

Land use in Urban Growth Agreements

Experiences from the Trondheim, Bergen and North-Jæren urban regions

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Urban growth agreements are a key tool for achieving the goal of zero-growth in passenger car-traffic in the larger Norwegian metropolitan areas. Land use development in the urban areas, including the suburban municipalities surrounding the core cities, is decisive for whether the zero-growth objective can be reached. We studied how land use was handled in urban growth agreement negotiations in the Bergen, Nord-Jæren and Trondheim metropolitan areas. The land use discussions concerned both questions of principles relating to the municipalities' autonomy as land use authority, and substantial disagreements related to land use policy. The municipal actors said that the zero-growth objective is easy to understand and accept, but they also have other goals that might conflict with this objective when it is operationalized into specific policy-measures. In all three cases, it was decided to use the regional or inter-municipal plan as basis for the agreements, and thus, they got no direct influence on land use planning. Still, the municipalities reported that they feel committed to adjust their land use policies in directions contributing to reach the zero-growth objective, and that they are obliged to this by the Mayor's signature on the urban growth agreement. Important questions concerned how one might reach agreement about future land use development strategies and measures to achieve the zero-growth objective and ensure that these are followed up in line with the Planning and Building Act. An important input is that the municipalities must be given, and take, greater responsibility for developing visions, goals and solutions that both contribute to the zero-growth objective and to safeguard important issues for the municipalities. The municipal master plan process is a natural arena for this, and knowledge is a key factor. Common visions, goals and solutions for the metropolitan areas might be developed through planning processes related to regional or inter-municipal plans. The state has only weak sanctions available. The agreements and the steering systems should be simplified, adapted and described. The municipalities need to prepare better before the negotiations. A general criticism from the municipalities is that the state itself acts in ways that reduce the chances to achieve the zero-growth objective.




Background

Urban growth agreements are a key tool for achieving the goal of zero-growth in passenger car-traffic in the larger Norwegian metropolitan areas. Through these agreements, the state, counties, and municipalities enter equal and binding collaborations to finance more sustainable transport solutions and to ensure land use development stimulating to shifts from car-usage to biking, walking and use of public transport. Urban growth agreements were introduced in the National Transport Plan (2018-2029), as a development of previous Urban environment agreements. This development involved, among other things, that land use development become part of the agreements, that the neighbouring municipalities to the core-cities and the Railway directorate were included as partners, and that the County Governor was given a more central role in the negotiations. The agreements were thus developed from being pure transport packages to agreements aimed at integrating land use and transport development.

Land use development in urban areas, including in the surrounding municipalities of the cities, is decisive for whether the zero-growth objective can be reached. In many urban regions, the car-based and traffic-generating land use development in the suburban municipalities is an important source of increased traffic, both in the region, between the suburban municipalities and the core city, and in the core city itself. The core cities can do little about this traffic growth on their own. They are dependent on the surrounding municipalities steering land use development in directions that limit the need for transport and that allow high proportions of the transport demand to be carried out by public transport, cycling and walking. Integration of land use development in the urban growth agreements can thus be understood as a strong incentive for the city municipalities and their surrounding municipalities to steer land use development in directions that result in lower transport needs and car dependence, in addition to being an incentive for regional coordination of housing, land use and transport planning.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is responsible for the land use dimension of the urban growth agreements, and the Ministry commissioned a study to describe how land use was handled in the urban growth agreement negotiations and to propose improvements. There is a potential conflict between the municipalities' self-determination in land use planning, and urban growth agreements' ambitions of committing the actors for a 10-year period. The negotiations and agreements in the Bergen, Trondheim and Nord-Jæren metropolitan areas were selected as cases. Data were collected through document studies and in total 44 interviews with key actors representing administrative leaders, civil-servants and elected representatives (politicians). We focussed on how the municipalities experienced the negotiation processes and results, and more than half of the interviewees were municipal actors. The results from each case study have been published in separate reports, where the following issues were discussed: How the topic of land use development was handled in the negotiations, how local democratic anchoring was ensured and how this influenced the legitimacy of the agreements in the municipalities, how the agreements influenced the municipal land use master plans, how the municipalities' experienced



the negotiations and the resulting agreements, and suggestions for improvements from the municipalities.

With the three published reports as basis, a comparative analysis across the three cases were conducted. The results are presented in this report. Based on the results, we discuss the overarching questions posed by the Ministry: How might one reach agreements about future land use development strategies and measures contributing to achieve the zero-growth objective? How might one ensure that this is followed up by the actors in line with acknowledged decision-making processes and with the Planning and Building Act? We have also discussed how national authorities can contribute to improve negotiation processes for the municipalities, and we have identified important knowledge needs.

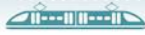
Handling of land use issues in negotiations and agreements

Land use was an important topic in the negotiations of the urban growth agreements in the Bergen- and Trondheim-areas. In Nord-Jæren, the land use discussions were mainly dealt with in the parallel processes related to the regional plan. The land use discussions concerned both questions of principles relating to the municipalities' autonomy as land use authority, and substantial disagreements related to land use development (urban sprawl, compact city development). In all metropolitan areas, the challenges related to principles were solved by using the regional or inter-municipal plans and existing state guidelines as a basis for the text concerning land use development in the agreements. This implies that the urban growth agreements were not given a direct influence on the municipalities' land use development, and that the municipal land use authority (according to the Planning and Building Act) was not challenged. The substantial disagreements about land use development were not resolved in the processes. However, many of the informants were of the opinion that the municipalities' participation in the urban growth agreements will contribute to them adjusting their land use policy to some extent.

Procedures in the negotiation processes

Formally, the procedures were relatively similar across the municipalities in the three metropolitan areas with regard to negotiations of urban growth agreement, and the processes for anchoring them in municipal councils and in the general population. The municipal councils appointed political negotiators and one or two from the municipal administration as administrative support. There were differences in the negotiator leaders' authority to negotiate on behalf of the municipalities, and on whether the negotiations took place as closed or open processes. The appointed negotiators informed and consulted with the municipal executive committee during the negotiations, and most informed their municipal councils during the negotiations. None of the municipalities in the three metropolitan areas carried out systematic processes to involve the population during the negotiations. The negotiated agreements were adopted by the city and municipal councils by ordinary procedures, and subsequently land use planning matters were dealt with in the ordinary way.

A number of situational factors, which mainly had nothing to do with the negotiations themselves (substantial disagreements, underlying conflicts, coincidence in time




between negotiations, municipal elections and municipal mergers, etc.), influenced the processes. This resulted in different levels of challenges and time-consume in the three metropolitan areas. In the Trondheim area, the process was fast and efficient, without major conflicts or interruptions. In the Bergen area and in Nord-Jæren, the negotiations took place over a long period of time, with interruptions, disagreements, conflicts and uncertainty. Especially in the Bergen area, the negotiations became very time-consuming for those involved. Several municipalities were unexperienced and had not prepared properly for the negotiations. They had not made the necessary internal clarifications on their mandate, and they had not familiarized themselves with the urban growth agreements. This contributed to greater time-usage and high levels of uncertainty.

As we see it, the differences in the processes are primarily triggered by local situational factors, more than how national authorities acted in the negotiations. The informants nevertheless pointed out that the complexity of the management structure in the urban growth agreements led to uncertainty and made it difficult to anchor the agreements locally. This was also referred to as a democratic problem, because a consequence of the complexity was that few of the elected representatives became familiar with how the system worked. Administrative staff spent much time getting to know the system and to explain it to politicians. In the Trondheim area, they experienced that the governance structure also created delays and other problems in the implementation phase.

Local democratic anchorage and legitimacy

Our studies showed, as mentioned, that the regional and inter-municipal plans were used as a basis for the texts about land use development in the urban growth agreements. We examined how characteristics of the planning processes related to the regional and inter-municipal plans processes had affected the anchoring and legitimacy of the plans, and how this had affected the land use discussions in the negotiations of urban growth agreements. The results indicate that the comprehensive processes related to regional plans in the Bergen area and in Nord-Jæren had not resulted in good anchoring and legitimacy of the regional plans among all municipalities. The underlying tensions and disagreements related to land use development (especially between the core-city and the peripheral municipalities) were not resolved in the regional plans, and the tensions were highly visible in the negotiations of urban growth agreements. We also found that the inter-municipal plan seemed to be well-anchored and had high legitimacy among the municipalities in the Trondheim area, and to have functioned as a vision-building arena, despite short and shallow processes related to it. This contributed to trust and cooperation between the local actors in the negotiations of the urban growth agreement.

In the discussions about the legitimacy of the agreements, we concluded that the municipalities do not consider them to give the national authorities extended power to influence land use development in the municipalities. The municipalities strongly insisted that their land use authority follows the Planning and Building Act's institutions and rules of the game, even though the municipalities have signed urban growth agreements. Nevertheless, many municipalities expressed that they will adjust their land use policy to some extent to help meet the goal of zero-growth in car traffic. This



indicates that they perceive that the urban growth agreements have legitimacy to influence their political goals and priorities, but not to influence on their concrete land use policy.

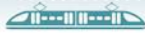
The influence of urban growth agreements on municipal masterplans

Our study included investigations of how the previous urban growth agreements had influenced the revisions of the municipal land use masterplans in Bergen and Sandnes. It was found that the previous agreements had influenced the masterplans in ways that involved a shift towards less urban sprawl. In Bergen, this happened through internal political processes in the municipality. In Sandnes, it happened through external consultation statements and (national) objections, and subsequent mediation between national and local actors. We identified important characteristics of the urban growth agreements that can explain their influence on the revisions of municipal plans. They are: That the municipalities were involved in drafting the agreement, that they are committed through the Mayor's signature, that the zero-growth objective is concrete and easy to relate to, that the urban growth agreements link development of transport systems and land use in clear and concrete ways, and that the investment budget strengthens the motivation and obligations.

Experiences and recommendations of municipal actors

The municipalities considered the current system of urban growth agreements to have several strengths. Firstly, that the inclusion of surrounding municipalities allows them to consider the metropolitan area as a whole. Secondly, that it allows different actors to collaborate and align their interventions in development of land use and transport systems in directions contributing to achieving the zero-growth objective. The municipalities also considered the funding mechanisms for projects and measures to be important incentives. Further, they reported that the overall goal of the agreements works as a coordinating mechanism, pushing the actors in the same direction. They also emphasised the importance of the fact that the land use objectives in the agreements reflect the regional or inter-municipal plans, while details and decisions are made locally, in alignment with procedures in The Planning and Building Act. Finally, the many informants from the municipalities considered the urban growth agreement system to contribute to developing local, regional and national leadership and cooperation in their metropolitan areas, and that the processes were important learning arenas.

The municipalities also identified important weaknesses in the current urban growth agreements system, which can be summarized as follows. Firstly, that the management structure is too complex, which has several negative consequences, both during the negotiations and in the implementation phase. Secondly, that the national authorities do not meet their obligations, since they build and extend road capacity and build or rent their own offices in car-dependent locations. The consequences are increased car-use and reduced opportunities for zero-growth. Thirdly, both time pressure and timing caused problems in the Bergen area, and in Nord-Jæren, while the Trondheim area did not report these as problems. Finally, some municipal actors problematized that individual municipalities have 'a right of veto', that might reduce the quality and effectiveness of the solutions.



The recommendations from municipal actors to the Ministry on the organization of negotiations, agreements and systems can be summarized as follows: Simplify and adapt the management structure for the urban growth agreements, ensure better timing of the processes, enshrine that main goals are defined in the urban growth agreements, while the detailing and formal decisions are made through processes according to the Planning and Building Act, treat the municipalities as equal parties – they expect to be listened to, understand and recognize the differences between municipalities and that land use development and other measures must be slightly different, recognize that municipal politicians need to have something to 'sell' at home to get local acceptance, the state must follow up on its obligations (such as land use clarifications around stations), the state must act in accordance with the agreements and the zero-growth objective (location of state enterprise offices, road construction).

The municipalities also had advices to other municipalities that are to enter into negotiations on urban growth agreements. They were mainly about working together, preparing well, and being aware that the negotiation processes require a lot of time. They recommended other municipalities to enter such processes and agreements.

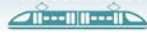
Discussion: How agreement and implementation might be achieved

The Ministry asked us to answer the following questions: How might one reach agreements about future land use development strategies and measures contributing to achieve the zero-growth objective? How might one ensure that this is followed up by the actors in line with acknowledged decision-making processes and with the Planning and Building Act?

We discussed these questions in the light of what we had found in the empirical studies under the headings: Goals and goal conflicts, knowledge, power and processes. Based on the discussions, we formulated proposals for changes. These changes may be difficult to implement, but we hope that the input can be useful in further discussions.

The zero-growth objective is easy to understand and accept, but the municipalities also have other goals that might conflict with the zero-growth objective when it is operationalized into specific policy-measures. Local politicians must take the lead in developing goals, visions and solutions that contribute to make their municipality a good place to live and to run businesses, and at the same time contribute to achieving the zero-growth objective. This can, for example, be about improving local centres or improving public transport accessibility to the core city. The municipal masterplan processes are natural arenas for formulating such goals, visions and solutions in collaboration between local actors.

Local politicians who choose to initiate processes aimed at change take a high risk. They must expect to face opposition and disagreement from various actors in their electorate. Knowledge can be an important success-factor. Processes related to urban growth agreements might contribute to achievement of the zero-growth objective by strengthening the knowledge and competence among local politicians and planning professionals. One way of contributing to this is to develop and disseminate a knowledge base document, presenting key mechanisms through which land use and transport systems development affects car-dependency and traffic growth. Other actions could be to reintroduce a subsidy scheme for covering knowledge needs, and to linking



the analyses made before the negotiations (byutredningene) closer to the to the development of local visions, goals and solutions.


The discussions about power revealed that national authorities, or others, in reality do not have sanctions or other power measures available that can be used to pursue municipalities to develop a land use policy that contributes to achieving the zero-growth objective. An exception is that national authorities might require that municipalities can document a land use policy that contributes to zero-growth, preferably in the form of an adopted municipal plan, before inviting them to negotiations about urban growth agreements.

We compared the processes for the regional and inter-municipal plans for the metropolitan areas, that formed the basis for the urban growth agreements. We found that the collaboration between the municipalities and the county municipality on the inter-municipal plan in the Trondheim area, led by Trondheim municipality, had contributed to the development of common visions, goals and solutions among the local actors. They had adopted the inter-municipal plan in the municipal councils and the County Council, and the municipalities had integrated the principles in their municipal land use masterplans. The processes related to development of the relevant regional plans for the metropolitan areas of Bergen and Nord-Jæren were led by the county municipalities and adopted by the county councils. These processes did not contribute to the same level of co-production of joint visions, goals and solutions. Several municipalities had not had time to revise their municipal plans according to the regional plans before entering into negotiations. These results exemplify the benefits of the municipalities themselves taking responsibility for developing visions, goals and solutions, which provide ownership and commitment. It will depend on local context how well this might work out.

The urban growth agreements are a tool for achieving the goal of zero-growth in passenger road traffic in urban areas, but there is no automaticity in the goal being reached because such an agreement has been signed. Achieving the goal requires creating routines and methods to assess whether projects, measures and changes contribute to increased road traffic, which makes it more difficult to reach the zero-growth objective. Furthermore, that the goal of zero growth in car traffic is prioritized higher than today. This applies to decisions at municipal as well as regional and state level.

Based on these discussions, we formulated the following input for changes that might contribute to the actors reaching agreements about future land use development strategies and measures to achieve the zero-growth objective and that these are followed up in line with the Planning and Building Act:

- The municipalities must be given, and they must take, greater responsibility for handling goal conflicts and for developing visions, goals and solutions that contribute both to achieving the zero-growth and to safeguard important issues in the municipalities – that they can promote in their electorate with both their head and heart
- It might be required that the municipalities prove that they will develop land use in ways that contribute to achieving the zero-growth objective, for instance




in the form of an adapted municipal masterplan, before they are invited to enter urban growth agreement negotiations

- There should (still) be a formal requirement of an adopted regional or inter-municipal plan for the relevant metropolitan area, that contributes to zero-growth in car traffic during the agreement period
- It should be clarified that local and regional visions, goals and solutions contributing to achievement of the zero-growth objective ought to be developed and agreed before the actual negotiations on urban growth agreements start (alternatively, the negotiations must be structured in ways that allow for the development of visions, goals and solutions)
- The processes for developing common visions, goals and solutions should be organized in ways that provide time and room for learning, conscious-building and competence building, and popularized knowledge descriptions should be prepared and disseminated to improve effectiveness
- The urban analyses (byutredningene) could be more closely linked to the development of visions, goals and solutions in the urban areas – both as a part of the knowledge base and as a tool to assessing whether the proposed solutions (from all actors signing the agreements) will result in zero-growth I traffic in the metropolitan area
- The State must to a greater extent than today act in ways that contribute to achieving the zero-growth objective (location of state enterprises, land use clarifications, road construction, etc.), both to contribute to the zero-growth objective and to not weaken the other actors' motivation and arguments
- There is a need of considering whether to develop sanction-measures that can contribute to achieving the zero-growth objective, such as changes in the practice of the objection-system (innsigelsesordningen), clarifications about sanctions if metropolitan areas do not reach the zero-growth objective, and clarification of what means exist to ensure that national authorities act in line with the zero-growth objective
- The zero-growth objective must be prioritized higher than today in the implementation phase, and routines and methods must be developed for assessing whether projects, measures and changes contribute to increased road traffic

Recommendations to national authorities on improving negotiations

Municipalities actors reported that they experienced the negotiations process as demanding, in several ways. Based on input from municipal actors, we formulated some recommendations to national authorities about what they can do to improve future negotiation processes to make them less time-consuming and resource-demanding for local authorities. These changes might also reduce uncertainties, improve transparency, ease local anchoring, and enhance the legitimacy of the agreements among municipal actors. This might result in greater willingness among local authorities to adjust their land use policy in directions that contribute to achieving the zero-growth objective.



The recommendations can be summarized as: Simplifying and adapting the management structure of the urban growth agreements, facilitate that municipalities can meet prepared for the negotiations, formulate a description of how the management and decision-making structure in the urban growth agreements work, describe different models for vision-building and clarifying processes, clarify expectations and opportunities related to transparency in the negotiation processes, facilitate proper timing of the negotiation processes, national authorities must also act in line with the zero-growth objective and fulfil their obligations.

Further research

Our studies about how land use development was handled in the negotiations of the urban growth agreements provided answers to some questions, and at the same time opened several new questions. We summarized some issues that may be interesting and useful to investigate further, grouped in the following sections: Whether and how the urban growth agreements actually have affected spatial planning and development in the municipalities, processes and results related to the development of land use indicators, changes in the Ministry's practice related to formal objections, the roles of The County Governor (Statsforvalteren), how the collaboration in the urban growth agreements function as a political workshop and as an arena for learning and consciousness-building, simplification and adaptation of the management system in the urban growth agreements, responsibilities and practices of national authorities, tensions and challenges related to the fact that urban growth agreements are developed from transport packages, processes and agreements in the smaller urban metropolitan areas entering urban growth agreements.