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BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE PHYSICAL PLANNING FOR MOUNTAIN DESTINATIONS AND SECOND-HOME DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MOUNTAIN REGION OF SOUTH-EASTERN NORWAY: THE REIGN OF GOVERNMENTS OR DEVELOPERS?

Abstract. The number of hotels in the mountains of south-eastern Norway has decreased over the last three decades, with a concurrent increase in the number of modern, privately-owned second homes. The growth of second-home villages and associated commercial activity has produced sustainability issues. The shift in the planning and development process from the local government to private developers has resulted in a piece-by-piece process with the loss of sight of long-term consequences. This short review discusses the causes of uncontrolled or poor planning of mountain regions; in particular, the neoliberal trend in physical planning and the problem of small local communities. **Key words:** neoliberal planning, ski destination, second home, mountain resort.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Norway, the industrialisation of the country has mostly occurred in and around cities, as well as in some coastal towns with access to hydroelectric power. However, in the interior, in the valleys and the mountains, the industrialisation process

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has proved difficult. For rural communities in mountain regions, tourism and primary industries constitute the two main export trades, bringing in revenues from the outside world. In both Norway and other Scandinavian countries, tourism has been essential to the local economy in mountain regions for more than a century (Heberlein *et al.*, 2002). With a continued downscaling of the primary industries, agriculture and forestry, the economic importance of tourism has increased even more over the years. In the mountains of southern Norway there are more than a hundred ski resorts or mountain destinations of various sizes, constituting the engine of the tourism-related activity of this region.

The traditional accommodation industry used to be the economic gravitational point of ski resorts or mountain destinations. However, the rapidly increasing number of modern second homes over the last three decades has taken a toll on the number of hotel guests. Thus, the traditional domestic market for hotels and lodges has dwindled, resulting in a large overcapacity of beds (see, e.g., Flognfeldt and Tjørve, 2013). Though causing problems for the accommodation industry, the large number of new second-home tourists creates opportunities for the expansion of ski lifts and alpine slopes, but also other services and trade. This has resulted in large second-home agglomerations with the resulting commerce and infrastructure.

The rapid expansion of second-home villages, ski-lift areas, and other commerce and infrastructure in the mountains have raised growing concerns about the sustainability of all the developments. This is manifested in local resistance and criticism in the media and the literature, and it has also become highly visible in contemporary research literature (see, e.g., Flognfeldt *et al.*, 2017; Arnesen *et al.*, 2018). Several authors have noted that there has been a pronounced shift in physical planning tradition, from planning processes driven and controlled by local governments and their administrations towards a planning system where the role of the governments is weakened and instead private developers have taken over more of the planning process (Davoudi, 2017; Eckerberg and Joas, 2004). This has been described as part of the neoliberal trend that is seen not only in Norway, but also in other parts of the world (Nordregio, 2004; Olesen, 2004).

The current physical-planning regime and legislation may challenge the possibility of more sustainable physical planning. Thus, the purpose of this article is to present the barriers and challenges to the sustainable planning of ski resorts and mountain destinations in small rural communities. We do this as a brief review discussing the rapid increase in second homes in Norwegian mountains in light of present trends in the physical-planning traditions in Norway, which identifies the same liberal trend as commonly observed in other countries. The Mountain Region of south-eastern Norway has been chosen to provide examples of mountain destinations for the discussion. Statistical data for the destination municipalities was harvested from the official statistics of Statistics Norway (SSB) (http://www.ssb.no). Simple inferential statistics (t-test) was applied to the data.

Present studies on the sustainability of building and development in mountain areas typically focus on a single or only a few factors: for example, climate or economic sustainability. However, studies with a broader approach to sustainability, seeking to identify and discuss many factors, are missing. Accordingly, this study also aims to describe how a typical planning process proceeds; we will discuss the unwanted sustainability issues caused by scrutinising a typical ski resort/mountain destination in addition to the probable causes and alternatives to current processes and practices. The discussion in this study applies to the resorts or destinations in the mountain region of south-eastern Norway. However, most case study examples have been drawn from the Skeikampen destination, which is situated in Gausdal municipality, a two-and-a-half to three-hours' drive from the main market in the Oslo-fjord region. The Skeikampen case, as a typical ski resort and mountain destination, is easily comparable in terms of size, ownerships and development, to similar destinations with large second-home agglomerations throughout the mountains of Norway. The destination has one strong owner, which is also a city-hotel chain, but there are also a few smaller businesses operating at the site. This makes this destination suitable as a model case to understand the present practices and outcomes of physical planning and development.

2. THE MOUNTAIN REGION OF SOUTH-EASTERN NORWAY

According to Nordregio (2004), 93% of Norway is mostly mountains, meaning most of its land mass. In southern Norway 54% of the land mass (112,937 sq. km) lies above 700 m a.s.l. Here, we define the mountain region of south-eastern Norway as the municipalities where more than 50% of their area lies above 700 m a.s.l. This definition omits, however, some municipalities with important mountain destinations/ski resorts and second-home agglomerations, including those of Siusiøen (the Ringsaker municipality), Trysilfjellet (the Trysil municipality), and Oppdal (the Oppdal municipality). We have chosen to follow the region used by Flognfeldt and Tjørve (2013), which includes these three municipalities. The resulting region consists of 39 municipalities (Fig. 1) and includes the main ski resorts or mountain destinations: Trysil, Sjusjøen, Hafjell, Kvitfjell, Skeikampen, Beitostølen, Hemsedal, Norefiell, and Hovden, as well as many smaller resorts or destinations. The larger destinations in this mountain region all fall within of the weekend zone of the major cities of Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim, meaning within a distance that most visitors will find as acceptable for a weekend stay. It is evident that both second-home owners and domestic tourists seem to prefer not to travel more than three to three and a half hours when only staying for the weekend.

Most ski resort or mountain destinations started with summer tourism, though today they are foremost winter destinations (Flognfeldt and Tjørve, 2013). After the Second World War, the mountain hotels and lodges were given a boost by the central government as cheap loans and other benefits, e.g., priority to rationed foods and other goods, were offered. The main purpose of these policies was to attract foreign visitors and consequently foreign currency, much needed to buy goods from abroad. Still, up until today domestic tourists has made up the better part of the market. For example, if we include the use of private second homes, then as many as 96% of ski tourists are Norwegians (Innovasjon Norge, 2019).



Fig. 1. Map of southern Norway where the location of the 38 municipalities in the mountain region of south-eastern Norway are shown in grey

Source: modified from Flognfeldt and Tjørve (2013).

Traditionally, mountain hotels and lodges were the gravitational point of the destinations. Cabins or second homes, mostly built by the lower or middle classes, did not have the same amenities, such as electricity, running water, and sewage systems. However, from approx. 1990 most second-home developments have consisted of high-standard cabins or chalets with all modern amenities (Flognfeldt and Tjørve, 2013). The rise of the modern second home has caused the wealthier classes of Norwegians to abandon hotels and lodges. The fact that the domestic market still being the most important to the accommodation industry has resulted in an increasing overcapacity of beds (Flognfeldt et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some have succeeded to even become four-season destinations or at least to remain open in summer.

2.1. The problem of small municipalities

Some of the municipalities in this mountain region have less than a thousand inhabitants, whereas others have populations of up to almost 35,000. The total population of the region was 156,147 in 2021 (SSB, 2022), and the local populations have been decreasing in most of the municipalities. There are 86,855 permanent dwellings in total, compared to 99,191 registered second homes, thus there are more second homes than permanent homes (see Appendix 1). However, the number of buildings used as second homes may in reality exceed 100,000 as some of the houses registered as permanent dwellings undoubtedly function as second homes.

Most of the growth at the ski resorts or mountain destinations has come as second-home developments and ski-lift areas. Many of the largest ski resorts or destinations but also new destinations lie in municipalities with few permanent inhabitants and, therefore, small municipality administrations. Noticeably, new ski destinations are also being built in these small rural communities as (the Tururfjell destination) in Flå and (the Eifjord resort) in Eidfjord municipalities (whereof the latter is outside our study area). These have a mean population of less than 4,000.

If we look at the number of second homes, the picture of municipalities with few inhabitants becomes even more pronounced. In Appendix 1, we have aggregated the figures for populations, permanent (first) homes and second homes in the 38 municipalities in this mountain region (harvested from SSB, 2022). Of these, 22 municipalities now have more second homes than permanent homes. Many of these municipalities have small populations, about 3,000 compared to about 5,500 for municipalities with fewer permanent homes than second homes (see also Appendix 1). The mean number of second homes is also significantly higher (p<0.05, t=2.427, DF=36) for these 22 municipalities (mean=1863) than for the 16 with more permanent homes than second homes (mean=3154).

No.	Destination	County (municipality)	Ski lifts	Pistes
1	Trysil	Innlandet (Trysil)	32	69
2	Hafjell	Innlandet (Øyer)	19	64
3	Kvitfjell	Innlandet (Ringebu)	14	36
4	Skeikampen	Innlandet (Gausdal)	11	21
5	Beitostølen	Innlandet (Øystre Slidre)	8	19
6	Norefjell	Viken (Krødsherad)	14	30
7	Hemsedal	Viken (Hemsedal)	20	53
8	Geilo	Viken (Hol)	20	45
9	Rauland	Vestfold og Telemark (Vinje)	14	37
10	Hovden	Agder (Bykle)	8	33

Table 1. Major destinations in the mountain region of south-eastern Norway

Source: own work.

Table 1 shows a list of ten subjectively more prominent ski resorts in the region. They can be divided into "vacationist destinations villages" and "complete destination villages". The examples of complete destination villages with a resident population and developed trade and services are (5) Beitostølen and (8) Geilo. The "vacationist" type of village consists only (or predominantly) of tourist enterprises and second homes. Trysil and Hemsedal are typical corporate-owned resorts, both owned by Skistar, which owns a number of resorts in Sweden and one in Austria, while the Skeikampen destination is owned mostly by a city-hotel chain, thus being corporate but also with a number of smaller, independent businesses. However, the hotels at Skeikampen have been struggling, and today just one in three hotels is open, and only during the winter season. Thus, accommodation at Skeikampen has moved quickly from traditional, commercial accommodation (hotels and lodges) to privately-owned second homes. This has been the general trend over the last 20 years for this type of destination (Flognfelt and Tjørve, 2013), though Skeikampen is a rather radical example.

Given the fact that most of the municipalities with large ski resorts and many second homes have small permanent populations, they understandably do not have the same resources to spend on physical planning, and smaller municipalities have smaller administrations and typically do not have any dedicated, full-time physical planners (Thallbro, 2017). The developments, especially of second homes, are typically not proposed as large, joint development plans, but separately by several different actors over time. This requires a strong focus on each separate case, which becomes a challenge for these smaller municipalities with their limited planning resources (Angell *et al.*, 2021).

The corporatisation of destination ownership has also resulted in the dismantling of destination management organisations (DMOs). The disappearance of mountain destination DMOs may also add to the problem. These local DMOs, as that at the Skeikapen destination in Gausdal, functioned as collaboration and network-building institutions, bringing all the actors at the destination together. They also produced master plans, which offered municipalities a coordinated physical-plan proposal for the whole destination. This made it less resource demanding for municipality administrations to control and decide on the development at a destination.

3. TOWARDS A NEOLIBERAL PLANNING TRADITION

Physical planning in Norway is regulated by the planning and building regulations law (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2011). The physical planning system in Norway, and with it the planning process, has undergone substantial changes in recent decades. There has been a pronounced shift in the spatial-planning tradition from governmental authorities to private actors (Eckerberg and Joas, 2004; Saglie and Harvold, 2010). Consequently, most planning for developing areas at tourist destinations is done by non-governmental actors, replacing governmental planning. This is the result of what is described as a shift towards what is described as a 'neoliberal planning culture,' where hierarchical governance is replaced by governmental assistance to stimulate development (Fimreite et al., 2005).

We find this trend towards neoliberalism in the strategic planning process in Norway as in most other countries (Olesen, 2014, Davoudi, 2017). This shift has been described first and foremost in urban planning processes, though it is equally valid when considering rural and mountain regions. In recent decades central governments has sought to decentralise power to the local level, particularly towards rural communities. Together with the liberal trend mixed with strains on the economy of the municipality administrations, private planning has gained wider acceptance in mountain regions and especially in the planning of mountain resorts and second-home developments (Lasanta et al., 2021).

Today, it is mostly separate developers that forward their own plans for second-home developments and ski slopes, and the role of local governments is reduced towards that of discussing and deciding on individual proposals. The pressure for local governments to accept each private plan lies of course in the claimed economic benefits, pressuring them to make concessions to attract investments. The result of the loss of strict general physical plans from a municipality or master plans from a collective group of actors at destinations is deregulation, where short-lived economic gain of the developing interest trumps other considerations. Moreover, such a planning culture results in a piece-by-piece development of the land, where the view of the greater whole is lost (Saglie and Harvold, 2010). With these changes comes a distinct shift towards a stronger influence of private initiatives in the spatial planning of destinations, or rather a lack of spatial planning.

3.1. Reformation of the plan and building acts

The liberalisation of the planning process and the weakening of public spatial planning seems not to be on par with the intentions of the plan and building act. It was designed for the public-planning process, meaning for a process towards legally binding spatial plans, and not for a planning process that has been left to the private market (Fimreite et al., 2005). The planning process is currently taken over by new types of plans adjusted to a market-driven planning system, but which does not function well as a strategic tool for managing land use and development (see also Mäntysalo et al., 2015; Lasanta et al., 2021). Consequently, the planning process is dominated by many small plans forwarded by private developers, constantly changing the total plans for a larger area. Thus, as Holsen (2017) has noted, the new market-driven planning has resulted in a planning system outside the planning legislation. The present planning legislation is better suited for strategic planning but is less suited for coordinating a plethora of smaller privately initiated plans and developments (Holsen, 2017). Consequently, long term planning, both urban and rural, has a less significant place, as it is replaced by piece-by-piece decisions resulting from private plans and a market-controlled planning regime.

4. THE SKEIKAMPEN-DESTINATION CASE

Skeikampen is a larger destination with about 700 hotel and self-catering (commercial) beds within the traditional accommodation industry, 2,000 private second homes, 2 caravan sites, 9 ski lifts, 21 pistes and about 200 km of prepared cross-country ski tracks. It is situated 20 km from the community centre in Gausdal, about two hours and 45 minutes by car from Oslo, thus within a 'weekend distance' from the Norwegian capital. The spatial plan for the area was developed in 2011 (Gausdal commune, 2010), and a new plan will be in place in 2022 (Gausdal commune, 2021). However, the planning area described in these physical plans does not cover the total, increasing second-home agglomeration around the Skeikampen destination. These are covered by smaller plans and developer contracts. Together there are approved development plans for about 1,500 new second homes, but it is rumoured that there are additional plans for approxi-

mately 2,000 more cabins, though these areas are not regulated for second homes. This could result in a future agglomeration of more than 5,000 second homes. It should be noted that with the uncertainty of the economic situation in Norway and around the world it would not be surprising if the second-home building boom soon ground to a halt.

The expansion of the alpine ski area and fast-growing number of second homes has caused a water shortage. More water is needed for the second homes and to keep the snow canons operating to extend the downhill skiing season (Holø and Røsrud, 2021). This seemed a surprise for the municipality administration and politicians, and their new plan to obtain water for this development includes a suggestion to turn one of the two undisturbed lakes in the upper mountains into a water reservoir (Norconsult, 2021). This would transform a large portion of the undeveloped mountains around the destination, and the lake might also have to be fenced, unless farmers agree to stop letting their cattle and sheep onto the pasture in the mountains. The plans have caused protests from environmental protection organisations and the green political party (MDG) in addition to locals and second-home owners in the area. The municipality is forced to take a large economic risk, gambling on the second-home market not to collapse in the years to come. It has already invested largely in a new sewage pipe from the destination and down through the valley. If these investments cannot be covered by an increased number of second homes, the bill will go to the permanent inhabitants in the Gausdal municipality.

The growing number of second homes has also led to conflicts with local farmers and landowners. Incidents between second-home residents and cattle have resulted in resistance to allowing farm animals into pasture in the mountains. Complaints of sheep soiling terraces and the areas around buildings have also caused some conflict, making the owners want to fence areas around their second homes. To stop using the pastures in and around these former summer-farm areas may be considered a highly unsustainable outcome of the plans and development of this tourist destination.

The above issues of future sustainability warrant a closer look at how spatial planning and growth of a resort results in unwanted issues and what alternatives there are to the current processes and practices. The planning process in Gausdal seems to be characterised by a piece-by-piece planning practice, resulting in an uncontrolled development of mountain areas and no totality in the planning. This is to be expected when it is handed over to private developers, and where the role of the municipality has gone from governance to governmental assistance to stimulate development. This practice may be reinforced by the lack of competence and capacity at the municipal level. Still, it should be possible to influence the attitudes and practices within the municipality administration and with local politicians. However, introducing more restrictive governance is often more difficult within the local setting, where the decision-makers may have closer ties, personal or otherwise, with developers or landowners who may profit from the sales.

The level of conflict has risen steeply, particularly in the last few years. This is illustrated well by the large number of letters and articles in the local newspaper and the media in general. A quick internet search for the last five years (in Norwegian) on 'second-homes', with or without the word 'resort'/ 'destination' at Skeikampen or Skei combined with 'Gausdal' returned nearly 100 hits in newspapers and television media. Among those about eight in ten presented critical views on the plans and developments at the Skeikampen destination. About one in ten were critical towards the pasturing practices in the area (or reporting attacks by cattle), and one in ten reported on and/or praised plans for new developments. The search also showed a steep increase in the number of articles published in recent years (Tjørve and Tjørve, submitted manuscript). The reactions from the general public are a good illustration of some of the challenges the municipalities face regarding the physical planning of such a destination and seem to warrant further investigation. The issues raised in the letters, articles and other entries found included the loss of nature, the loss of access to nature for recreational purposes, the loss of access to pastures, over-tourism, and the risk of economic burden for the locals.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that the municipalities have lost much of their will and ability to conduct spatial planning activities for developments in Norwegian mountains. Instead, private developers have taken over the realm of planning, where every private plan is presented as a *fait-accompli*, where rejection would result in losing the opportunity of large revenues. Most of the larger ski resorts or mountain destinations in Norway are situated in a 'weekend distance' for the large population centres in southern Norway, meaning the regions in and around the largest cities, e.g., Oslo, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen, and Trondheim. The weekend distance is here defined as somewhere between two and three hours by car from the permanent homes of second-home owners. Three hours is usually considered the top limit for weekend travel (see, e.g., Arnesen et al., 2002, 2018). We see that most growth occurs at the larger destinations within this weekend distance. This increasingly centralised development means that the negative impacts of a liberal, piece-by-piece planning regime will have a more severe impact in these weekend distance destinations. To be able to give advice on how to improve planning practices, we need to identify possible causes or practices that can bring about challenges. A list of such causes or practices may include:

 Lack of resources allocated for planning purposes at the municipality and county levels, with a loss of perspective and totality;

- Decision-making power moved to the lowest (municipality) governmental level may strain the willingness to decline building or development permissions sought by private initiatives due to close personal relations and family ties with the developers;
- A general neoliberal trend in spatial planning, both domestically and worldwide, lessening the power to control or slow down the pace of new destination or second-home developments.

Much of the discussion can be seen as part of the old conflict between production and nature values. However, mountain tourism has in many ways stood on both sides of this conflict. On the one hand, second-home and destination development demands the consumption of new areas, but, on the other, the attraction "promised" to tourists is recreation in unspoiled nature. Another obvious challenge is the increased privatisation of the mountains. An expanding destination sprawl and second-home agglomerations represent a de facto privatisation of wilderness or nature (Ellingsen and Arnesen, 2018). In most second-home developments, only fixed-point ground leases are offered. This means not only that this a lease with a yearly rent, but also that the second-home owners do not have the exclusive rights to the plot, but also that the farmers still have the right to pasture. Thus, conflicts may develop between second-home dwellers and the owners of pasturing animals, typically cattle, sheep or reindeer, or other agricultural and logging interests (see, e.g., Arnesen et al., 2012). The conflict related to farm animals that feed at destinations and between the cabins is especially acute where second-home developments have grown into big sprawls covering the old summer-farm landscape and far beyond.

With the type of building contracts where second-home owners only receive a fixed-point ground lease, the land still retains the status as outlying land and also the traditional right of way (Allemansretten) remains. This means that anybody can move freely between the second homes. This generates conditions for conflict between second-home dwellers, potential second-home buyers, farmers, and locals using the area for recreational purposes, and other locals – and ultimately also private developers and decision-makers within municipalities.

Another challenge seeming to result from the transition to private development plans is that the piece-by-piece planning practice more easily causes the puncturing of continuous wilderness or nature areas. This seems often to be instigated by the fact that the location of land owned by farmers who want to sell to a developer is not necessarily a location most favourable for development. The area can instead be one of greater natural value or be important as a pasture or for recreation. This is a good illustration why municipalities should not merely sit and wait for development proposals, but present their own plans, where other arguments than just land ownership (that is landowners who wants to sell) and short-term profit are considered. In other words, municipalities should not allow the planning of new development only focusing on who owns the land, without considering other

arguments, potentially resulting in spreading or puncturing any large expanses of undisturbed wilderness.

There is much political and financial uncertainty in the world today, which seems to be resulting in a concurrent halting of the construction of second homes. There is even some talk of these huge second home agglomerations becoming ghost towns in the future.

Having acknowledged the deregulation of mountain-destination and second-home planning and the realisation of its negative impacts, it is high time to offer a recommendation for the political implementation of strengthening the planning competence and capacity not only at the local level but also at the county level. The latter should not only entail the strengthening of spatial-planning competence but also the transfer of the decision-making power or strengthening the role of the controlling authority. Strengthening the role of the county level may not only alleviate the lack of resources and competence at the county level, but it may also alleviate the negative effects of the various degrees of prejudice at the municipality level.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. The counties, municipalities, and population of the mountain region of south-eastern Norway. Populations are given as of 01.01.2021, while the data for the number of buildings for permanent (first) homes and second homes is from 2019. All data was harvested from SSB (Statistics Norway /https://www.ssb.no). The numbers are somewhat uncertain, as buildings with several units typically are registered as one. The numbers for permanent homes ("homes") and second homes in municipalities with more second homes than homes are indicated in bold. It should be noted that even though Ringsaker has the largest second-home agglomeration, much of the municipality is more of a lowland, partly with an urban character (explaining the large resident population).

County	No.	Municipality	Population	Homes	Second homes
Innlandet	1	Trysil	6,627	3,946	6,853
	2	Engerdal	1,268	859	1,631
	3	Os	1,891	1,114	1,130
	4	Tolga	1,562	889	708
	5	Tynset	5,578	3,102	1,848
	6	Alvdal	2,432	1,266	752
	7	Folldal	1,545	1,033	532
	8	Ringsaker	34,768	16,790	7,271
	9	Dovre	2,553	1,392	655
	10	Lesja	1,975	1,115	2,160
	11	Skjåk	2,197	1,350	707
	12	Lom	2,228	1,364	271
	13	Vågå	3,570	1,936	1,054
	14	Sel	5,739	3,147	2,080
	15	Nord-Fron	5723	3,302	2,473
	16	Sør-Fron	3,119	1,639	1,861
	17	Ringebu	4,392	2,520	4,203
	18	Øyer	5,100	2,433	3,401
	19	Gausdal	6,106	3,215	2,945
	20	Vang	1,578	915	1,805
	21	Øystre Slidre	3,229	1,766	3,554
	22	Vestre Slidre	2,125	1,268	2,732
	23	Nord-Aurdal	6,413	3,584	4,670
	24	Sør-Aurdal	2,954	1,832	3,519

County	No.	Municipality	Population	Homes	Second homes
Viken	25	Krødsherad	2,212	1,198	1,661
	26	Flå	1,050	712	2,192
	27	Nesbyen	3,273	1,919	3,588
	28	Gol	4,608	2,772	2,563
	29	Hemsedal	2,486	1,376	2,211
	30	Ål	4,674	2,554	2,966
	31	Hol	4,441	2,771	5,720
	32	Nore og Uvdal	2,439	1,527	3,997
Vestfold og	33	Tinn	5,691	3,729	3,470
Telemark	34	Vinje	3,676	2,286	5,493
Agder	35	Bykle	965	657	2,658
	36	Valle	1,164	881	1,376
	37	Bygland	1,162	863	856
	38	Evje og Hornnes	3,634	1,833	1,625
TOTAL			156,147	85,855	99,191

Source: SSB (2022).