013). Another interviewee stated that ‘there is a limit to how many times 300 people are amused by a concert for traditional singing [stevkonsert]’ (interview, 4 April 2014), and seemed to be implying both that listening to music is what one does with culture, and that culture can be reduced to an amenity.

In the interviews with stakeholders in Bykle, the conflicts over the ‘destination strategy’ were downplayed: ‘I would say that the conflict between Hovden and [the southern centre] is over now’ (interview, 24 January 2013). When reflecting on the fate of the administrative centre in the south, the general manager of the destination company claimed that ‘one of the things that should have been done is to move … [the southern centre] to Hovden’ (interview, 4 April 2014).

The growth in Hovden has in part come at the expense of the southern centre. In 1970, one-quarter of the municipality’s inhabitants lived in Hovden, and by the year 2000 that proportion had increased to approximately half (Statistics Norway). Currently, Hovden has almost double the number of inhabitants in the administrative centre in the south. During the field visit on 24 January 2013, there were discussions among our interviewees about the closure of a section in the kindergarten in the south and opening of a new section in Hovden. During a seminar in June
2010, the locals had claimed that the Bykle Municipality had become stuck in a tourism path (Vasström 2010). Several of the seminar participants also indicated that the southern centre, not just Hovden, should be developed, and some even claimed that the municipality authorities paid greater attention to second-home visitors than to the locals, including the youths.

Whereas such conflicts have been largely suppressed in the overall strategies in Bykle Municipality, they have been articulated in Valle. The background for the territorial conflict in Valle is that in 1963 two municipalities, each with their own church and school and recognized as independent local authorities, were merged into Valle Municipality. The administrative centre was placed in the slightly more populous northern part. People in the southern part were resistant towards the merger because the bulk of the income from hydroelectric power plants would come from the southern part, whereas investments in the public sector, they feared, would increasingly be channelled towards the north (Jansen and Rydningen 1994). It was also claimed that cooperation would be difficult because the ‘temperament [folke-lynne] was different in these two places [herad]’ (Jansen and Rydningen 1994, p. 616 [my translation]). The conflict continues to underlie planning issues and is particularly evident in questions about localization of public services, not least in a 15-year struggle about where to locate a state-funded cultural centre, which instead resulted in the building of a locally-financed sports centre.

Another conflict in Valle has been between traditional and local versus modern and consumption-based cultures. One of the stakeholders stated: ‘The problem with our cultural heritage is that it is regarded [locally] as pure and holy. It should be preserved. Others should not be able to share it. It should not be popularized as a business’ (interview, 9 October 2012). Hence, although Valle has a strong cultural heritage in the form of traditional music and clothing, dialect, and silversmiths, some key stakeholders in the cultural strategy have articulated their despondency over the lack of ambition to strengthen and exploit this heritage. The interviewees complained that young people were not interested in traditional music, and ‘the youths are not proud of the local farming culture’ (interview, 9 October 2012).

The people who represent the culture of Valle and for whom this culture is a source of identification were regarded by some of the interviewees as self-absorbed, unwilling to cooperate, passive, and reluctant to change: ‘We are not performing well with regard to being proud of our culture. We are probably a bit unassuming and not very talented in making money’ (interview, 9 October 2012). The former headmaster, who had attempted to create a silversmith cluster around silversmiths and the secondary school, said: ‘So then I think ‘Jesus! What am I doing?’ If they are not interested in cooperating, not interested in building something superior that can play a part, then it [the silver crafts centre] is completely doomed’ (interview, 13 March 2014).

In the cultural strategy in Valle, much more than in Bykle, agonisms and diversity were articulated and maintained, and they influenced decisions or they influenced the lack of decisions in an unproductive way.

The drawback of urban-based ideas
Measured by the common goals for rural development in Norway (i.e. a healthy municipal economy, job creation, and population increase), the strategy in Bykle is a success utilizing nature as a tourism strategy, whereas the case in Valle, exploiting the cultural heritage, is not. However, the reasons for the positive results
in Bykle have not been sensitivity to traditional culture and cultural diversity but the ability of planners in Bykle to act as a change agent in coping with rural challenges. Valle Municipality has rather emphasized cultural heritage and allowed conflict to influence its planning processes, which seems to partly explain the lack of the necessary economic change. These observations lead to the question of the relevance, for rural municipalities, of much of the literature on planning in general and on culture-led redevelopment in particular.

From the cultural planning discourse, it is understood that under certain conditions culture is a key driver of urban development processes. In the literature dealing with cultural policies there is an argument that culture contains an inherent value and that cultural heritage is a resource for development actors. However, in the case of Valle Municipality the study revealed that culture was more of a distraction from overall strategic action. The strong emphasis on culture as a historically given ‘thing’, at the expense of strategies that adapt more to what tourists demand (as in Bykle), seems to be an important cause of the problems that Valle currently faces. The energy that has gone into cultivation of traditions would probably have been better employed in a strategy with a more open approach to business development based on the competitive advantages of Valle Municipality.

Rural planning cannot afford to put too much emphasis on cultivating cultural artefacts if there is not enough non-local demand for them. Furthermore, in their role as strategic actors, planners must be careful to encourage agonisms too much, even if they serve to protect traditional enterprises, the sense of community among local inhabitants, or the rural idyll (Mitchell 1998). Mitchell (1998) would warn against the strategy in Bykle because it might result in the destruction of the amenity environment upon which the community was originally created, but as I have argued in this paper, commodification should not only be seen as a threat. In many instances, it has enhanced rather than displaced conventional enterprises (Mitchell 2013). Furthermore, as I have shown, cultivating resistance against commodification, as is the case in Valle, might lead to a destructive stalemate.

In Valle there is a conflict between sports and culture, the northern and the southern centre, and local and traditional versus modern, consumer-based culture. According to some of the interviewees, these conflicts are combined with a lack of will to cooperate. Within this context, ideas about culture-led redevelopment seem to have strengthened conflicts and contributed to the stalemate rather than created ‘development opportunities for the whole of local communities’ (Redaelli 2013, p. 32). The question is whether Valle would have been better off if it had not focused on culture or whether the problem is rather that planners fail to do cultural planning as it should be done. Either way, the literature on cultural planning should be more about investigating the possible drawbacks of implementing their ideas.

**Cultural planning the rural way**

The adoption of planning theory in rural settings does not merely have negative consequences. Building institutional capacity (Healey 1998) is as important in rural contexts as in urban contexts, and much of the success in Bykle could be explained by the ability to perform according to ideals in planning theory, such as being a change agent, defining culture as what counts as culture for those who participate in it, not treating culture as something that pre-exists planning, and, not least, by letting culture inform the whole planning process.
However, in rural planning there is a need to be alert especially to exactly how and also whether general ideas should be transformed into local strategies. In some important respects, it could be claimed that Bykle does not really practice cultural planning: The commodification strategy was initiated in 1968, long before the discourse on culture in planning was introduced, and what I have analysed is not really the cultural plan in Bykle but more of an overall strategy for industrial and commercial development. The Bykle case is therefore difficult to fit into the frames of cultural planning. The conceptualization of culture as nature is one thing. Another is the manner in which the importance of cultural heritage and traditions is diminished, contrary to much of the cultural planning literature where these are the resources for societal improvement.

In accordance with theories of collaborative planning, much of the strategy in Bykle is inadvisable, as it supports investors and private development initiatives at the expense of paying attention to the ‘daily life experiences of ordinary citizens’ (Healey 2007, p. 280). Moreover, planners in Bykle should be reminded that culture can be a resource for actors in their endeavours to enact their places (Donaldson 2006, Hammami 2012b), and that they have ‘unwittingly allow[ed] the conceptions of articulate and powerful groups, which have clear ideas … to dominate’ (Graham and Healey 1999, p. 641). Instead of empowering, planning can turn into a tool for the control and disempowerment of social life (Flyvbjerg 1996). Framed in this way, planning in Bykle is undemocratic.

The answer to this critique is that one do not benefit from biting the hand that feeds you. Bykle has a capacity to compromise between traditions and economic interests and to address typical rural challenges. It should also be borne in mind that in the 1970s, Bykle faced classic rural challenges, which are possibly slightly exaggerated in the following diagnosis:

In aggregate terms, rural areas are found to be lagging behind national average economic growth rates. Weaker economic performance is driven by persistent out-migration of younger and better-educated people, lower educational attainment, lower average labour productivity, and lower levels of public service provision, often working as a vicious circle of rural decline. (Ward and Brown 2009, p. 1238)

Prior to the development of hydroelectric power and tourism projects in the 1960s, Bykle was a poor municipality, not least because it has a hilly and stony landscape that is unfit for large-scale grain production, unlike in Valle (Bø 1991). Therefore, clear ideas came to dominate, but the alternative was not necessarily a sustainable growth path, as is often the case in urban agglomerations, but rather the incapacity to remain sedentary.

The strategies in Bykle and Valle have differed along five dimensions, as summarized in Table 1.

With the exception of the first dimension, Valle is more in line than Bykle with regard to the contemporary discourse on cultural planning, but this has not prevented population decline and lack of local employment opportunities in Valle. Hence, my claim is not that prioritizing ‘places not spaces’ in consensus-building processes, thereby reinforcing the myth of some shared and single cultural heritage, is an ill-advised strategy, but rather that cultural planning should be done differently in rural and urban settings.
Conclusions

Frank and Reiss state that ‘Looking back over the past 100 years of the planning profession, the urban orientation is clear’ (Frank and Reiss 2014, p. 386), and in this paper I have pointed out the risk that is inherent in adopting urban-based theories about culture-led strategies in rural areas. It is well known that culture-led redevelopment is widespread in large cities (Harvey 1989, Bianchini 1993, Hall and Hubbard 1998, Mathews 2014), where culture and creativity have appeared almost as a mantra in urban development worldwide since the mid-1990s (Stevenson 2004, Peck 2005). Cultural planning is a possible response to the claim that planning practices remain unable to respond to the challenges faced by an increasingly complex society. With its cross-sectorial approach and its focus on the human resources of places, cultural planning might be the answer to many of the challenges faced by spatial planners.

How culture is conceptualized and incorporated into strategies for developing place is decisive for the outcome of culture-based development. The two case municipalities have conceptualized and exploited culture in very different ways in their overall strategies and despite the many contextual similarities they have performed very differently when measured by indicators such as job creation, population increase, and municipal economy. Valle Municipality has understood what cultural planning is about and implemented this thinking in its strategies, but so far this has proven ineffective in fulfilling general goals. This ambition and way of thinking about culture is far less in evidence in Bykle Municipality, where a few stakeholders have been ‘change agents’ and succeeded in creating jobs outside urban agglomerations.

In this paper I have demonstrated that there is a need to discuss the possible drawbacks of implementing in planning practice perspectives and models from the academic planning discourse, a topic that is rare to find in the production of knowledge concerning how to improve collaborative planning processes. The risks are especially evident in rural settings, where the role of municipal planners is much more decisive for development than in urban settings. Opting for culture-led development may be less risky in urban settings, where the forces that shape cities to a larger degree work also without the influence of the municipal planner.

While developing knowledge about how culture could be instrumental in the pursuit of general goals is worthwhile, there is a need for researchers to go beyond the cultural planning discourse, and gain a better understanding of what occurs at the interface with the overall context into which cultural strategies are introduced.
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Notes
1. There are three levels of government in Norway: state, county, and municipality. All 428 municipalities are responsible for land-use planning and services to their inhabitants, especially primary schools and health care for the elderly. Municipalities also function as democratic bodies with politicians who are elected at four-year intervals and are staffed by professionals (funded by municipal taxes) who prepare and implement policies. Increasingly municipalities are encouraged to play the role as community development agents (Ringholm et al. 2009).
2. Two in Valle (on 9 October 2012 and 13 March 2014) and two in Bykle (on 24 January 2013 and 4 April 2014). While the first interviews included a wide range of stakeholders, only two persons were invited to the second interview in Valle, and only one person to the second interview in Bykle.
3. This viewpoint was especially evident in what the interviewees in Valle called the ‘golden age of culture’ in the 1990s, an expression that was frequently used with reference to the period during which traditional music and other cultural traits of Valle were popular locally and motivated several projects.
4. The former headmaster’s expressed resignation and criticism was also found among key stakeholders in Bykle, who distance themselves from Valle, which they regarded as conservative. The interviewees in Bykle did not want to be bound to the old culture (as in Valle), which they described as ‘the culture of the indigenous people’ (interview, 24 January 2013). It was even claimed that people are marked by the landscape, to the extent that in Hovden there is more openness and tolerance, and some interviewees questioned: ‘What have they [Valle] done with their money [from hydroelectric power]?’ (interview, 24 January 2013).

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