

Attractive villages in the rural areas of Rogaland

– Evaluation of the Attractive villages project 2021-2024

TØI Report 2046/2024 • Authors: Maja Karoline Rynning, Veronica Blumenthal • Oslo 2024 • 44 pages

We have evaluated the project *Attractive villages in the rural areas of Rogaland*, phase 2. We find that the project has largely contributed to the overall goal of supporting and strengthening the development of attractive and vibrant settlements in the rural areas of Rogaland. The county's organisation, working method and use of instruments have contributed positively to the goal achievement. The county and the municipalities involved agree that the project has been useful and thus should be continued. Our assessment is that it is pertinent to continue the project. We also discuss the county's ability and opportunities to coordinate its use of instruments in its ordinary operations to support the smaller municipalities in their work with the development of attractive villages in the rural areas. We find that the county today has little ability to do so, but that it has good opportunities to strengthen its coordination if they establish structures and routines, as well as set aside dedicated resources to support this, as was done in the project *Attractive villages in the rural areas of Rogaland*.

Background, mission and execution

Rogaland County has carried out the project *Attractive villages in the rural areas of Rogaland* (the Attractive villages project). The purpose has been to facilitate the development of attractive villages in the rural areas, including strengthening the quality of life, settlement, employment and value creation (Rogaland fylkeskommune, 2020). In the Attractive villages project, the county has chosen to coordinate efforts from different professional fields and departments to assist the municipalities in their work to make it more attractive to live in the villages in the rural municipalities in the county. The project started as a pilot (2016-2019) with the municipalities Sauda, Vindafjord, Lund and Hjelmeland. It was continued in a phase 2 (2021-2024) with the municipalities Bokn, Utsira, Kvitsøy, Sokndal and Suldal. In phase 2, the pilot municipalities participated in network gatherings, etc. The county has contributed with financial support, professional advice and the organization of a learning network between the municipalities (Rogaland fylkeskommune, 2020). Five project goals have been common to the pilot project and phase 2:

- Goal 1: Mobilize rural municipalities to work with village development

- Goal 2: Contribute to strengthening the competence and capacity of rural municipalities to work with village development
- Goal 3: Develop and test new ways of working
- Goal 4: Facilitate learning and sharing new knowledge and experiences
- Goal 5: Harmonize and coordinate the county's efforts towards rural municipalities

We have evaluated phase 2 of the project *Attractive villages in the rural areas of Rogaland* on a commission by Rogaland county. The focus has been on the project's goal achievement and how the county's organisation, working methods and instruments used in the project have affected goal achievement. The objective has been to provide a good understanding of what inhibits and promotes desired results, and what changes can contribute to increased goal achievement. We have also assessed whether the project should be continued in its current form or changed and offer recommendations that can strengthen the degree of goal achievement in a potential continuation.

We furthermore discuss the county's ability to coordinate its use of instruments to support rural municipalities in their work to develop attractive villages on a more general level, as well as the county's opportunities to improve this coordination. We discuss this in light of the results from the evaluation of the Attractive villages project, as well as findings from the interviews regarding the county's general efforts to support rural municipalities in their work to develop attractive villages.

We have carried out document studies of relevant documents, interviews with the county's representatives in the project (project manager, project group and steering group), as well as a simplified survey and group interviews among the municipalities. Eight out of ten municipalities participated in the evaluation.

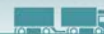
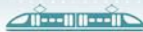
Results

Evaluation of the project *Attractive villages in the rural areas of Rogaland*

We find that the Attractive villages project has strongly contributed to the overall goal of facilitating a joint effort to support and strengthen the development of attractive villages in the rural areas of Rogaland. The project goal achievement is medium to high for the five project goals, see Table S 1. The exception is the goal to strengthen the municipalities' capacity to work with village development beyond temporary hire or free-purchased capacity. The county has had little success with this, and increasing capacity is highlighted as a particularly challenging issue.

Table S 1: Summary of degree of goal achievement for the project goals in the Attractive villages project.

Project goals	Level of goal achievement	Comments
Goal 1: Mobilize rural municipalities to work with village development	High level	The project has greatly contributed to mobilizing village development work. The degree of mobilization and whether this has continued beyond the project varies however between the municipalities. This is largely linked to the municipalities' prerequisites and resources for working with village development.
Goal 2: Contribute to strengthening the competence and capacity of rural municipalities to work with village development	Competence: High level Capacity: Low level	The project and its activities have strengthened the municipalities' competence in village development. Strengthening the municipalities' capacity beyond temporary hire/free-purchased capacity has been more challenging to achieve.
Goal 3: Develop and test new ways of working	Medium to high level	The project itself has been a new way of working. Both the county and the municipalities have tried new ways of working.



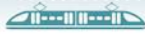
Project goals	Level of goal achievement	Comments
		Beyond the project itself, no new working methods have been developed.
Goal 4: Facilitate learning, and sharing new knowledge and experiences	High level	The project's learning network has been an important arena for learning and for the exchange of knowledge and experiences.
Goal 5: Harmonize and coordinate the county's efforts towards rural municipalities	Medium to high level	The project has strengthened cooperation across the involved departments in the county, especially for the members of the project group. The interdisciplinary organization has contributed to more harmonization and coordination within the county and externally towards the municipalities. Both parties agree that the county has great potential for improvement in this area.

We furthermore find that the county's organisation, working methods and use of instruments have had a positive effect on the project's overall goal achievement. Table S 2 summarizes how the various elements have contributed to goal achievement with justification for our assessments.

Table S 2: Summary of how the county's organisation, working methods and use of instruments have influenced the project's overall goal achievement.

Category	Contribution to goal achievement	Justification
Organisation (Establishing the Attractive villages project as a project, the organisation of the project)	Has contributed mostly to realizing goals 1 and 5, but also to goals 2 and 4.	Commitment from the county led to mobilization in the municipalities. A dedicated project manager who followed up the municipalities contributed to maintaining the mobilization and to the municipalities receiving more help and support. The project organization provided better coordination within the county and greater insight into the municipalities' challenges and needs.
Working methods (The municipal visit, strengthened follow-up, the learning network, the Rogalands model)	Has contributed mostly to realizing goals 1, 2, 4 and 5.	The municipal visit and the follow-up strengthened the mobilization in the municipalities, laid the basis for harmonization and coordination of the county's efforts, and gave greater insight into the municipalities' challenges and needs. Some municipalities experienced insufficient follow-up and/or the municipality itself was less connected to the project, which contributed negatively to the mobilization. The learning network contributed to learning and created an arena for knowledge and experience exchange. The Rogaland model contributed to strengthen process competence among the municipalities who employed it, as well as revealing a more general need to strengthen process competence among the rural municipalities in order to streamline their work with village development.
Use of instruments (The grant scheme, better access to professional resources)	Has contributed mostly to realizing goals 1, 2, 3 and 4.	Through the broad grant scheme, the municipalities were able to launch processes and projects that they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to, as well as (temporarily) strengthen their competence and capacity to engage in village development. Better access to professional resources has resulted in increased competence and learning.

Everyone who was interviewed from the county and the municipalities agreed that the project has been useful and should be continued. Based on this, as well our findings from the evaluation, we consider it pertinent to continue the Attractive villages project. The county should assess whether a possible continuation takes place as a project or as a permanent commitment. Both those interviewed from the county and from the municipalities expressed a desire for the latter. If continued as a permanent commitment, it is important to implement strengths from a project organisation. For example, it may be easier to achieve interdisciplinary cooperation and coordination across departments in a project where this is an important



premise, where there are dedicated professionals from different departments, and where project members are (somewhat) detached from normal working conditions.

In a potential continuation of the Attractive villages project, it is important that the county to a larger degree accounts for and adapts its efforts to the individual municipality's prerequisites for working with village development, including local challenges and issues. There is also a need for better and more structured contact between the county and the municipalities, as well as better clarification of expectations between the parties relating to own effort, contact and communication in the project, as well as project results, including what is considered results. In addition to clarifying expectations, this can contribute to systemize and structure the county's follow-up of the municipalities' work in the project.

Assessment of the county's ability and opportunity to coordinate their instruments for village development

The county has an objective to work more coordinated internally and externally towards the rural municipalities, which the municipalities in the project support. We find that, as of today, the county has little ability to coordinate its use of instruments in ordinary operations to support the municipalities in their work to develop attractive villages. This results in the county appearing fragmented vis-à-vis the municipalities. Which, in turn, prevents them from using the county as the support and sparring partner they believe it can be, and as they experienced the county as in the Attractive villages project.

However, we find that the county has several opportunities to strengthen its coordinated use of instruments. Through the Attractive villages project, the county has shown that they are able to achieve good coordination if they establish structures and routines, as well as appoint dedicated professionals to support this.

Important steps the county can take include, among other things, establishing a more active attitude to coordination and coordination such as in the Attractive villages project, for example by setting joint, well-established goals for better coordination of use of instruments. Furthermore, establishing better routines exchanging insights internally, as well as working towards better utilization of existing arenas where the county meets the municipalities. The interviewees from the county reflected on the possibility of the Attractive villages project eventually becoming such an arena. This is an exciting idea that the county can consider following up in a possible continuation of the Attractive villages project.

Recommendations to strengthen level of goal achievement in a potential continuation of the Attractive villages project

The county's organisation and working methods in the project

- Continue the interdisciplinary project organisation but ensure more support for the project manager.
- Ensure the steering group taking a more active role.
- Explore whether other departments can be involved and/or whether to involve more people from the departments that are already working in the project.
- Explore opportunities to link the project to other regional and national initiatives such as e.g., 'Age-friendly society'.

The county's working methods towards the municipalities

- Account for and coordinate the work towards the individual municipality considering their prerequisites for working with village development.
- Better clarification of expectations between the county and the municipalities.

- Strengthen the follow-up of the municipalities.
- Strengthen and structure the communication between the county and the municipalities, as well as facilitate better communication between the municipalities.
- Continue the municipal visits.
- Test different ways to strengthen the municipalities' capacity to work with village development.
- Make changes to the learning network related to the organization and implementation of gatherings.
- Consider a package approach as tested in the project *Rural Policy Packages for attractive, inclusive and climate-friendly development*³.

The county's use of instruments

- Continue the grant scheme but offer the municipalities more support in the development of the applications.
- Continue increased access to professional resources.
- Assist the municipalities in applying for other grant schemes that can contribute to local village development.
- Work for increased use of the Rogaland model among the municipalities.

Recommendation to strengthen the county's ability and opportunity to coordinate their instruments for village development in rural municipalities in general

- Create a more active attitude to harmonization and coordination, and work to ensure this is anchored at all levels in the organisation.
- Consider dedicating resources for harmonization and coordination as done in the Attractive villages project.
- Map which departments and professional fields in the county that are working on things relevant to village development in rural municipalities.
- Establish better routines to connect relevant professional fields when the county receives an inquiry from a municipality or is itself about to start measures or projects in a municipality.
- Establish internal contact points for updating and exchanging insights between departments and professional fields to highlight opportunities for harmonization and coordination.
- Consider a more interdisciplinary approach to existing arenas where the county meets the rural municipalities.
- Assess whether changes in own organization can help to transfer the positive effects from the Attractive villages project related to harmonization and coordination.

³ See www.tiltak.no: https://www.tiltak.no/0-overordnede-virkemidler/0-3-organisering-og-gjennomfoering/tettstedspakke/?highlight=tettstedpakke (only in Norwegian).