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Learning in Planning

An Action Research Approach to Municipal Economic
Development

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, June 2010

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty for Social Sciences and Technology Management
Department of Geography



NTNU

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Jens Kristian Fosse

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

In this study I explore the potential of municipal planning and development to become learning processes. The study is based on the use of the conceptual framework of regional development coalitions as a means to organise for learning in the context of municipal planning and development. My thesis is that municipal economic development and planning processes that include close cooperation with researchers with an action research strategy, facilitating participatory dialogical processes, enhance local learning capacity by turning practitioners into more reflective inquirers in their own practice. In addition, the organisation of such learning processes in a municipal context, based on the concepts of organisational learning and participatory democratic practice, contributes to change local economic planning activities towards a more participatory and learning-oriented practice. A study of learning in regional development coalitions is thus used to discuss how learning in planning and development could be facilitated. In this particular context, a regional development coalition exists within multiple external relations. Learning should thus not be understood as an isolated process, taking place within the coalition, but through interrelationship with the outside world. The study finds that learning does not replace planning but adds something to planning processes. Regional development coalitions is based on action–reflection cycles on both an individual and collective level, and on a continuous effort to reconstruct the local context based on new collective experience from action. Accordingly, learning should be understood as the generation of

knowledge through the meaning construction process linked to solving practical problems.

My unit of analysis is 'the process' within a territorially setting. The unit of analysis is thus different from that used in conventional social sciences. I identify a unit that is not the individual, focusing on a stakeholder analysis, nor is it the institutional and the analysis of competing interests. I do not think in terms of levels or layers but in parallel units. The process as I define it has different characteristics. First, it is territorial, one which unfolds in space at a particular place. This means it is situated in place and has a spatial context. Second, it is situated in time. It has a start and an end. It is thus laid out in space and time. Third, it is a collective and social process. Social relations are established and individuals interact in collaborative activities. This means that the particular process studied in my research is closely related to the spatial and economic, social, and cultural history of a particular region. In line with the focus on a social learning process I find it relevant and interesting to analyse the process in question by taking a constructivist perspective on the production of knowledge. Social learning is thus the process in which people develop collective understanding and insight. In addition, and as emphasised in my definition of a process, the social process needs to be contextualised in order to understand the impact of regional social, cultural, and economic structures. I will elaborate further on this in Chapter 5.

I relate the arguments about learning in regional development coalitions to challenges in planning practice and the governance of place. Central to this is the ability to enable local collaborative initiatives in planning and development to adapt to a changing environment and take on new challenges in the future. It is, however, a critique of versions of regional development concepts, such as *learning regions*, because they fail to identify what learning is and how it could be facilitated in the regional context.

In order to address the current challenge to planning practice (Cars, Healey, Madanipour, and de Magalhães 2002; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 2006), I take the fact that all planning activities create learning possibilities as my starting point. In the rapidly changing political economy, different forms of planning practice occur. I approach this general challenge to planning practice through a practical attempt to find a

way forward to addressing real challenges in a municipal setting. The empirical setting of the research presented in this thesis is an action research project in a Norwegian municipality over a four-year period aimed at place making, industrial restructuring and economic growth. Building on a dialogical concept of development, closely linked to an action research approach to Scandinavian work life, a model for municipal development and planning was adapted in collaboration with local stakeholders. In line with an action research approach, the purpose of the project was to take relevant action through a participatory process to solve problems identified in the local context, and to generate knowledge based on the meaning of construction process linked to solving these practical problems (Greenwood and Levin 1998). To understand learning in planning processes contributes potentially to the reformulation of *planning as learning* in the context of contemporary political economies. This expresses a normative concern implicit in the action research approach of this study.

The research questions addressed in this thesis are based on this line of reasoning understanding planning fundamentally as a learning process. My main research question is thus:

Main research question: How can action research and development concepts adopted from the industrial democracy tradition enhance the learning capacity in municipal economic planning and development processes?

In order to explore this main question, I address two subsidiary questions: the first subsidiary research question relates to an in-depth discussion of learning processes in regional development coalitions:

First subsidiary research question: How can municipal economic planning and development processes become learning processes?

The action research project in a Norwegian municipality was organised in line with the conceptualisation of *regional development coalitions*. This concept includes an explicit focus on learning and has evolved from studies in organisational and enterprise development. Development coalitions as a conceptual tool on the level of enterprises and work life have now been turned into a model for regional development (Asheim

2001; Ennals and Gustavsen 1999). However, this transformation is problematic, although it is also fundamentally a shift in context. It is my aim to explore the contribution of a regional development coalition to enhance learning processes in municipal planning and development. It is thus important to explicitly address the difference in context between an enterprise and a municipal level and the ability of a development coalition to enhance learning for all participants in a municipal development project. The second subsidiary research question is thus:

Second subsidiary research question: Is it so that regional learning processes are different from social learning processes within enterprises, and what are the implications for an action research strategy in a regional context?

1.2 Relevance

In discourses on planning there is increasing focus on the ability of planning practices to adapt to new models of governance (Cars, Healey, Madanipour, and de Magalhães 2002; Madanipour, Healey, and Hull 2001; Vigar, Healey, Hull, and Davoudi 2000). Theories in political economy maintain a shift from government to governance in Western welfare states (Jessop 1994), and a shift from a management regime to a development regime in Norwegian regional policy (Amdam and Bukve 2004). Other theories emphasise that governance should be seen as complementary to established government structures, not as replacing them (Elander and Blanc 2000). Based on this latter understanding, I argue that municipal planning faces the challenge of becoming a valuable set of governance activities (Madanipour, Healey, and Hull 2001) in addition to, and in close relation to its regulating basis in government structures. In line with the shift towards governance, theories emphasising collaborative- (Healey 2006) and deliberative (Forester 1999) planning practice have become influential (Allmendinger 2002a).

This study is a practical attempt to establish an alternative development process in a Norwegian municipality. It is thus an attempt to address the challenge identified in the discourses on planning:

But in many ways, planning as an activity is within a whirlwind politically and geographically The biggest change currently being enacted in practice is the extension of planning from its narrow regulatory base within various territories and various scales simultaneously, to a broader integrating and spatial governing activity, particularly at regional and sub-regional levels. (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 2006: 12)

The action research approach in the present study also gives particular emphasis on the role of research in municipal development and planning.

1.3 Situating the Research

1.3.1 The Context

Vennesla Municipality, in Vest-Agder County in southern Norway, serves to exemplify the history of growth and decline in the manufacturing industry. It is the history of a single industrial town depending on a few major enterprises for many years. This history could be told emphasising the close relations between the enterprises, the labour movement, and the social and cultural development of a place (Sørensen 1982). It could also be told emphasising the cultural dimension of the industrial society and the values, norms and systems of meaning that constitute social practice in this particular culture. It could also be told related to the distinct development of the enterprises which, because of the close relations to the community they develop within, also could be seen as the history of a place. As an introduction to the local context of Vennesla, I will take the starting point in one particular part of the latter approach, but in relation to the former two approaches.

It is now approximately 40 years since the first development project in the Industrial Democracy Programme was launched in the Hunsfos paper mill (Hunsfos Fabrikker AS) in Vennesla Municipality (Emery and Thorsrud 1976). As one of a number of new perspectives on work organisations in the 1950s and 1960s, rooted in the critics and opposition to the dominating Tayloristic ideas of scientific management, the Norwegian Industrial Democracy Programme centred on the creation of autonomous work groups (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999). In their book *Democracy at Work* (Emery and Thorsrud

1976), Emery and Thorsrud describe the aim of the development project as '*developing and testing of alternative organizational forms and their impacts upon employee participation on different levels of companies*'. The Industrial Democracy Programme was strongly influenced by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in England. Due to the Norwegian cultural framework, it was possible in the 1960s to establish the conditions for '*large scale social change over a period of at least ten years*' (Emery and Thorsrud 1976: 3). The Industrial Democracy Programme was based on support from trade unions, the employees association and gradually from the government. Hunsfos paper mill was one of the project's four locations.

Forty years after the introduction of the Industrial Democracy Programme, a new development project was launched in Vennessla Municipality as part of a new research programme, Value Creation 2010¹ (VC 2010). As part of the same tradition (starting with the Industrial Democracy Programme), VC 2010 built on the legacy of the pioneers within this Norwegian approach to organisational research. In a historical perspective one striking change is apparent. Whereas the development project under the Industrial Democracy Programme in Vennessla Municipality starting in 1964 took place within Hunsfos paper mill, which then was a major industrial plant in the municipality with a workforce of c.1000 persons, the VC 2010 project launched in Vennessla was about economic development and place making within the whole municipality. It took place in a time of major economic restructuring in the manufacturing industry in the municipality, as exemplified by the decline in the workforce at Hunsfos paper mill, which totalled 177 persons in 2005. The context had changed radically, but at the same time, some basic perspectives and normative elements regarding the approach to development in the projects remain central in both the Industrial Democracy Programme and the VC 2010 programme. I will return to a more comprehensive presentation of the VC 2010 programme later.

¹ The Value Creation (Verdiskaping (VS2010)) programme was terminated in 2007 and merged with the several other programmes under the Research Council of Norway. A new program, the Program for Regional R&D and Innovation (VRI) was launched. VRI is the Research Council's main support mechanism for research and innovation in Norway's regions. The primary goal of VRI is to encourage innovation, knowledge development, and added value through regional cooperation, and a strengthened research and development effort within and for the regions.

The radical change in the local context, from the dominance of a few industrial plants to a more diverse industrial structure and an ongoing economic restructuring process has also changed the roles of the actors in municipal development. The municipality was dependent upon the support and engagement of the enterprises for many decades before and after World War II. It was the enterprises and their social responsibility that were most important in the provision of social security and welfare. The local authority was weak in many ways before the period of ‘municipal construction’ that started in the early 1960s (Sørensen 1982). Today, the situation is different. The role of the local authority in social services and administration is considerable, and the local authority is often seen as the most important actor in social and economic development. The changing role of two main sectors, industry and public administration, is an important element in the new local context. The attention of the larger firms has shifted: they are now part of multinational corporations and compete on global markets. They are no longer preoccupied with local questions to the same degree as they were previously.

I will summarise this introduction with two interlinked arguments. First, there has been a shift in the role of the public and private sectors in local development. Attention has shifted from enterprise development to territorial development of local authorities in Norway. Second, and in relation to the former argument, place has become an important and relevant unit of analysis in contemporary planning practice. A territorial approach to the organisation of local development has replaced a more functional approach (Madanipour, Healey, and Hull 2001), and implies a more complex set of local stakeholders.

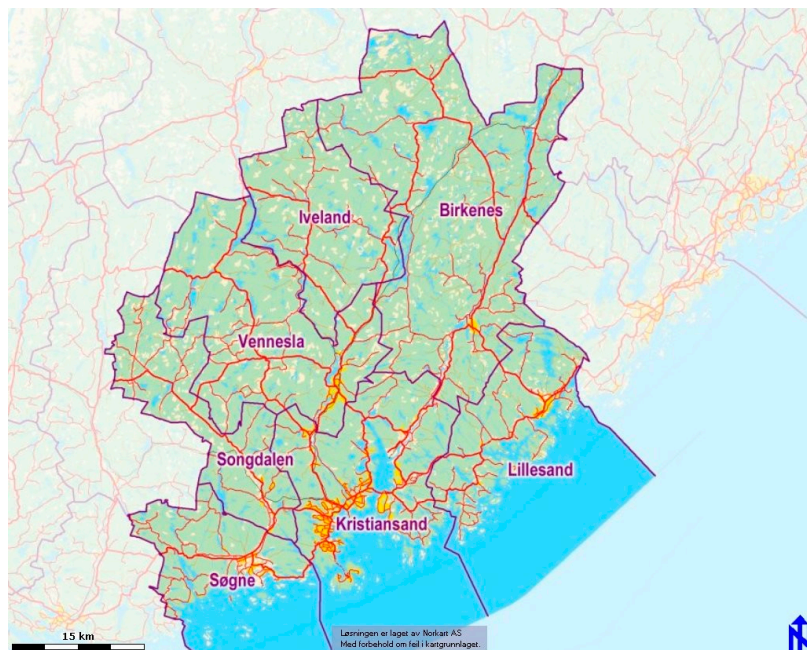
1.3.2 Locating the Case Study

Vennesla Municipality (see figure 1-1) ² is located in the south of Norway, a few kilometres from the city of Kristiansand. The municipality has *c.*12,000 inhabitants and is known within Norway for its almost 100 years history of industrial activity based on

² The inter-municipal collaboration in the Kristiansand city region, called Knutepunkt Sørlandet, consists of seven municipalities: Kristiansand, Søgne, Songdalen, Vennesla, Birkenes, and Lillesand. (<http://www.knutepunktsorlandet.no/>)

its natural resources such as hydroelectric power from waterfalls and wood from forests in the region. Geographically, it is located in an area between the coast and inland, and in addition to its industry it is known as a recreational site for the inhabitants of more densely populated areas along the coast. As an area in which to live, the southern coastline of Norway is known as the sunbelt and has a favourable climate. The area is also an important national tourist destination. The municipality has a distinct history that is well documented. It is not possible to present the comprehensive history in detail within the limits of this dissertation. However, I will present selected important aspects of the local industrial and cultural history as studied and presented by others.

Figure 1-1 Kristiansand city region



(Source: Knutepunkt Sørlandet)

Vennesla Municipality is a rather scarcely populated municipality and had 12,513 inhabitants at the start of 2006 (Statistics Norway), and an area of 385 km². It is, however, the second largest municipality in terms of population within the Kristiansand city region, defined by the (inter-municipality) city region partnership Knutepunkt

Sørlandet. The city region has 119,247 inhabitants, including Kristiansand city with 76 917 inhabitants (Statistics Norway).

The collaboration with Vennesla local authority has shed light on the nature of the challenges in the local context. The almost four-year long project has been a window into problems that I believe are shared by many municipalities. It marked an opportunity for me to take part in a process of change and development in a municipality for a considerable length of time and a unique opportunity to study how the process evolved. Although I believe that the general situation is not unique to the Vennesla context but is rather quite common in many municipalities, there is seldom the opportunity to follow and study it that closely as has been possible in this case. The openness and acceptance on the part of the local authority is a quality that further development could be built around.

1.3.3 Relations to Theory and Research

The municipal development project is a part of the Agder project in the Value Creation 2010 programme (VC 2010). VC 2010 is a co-operation between the Research Council of Norway (Norges Forskningsråd (NFR)), the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (Landsorganisasjonen i Norge (LO)), the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (Næringslivets Hovedorganisasjon (NHO)) and the Norwegian Industrial and Regional Development Fund (Statens nærings- og distriktsutviklingsfond (SND))/Innovation Norway (Innovasjon Norge). The research programme emphasises enterprise development through broad participation and relates to the conceptualisation of an industrial democracy in Scandinavian work life. The characteristic features of the programme are thus linked to the collaborative model of Norwegian work life between the social partners (LO and NHO) (Gustavsen 2001).

However, a shift in focus on enterprise development, from an intra-organisational to an inter-organisational or network perspective has evolved, articulated through the VC 2010 programme and the research project under the programme. This shift also marks the foundation of the design of the VC 2010 Agder project emphasising research on an enterprise, regional and sub-regional level (Johnsen and Normann 2001a).

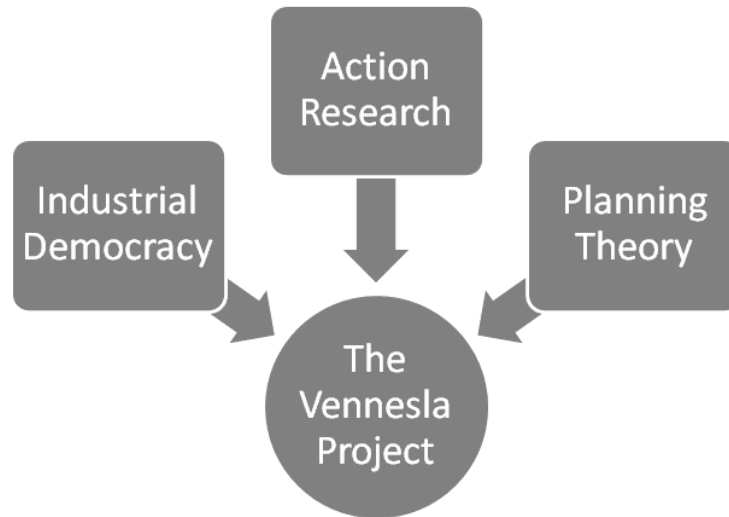
In addition, and closely associated with the Norwegian work life research tradition is the action research approach, implicit in the VC 2010 programme. Accordingly, action research has been the methodological foundation of the Agder project (Greenwood and Levin 1998).

In the municipal development project that is discussed in this thesis, a line is drawn between organisational learning and enterprise development to municipal planning. The development model conceptualised in the VC 2010 Agder project was implemented in the municipality in collaboration with local stakeholders. The thesis discusses the experiences from this process, addressing challenges in the transformation of the normative development model from an enterprise to a municipal context.

To address learning in municipal planning and development implies an integrated theoretical and multidisciplinary approach. I find relevance in a number of distinct theoretical traditions and research, such as in learning processes (Argyris and Schön 1996; Bateson 1972; Kolb 1984), planning practice (Amdam 2005; Forester 1999; Healey 2006), action research in place making processes and community development (Almås 1985; Levin 1988; Madanipour, Healey, and Hull 2001), political economy (Jessop 1994), local and regional economic development (Asheim 2001), and industrial restructuring (Dale 2002; Hansen and Selstad 1999; Karlsen 1999).

Figure 1–2 shows a summary of the analytical framework developed in this study. It is based on three theoretical approaches, the industrial democracy approach, the planning approach, and the action research approach. The industrial democracy approach is introduced in the next chapter (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, planning theory and regional development are presented. Action research is both a theoretical and methodological approach applied in the study and is discussed in the method chapter (Chapter 4).

Figure 1-2 Analytical frame



1.4 Outline of Thesis

In the following chapters, I present a theoretical conceptualisation of the research perspectives in this study. I start with the theoretical foundation of the research programme under the Research Council of Norway, Value Creation 2010, which my project was a part of. Thereafter, I establish a link between the perspectives in the programme and theories in regional planning and development in order to prepare for a discussion of the potential in applying organisational theory and action research, the approach used in the Value Creation 2010 programme, in a regional context. In Chapter 4, I present and discuss methods and research design. I present the action research approach applied in this thesis. In the presentation of the empirical case in Chapter 5, I prepare the analysis of the learning process in the municipal development project. In Chapter 6, I start with the analysis of what learning is and how it occurs in the project, and continue with the analysis of the application of a model for learning adopted from enterprise development and work life research in a municipal context in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, I present the conclusions relating to the study, with the reformulation of the initial development model applied in the project and the condition for learning processes in planning and development project.

2 DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BROAD PARTICIPATION

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the contextual background of the Vennesla project and the theoretical foundation of the Value Creation 2010 research programme.

2.2 Value Creation 2010

The Research Council of Norway launched the research programme Value Creation 2010 (VC 2010) in 2001 following the closure of its predecessor Enterprise Development 2000 (ED 2000) (Gustavsen, Colbjørnsen, and Pålshaugen 1998; Levin 2002).³ The VC 2010 programme concerns enterprise development with broad participation. The programme involves collaboration between the Research Council of Norway, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, and Innovation Norway. The programme aims to contribute to economic growth (value creation) in enterprises through the stimulation of collaboration between the enterprises and researchers on organisational development and innovation. Innovations are defined as the development of new or changed products, production

³ I will not give a presentation of the ED 2000 programme and its results, but rather I will focus on the VC 2010 programme as a direct but somewhat revised extension of the ED 2000 programme.

processes, and new forms of organisation and collaboration. In addition, the programme supports the development of regional innovation strategies through regional partnerships:⁴

*Through these various levels of activities, the enterprises are stimulated to actively use social research as a resource in their development. On the other hand, the researchers in VC2010 produce scientific material and publications to increase the general knowledge in the field of work life research. At a strategic level, VC2010 promotes competence in themes of relevance to enterprise development in the research community. The program contributes to a richer offer of teaching experience and teaching material based on Norwegian experience.*⁵

Both the ED 2000 programme and VC 2010 build on the legacy of a distinct approach to organisational development in Norwegian work life research. The historical development is thoroughly presented in several publications (Johnsen 2001; Johnsen 2005).

It is first and foremost the work of Fred Emery and Einar Thorsrud (1976) that conceptualised the Scandinavian model of workplace co-operation in the early 1960s (Johnsen 2001: 20). Their work can be linked to the human relations tradition and they were inspired by the Tavistock experiments in England and the work of Kurt Lewin in America (Gustavsen 1992). One central contribution was the Norwegian Industrial Democracy Program (Emery and Thorsrud 1976), launched in several Norwegian industrial plants. The aim of the Norwegian Industrial Democracy programme reflects some basic elements in Emery and Thorsrud's approach to organisation and/or enterprise development: the aim was *'the development and testing of alternative*

⁴ Website for the programme (26 October 2006):

<http://www.forskingsradet.no/servlet/ContentServer?c=Page&pagename=vs2010%2FPage%2FHovedSide&cid=1096558006737>

⁵

<http://www.forskingsradet.no/servlet/ContentServer?c=Page&pagename=vs2010%2FPage%2FHovedSide&cid=1096558006737>

organizational forms and their impacts upon employee participation on different levels of companies' (Emery and Thorsrud 1976: 1–2). Major emphasis was placed on the concrete conditions for personal participation, including the technological factors structuring the tasks, workers' roles and the wider organisational environment for workers. The focus was also on self-development (self-realisation), work variation, creativity, and increasing efficiency (Emery and Thorsrud 1976; Johnsen 2001). In Emery and Thorsrud's work the concept of 'semi-autonomous work groups' became an important aspect in exploring alternative forms of organisation (Emery and Thorsrud 1976: 2).

Thus, it is evident that employees' participation in work organisations has a central role in the Scandinavian collaboration model. However, it is claimed that the term 'participation' has changed in content between the 1960s and today (Toulmin and Gustavsen 1996). Johnsen (2001: 21) describes four phases in the development of participation:

- 1) The original functionalistic thinking of the human relations approach in the 1950s and 1960s
- 2) The more institutional thinking (a collective and representative participation perspective) in the 1970s
- 3) A broad, direct participation thinking (linked to the approach in Total Quality Management and Management by Objectives) in the 1980s
- 4) The communicative concept of organisational change in the 1990s, which represents both continuity and a break with the preceding three phases.

It is first and foremost on the basis of the writings of Bjørn Gustavsen at the Work Life Research Institute (*Arbeidsforskningsinstituttet* (AFI)) in Norway, and his central role in two research programmes, ED 2000 and VC 2010, that the fourth phase has evolved. This 'communicative turn' in enterprise development is thus very much associated with a few but influential researchers at the Work Life Research Institute. I will discuss this communicative approach thoroughly below.

2.2.1 Action Research and Organisational Development

An additional important characteristic element of the work life research and organisational development tradition associated with the VC 2010 programme is the action research approach. This is very much grounded in the inspiration from many but particularly from the work of Kurt Lewin and his experimental approach to social change.

As discussed by Johnsen (2001), there is a close relation between what has been termed the ‘action discipline’ (*aksjonsfaget*) in Norwegian organisational theory (Døving and Johnsen 2005) and the action research approach to organisational development and work life. In contrast, it is argued that this turn is a too narrow interpretation of the scope of an action research approach, or the ‘action discipline’, to work life research and organisational development in Norway (Levin 2005). It is, however, important to recognise the connection within the approaches to work life and organisations articulated in an action research strategy.

The VC 2010 project in the Agder region takes its starting point in the ‘communicative turn’ and a dialogue-based approach to regional development. This may be seen in relation to the approach of Agder Research (Agderforskning) in the ED 2000 programme and its communicative perspective on enterprise and work life development (Johnsen 2001; Johnsen and Knudsen 2001; Knudsen and Johnsen 2002).

2.2.2 The Development Model – the Agder VC 2010 Project

In the comprehensive applications from Agder Research (Johnsen and Normann 2001a; Johnsen and Normann 2001b), an extensive research project is suggested. It operates on different levels: an enterprise level, an enterprise network level, and a regional level. The project is organised with a regional development coalition, Value Creation Alliance Agder (Verdiskapingsalliansen Agder), as the central steering group, with participation from two counties (Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder), the county administrators (*fylkesmennene*), the regional representations of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, Innovation Norway, Agder University College, and the Norwegian Directorate of Labour, in addition to Agder

Research. The application presents the theoretical foundation, an analysis of the present regional context, suggested development activities, and research activities ((Johnsen and Normann 2001a, 2001b). The project is founded on the same assumptions as the VC 2010 programme: change and development processes based on *broad participation* contribute to improvements, economic growth, and competitive advantages in enterprises. The aim of such processes is to mobilise local and/or regional knowledge, to create common goals and engagement to these goals, to translate development concepts applied in public policy into practical action related to the regional context, and the coordination of divided milieu and institutions in order to enhance collaboration (Fosse 2005; Johnsen 2003; Johnsen 2004; Johnsen, Lysgaard, Kvaale, Fosse, Normann, and Karlsen 2005; Johnsen and Normann 2004; Johnsen, Normann, and Fosse 2005)

2.2.3 *Broad Participation*

The ‘broad participation’ approach is central in both the VC 2010 programme and the Agder project. I will elaborate this perspective based on the theoretical foundation.

The Scandinavian collaborative model of work life established in the 1960s and 1970s is founded on collaboration between social partners in work life and the development of arenas for mutual negotiations within enterprises and organisations. It is the extension of this approach that has taken a new form with the introduction of a communicative perspective on change. In the communicative approach, the potential to rethink dichotomies and established divisions between direct and representative democracy and between state and market has been recognised. Both the Scandinavian collaborative model of work life in general and the communicative turn in particular may be seen as organisational-related development and change concepts based on participation. The communicative turn, or more precisely the communicative change concept, implies de-emphasising interests and negotiations which were central in the initial economic democracy approach, and instead focusing on dialogical development processes in organisations.

The Scandinavian collaborative model is characterised on a macro level by strong and centralised trade unions and their close relations to a regulating oriented government, and a comprehensive system of agreements between the parties. On the enterprise level, this constitutes a strong tradition for negotiations and many union members.

Three arguments in favour of the Scandinavian collaborative model have been emphasised. First, there is a political dimension in the efforts to develop a more democratic work life that started in the 1960s. Second, it has been argued, e.g. by Hofstede (Hofstede 1980), that the Scandinavian countries have a social structure that supports participation and sees it as less problematic than in other countries. Third, it is argued that participation gives competitive strength and enhances economic growth. The latter point is emphasised by Porter (Porter 1990), who argues that well functioning collaboration between social partners in Scandinavian work life is an important strategic factor in economic development. This is also discussed by others (Reve, Lensberg, and Grønhaug 1992). Reve et al criticises the Scandinavian collaborative model for being too inward focused or introvert, and too little action oriented.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the arguments supporting participation were politically motivated. During the 1980s this changed, and the economic efficiency argument became stronger. The new perspective, as can be found in the ED 2000 programme, is on a wider concept of continuous change. The communicative turn is, in a way, an attempt to overcome the contrast between economic efficiency and participation, through a new meta-perspective in which the importance of formal structures is toned down and in which participation takes place in the form of continuous dialogue. Today, the perspective is communicative with emphasis on the construction of meaning and understanding. The starting point is no longer objective facts that may be studied analytically, and suggested as solutions, nor is the perspective on systems and their reciprocally logical way of working. In the communicative perspective, truths are local, subjective, temporal, and based on interpretations and consensus. Focus is on frameworks for collaboration, language, and incremental change. In addition, change and development are seen as evolving over time, and individual organisations are an integrated part of external networks.

In line with communicative theory, emphasis is on institutional design and new arenas in order to enhance better dialogue. The aim of institutional design is to establish a framework that is able to secure the conditions and consistency for communicative action in shifting contexts. It rests on the ambitions of an open dialogue, and the better argument. This should lead to an increase in the degree of objectivity and a decrease in the split between objectives and implementation through the combination of institutional design and moral validity. The local dimension in the communicative development concept focuses on how participants should apply their personal experiences in an individual reflection process. This is based on the acknowledgement of the way in which learning is related to practice and the importance of applying and testing knowledge through practice.

The above-mentioned theoretical perspectives form the VC 2010 project in Agder, a project that may be seen as the result of what Gustavsen (Gustavsen 2002) has called a ‘seamless transition’, from ED 2000 to VC 2010. However, the transition is perhaps not as seamless as it appears. The new VC 2010 programme introduced the importance of a new approach to enterprise development based on experience from its predecessor, an approach that implied shifting from the enterprise and organisational level to the regional level. It is this significant change in perspective that I will now turn to.

2.2.4 From Enterprise Development to Regional Innovation

It is important to emphasise the change in focus from the ED 2000 programme to the VC 2010 programme. In ED 2000 the focus was solely on enterprises and also enterprise and organisational development:

While ED 2000 mainly was about the development of collaborative constellations between enterprises and researchers, VC 2010 is about this and more. What has been added to the new programme is development coalition, and gradually also partnership. It was a lesson learned from ED 2000 that the potential to create flourishing modules often depends on the collaboration between regional development agents [virkemiddelaktørene], e.g. Innovation Norway, county representatives ... Such experiences motivated the introduction of these [regions] as a level in their own right in VC 2010. (Gustavsen 2002: 33–34; my translation and underlining)

Based on the point that research is a productive element within innovation and regional development processes, instead of observing and analysing from outside, an argument for linking the industrial democracy approach to regional development is developed (Fricke and Totterdill 2004):

The crucial point of the new action research approach is to integrate the ideas and interests of as many regional stakeholders as possible, thereby introducing an element of industrial democracy and participation into regional development.

The *turn to regions* became central in the development of the Agder project. A regional development coalition (Value Creation Alliance Agder) was established as the main partnership and steering group in the project. The Agder project took the new focus on development coalitions in VC 2010 quite literally, in many ways (Johnsen and Normann 2001a, 2001b). This was also reflected in the transdisciplinary research group that was established at Agder Research, consisting of geographers, political scientists, economists, and organisation developers.⁶

⁶ Two PhD projects Karlsen, J. 2007. "Why Is It Important to Develop a Contextualised Knowledge Creation Process between a University and Its Host Region? A Case Study of Knowledge Construction Processes between Agder University and Actors in the Agder Region." Ph.D. thesis Thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Normann, R. 2007. "Democracy in Development. A Critical View on regional Governance. ." Forthcoming, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim. have been completed in connection with the VC 2010 Agder project, in addition to my project. All three research studies address questions relating to regional or sub-regional development.

In addition to a distinct division between the level of enterprises and the regional level, a comprehensive theoretical discourse on regional development became relevant to the programme. In several theoretical contributions, the relations between enterprise development and regional development are addressed (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999, Asheim 2001).

The focus on the importance of inter-enterprise processes links the concept of development coalitions and learning organisations in organisational theory to the regional development literature and the concept of ‘learning regions’ (Asheim 2001; Florida 1995), emphasising co-operation and collective learning in regional clusters and networks in order to promote innovativeness and competitiveness among firms and regions in a global learning economy (Asheim 1996; Asheim 2001; Florida 1995). The work of Ennals and Gustavsen (1999) on the use of development coalitions in regional development is clearly inspired by the literature within regional innovation studies:

In the promotion of such innovation supportive regions, the interlinking of co-operative partnerships ranging from work organizations inside firms to different sectors of society, understood as ‘development coalitions’, will be of strategic importance. (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 114)

This leads to theories on regional development and on the learning region in particular (see Asheim 2001). In the perspective of learning economy, as well as in modern innovation theory, learning is emphasised as a localised process, not as a placeless process (Asheim and Isaksen 1997; Lundvall and Johnson 1994; Storper 1995). Attention is directed to the historical and contemporary importance of territory specifically (i.e. location and agglomeration) and non-economic factors (i.e. institutions, social structures, traditions, etc.) in general, or what Piore and Sabel (1984) call the ‘fusion’ of the economy with society for the performance of an economy (Asheim and Isaksen 1997).

Building on examples from Emilia-Romagna,⁷ the question of a potential collective innovation capacity is emphasised, establishing enterprise support systems helping to keep networks of firms innovative. This has to be systematically developed and supported both at the intra-firm, the inter-firm, and the regional level (Asheim and Isaksen 1997):

This perspective emphasizes the importance of organizational (social) and institutional innovations to promote cooperation, primarily through the formation of dynamic flexible learning organizations within firms, between firms in networks and between firms and society regionally.

This in turn led Asheim (2001) to the conclusion that these organisational and institutional innovations, e.g. regional development coalitions, are of strategic importance for the formation of learning regions. By the concept of development coalition is meant a bottom-up, horizontally based co-operation between firms or networks of firms, but also generally the mobilisation of resources in a broader societal context, to initiate a learning-based process of innovation, change and improvements.

It can be seen from the literature on regional innovation that the basis of arguments in favour of more integrated and cooperative models to facilitate innovation and development is grounded in the perspective of a learning economy. According to Lundvall and Johnsen (1994), the concept of 'learning economy' refers to the contemporary post-Fordist economy dominated by the ICT-related techno-economic paradigm. In addition, in the learning economy innovation is a crucial means of competition in the new paradigm.

In addition, the turn to regions in the VC 2010 programme implies a need for further discussions about the concept of *region*, in particular a more precise definition of different types of regions⁸ and the territorial demarcation of different regions. Under VC

⁷ An administrative region in north-east Italy, comprising the two historic regions of Emilia and Romagna.

⁸ At least three types can be identified: political, methodological- and identification regions Lysgård, Hans Kjetil. 2001. *Produksjon av rom og identitet i transnasjonale regioner: et eksempel fra det politiske samarbeidet i Midt-Norden*. Trondheim: Geografisk institutt, Fakultet for samfunnsvitenskap og teknologiledelse, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet.

2010, Agder, a sub-regional level, is identified in order to territorially frame projects in the Agder region. In line with the process of regionalisation, VC 2010 represents an attempt to realise collaborative processes between regional actors. At the same time, regions are seldom discussed critically, and it is difficult to identify whether regions refers to political-administrative regions or to a more open territorial category. In line with my interest in the transformation of development models from enterprise and/or organisational development to regional development, I find it important to discuss such questions. I will thus address this issue several times throughout the dissertation.

As a starting point in such discussions it is important to have in mind the key finding of the mid-term evaluation of the VC 2010 programme. The evaluation states that the realisation of the programme objectives has not been achieved regarding the ambitions of working on three levels: in-company organisational development and innovation, inter-company networking, and establishing regional development coalitions:

Regional development through strengthening the capabilities of regional actors is undoubtedly important, and there is every reason to believe that more and better research into these questions will allow us to improve performance. VS2010 [VC 2010] combines these ambitions in a single programme, aiming to work at the three levels of in-company organisational development and innovation, inter-company networking and establishing regional development coalitions. A key finding of this evaluation is that trying simultaneously to tackle all three levels is impractical. ... VS2010 shares the focus of its predecessor programme BU2000 [ED 2000] on promoting innovation within individual organisations and in inter-organisational networks. The aim of extending this to the regional partnership level has not been achieved. It takes time to establish the needed capabilities, relationships and trust, and it is likely that given more time the programme's influence at this level could increase somewhat. However, the limited appropriateness of the available researchers' skills, their comparative lack of interest in this level, lack of the resources needed to operate there and the presence of other, established support initiatives make it less than obvious that VS2010 is the right mechanism to use. (Arnold, Muscio, Nählinder, and Reid 2005)

2.3 Learning Regions as Development Coalitions

The VC 2010 approach to regional development is founded in the relations between two approaches, one based on organisational theory, the other on economic geography and regional innovation systems. Asheim (Asheim 2001: 77) suggests an explicit emphasis on the strong sides of two different approaches and the merging of these in order to enhance regional development:

However, while the economic geographic and the evolutionary economic approaches are strong on the innovation dimension, the action research approach of the socio-technical school has mainly focused on the organisational principle of broad participation. Thus, it is an important task to merge these approaches in order to obtain a coherent model or policy framework for formulations of partnership-based development strategies in order to achieve economic growth, employment generation as well as social cohesion.

This perspective is interpreted and articulated in the Agder project. The project, as described above, is based on the communicative approach to the facilitation of collaborative and partnership-based development processes in the region. This approach is more or less a direct translation of the enterprise development through broad participation perspective. Initially, there were no critical examinations of the relevance and applicability of this translated approach. A critical reflection has, however, developed, based on the experiences from the Agder project (Johnsen and Normann 2004; Johnsen et al. 2005), and I will return to this later in the chapter.

As an institutionalisation of a dialogical approach to regional development, development coalitions were organised on regional and sub-regional levels. In addition, and as a starting point for the establishing of coalitions, *dialogue conferences* were organised. Shotter and Gustavsen had previously developed dialog conferences as an approach to regional development. The concept of dialog conferences was related to the 'Learning Region' programme in Sweden (Shotter and Gustavsen 1999). Together, the concepts of *dialog conferences* (Shotter and Gustavsen 1999) and *development coalitions* (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999) became building blocks in the Agder VC 2010

project, both on a regional and municipal (sub-regional) level. In the following, these concepts will be discussed and related to the organisational design of the municipal development project in Vennesla.

2.3.1 *Dialogue and Development*

The VC 2010 programme is one of the latest research programmes related to the action-oriented work life discourse.⁹ In a book published in 1992, discussing the Swedish LOM (Leadership, Organization and Co-determination, a tripartite workplace development programme, 1985–1990), Gustavsen emphasises the historical development from the *field experiments* developed by Kurt Lewin and to another approach to change in the form called *broad programmes*. Field experiments were central in the early phase of the research done by the Tavistock group in England in the 1950s and in the Industrial Democracy Programme (Emery and Thorsrud 1976) in Norway in the 1960s. From the mid-1970s research programmes emerged in the Scandinavian context, with the following characteristics (Gustavsen 1992: 2):

- They are broadly defined efforts which seek to cover all major issues, organisational levels and interests groups within an enterprise.
- Many enterprises are involved in a pattern that encourages collaboration between enterprises.
- Research plays a role which is complimentary rather than leading.
- The efforts are not steered by one single ‘theory of organisation’. Furthermore, ‘theory’ can emerge as part of the process of change and does not have to be fully worked out in advance.
- Insofar as general theory plays a role, it is generative theory, i.e. theory about how to *create* local understanding and change.

⁹ VC 2010 was terminated in 2007 and the succeeded by the Programme for Regional R&D and Innovation (VRI).

- 'Results' are diffused along a number of different channels. The main emphasis is put on personal contacts between the people directly concerned.

In these characteristics there are some main elements which prepared the ground for what later became long-term work life research programmes in Norway, such as Enterprise 2000 and Value Creation 2010. Based on the emphasis on collaboration between participants, an additional characteristic could be identified. As a theoretical underpinning, a concept of communication was therefore developed.

Building on the communicative action approach (Habermas 1984), the idea of *democratic dialogue* is operationalised by Gustavsen (1992: 3) in a action-oriented approach in a work life context. The following arguments represent a comprehensive ontological and epistemological foundation for a dialogical approach to development (Gustavsen 1992: 3–4):

1. Dialogue is a process of exchange: ideas and arguments move to and fro between participants.
2. It must be possible for all concerned to participate.
3. The possibility for participation is, however, not enough. Everyone should also be active. Consequently, each participant has an obligation not only to put forth his or her own ideas but also to help others to contribute their ideas.
4. All participants are equal.
5. Work experience is the basis for participation. This is the only type of experience which, by definition, all participants have.
6. At least some of the experiences which each participant has when entering a dialogue must be considered legitimate.
7. It must be possible for everyone to develop an understanding of the issues at stake.

8. All arguments which pertain to the issues under discussion are legitimate. No argument should be rejected on the grounds that it emerges from an illegitimate source.
9. The points, arguments, etc., which are to enter a dialogue must be made by a participating actor. No one can participate 'on paper' only.
10. Each participant must accept that other participants could have better arguments.
11. The work role, authority, etc., of all of the participants can be made subject to discussion – no participants are exempt in this respect.
12. The participants should be able to tolerate an increasing degree of difference of opinion.
13. Dialogues must continuously produce arguments which can provide platforms for practical action. Note that there is no contradiction between this criterion and the previous one. The major strength of a democratic system compared to all others is that it has the benefit of drawing upon a broad range of opinions and ideas which inform practice, while at the same time is able to generate discussions which may gain the support of all participants.

In the LOM programme, the concept of *democratic dialogue* was converted into a set of action parameters: a) the establishment of networks between enterprises, b) the use of dialogue-conferences, c) launching collaborative projects, and d) building of broader networks.

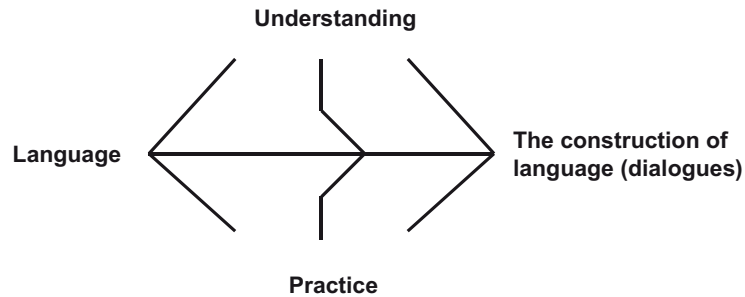
In the democratic dialogue concept an argument building on Habermas' communicative action approach could be identified (Habermas 1984): democratic dialogues in working life add to the discursive plurality of society and are regulated by structures defined by society. This is an important normative argument emphasising the importance of

democratic dialogue for development and change. As seen in the operationalisation of the democratic dialogue above, pluralism and diversity refer to the contents of the dialogue. This implies that among the participants there must be a grounded acceptance of diversity. A dialogue should therefore be a process of exchange: ideas and arguments move to and fro between the participants and it must be possible for everybody to develop an understanding of the issues at stake (Gustavsen 1992; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999).

Through the overlapping discourses on the role and usefulness of social research, the characteristics of 'good work', and the discourse on change in work life, Gustavsen (1992: 10) raises the question: *'How to create a better working life through processes of change to which research makes significant contributions?'*

Central to the answer to this question is the role of research. Gustavsen argues, in line with the critique of positivism made by Skjervheim (1976), that research exists within the framework of a specific language. It is this specific language that determines what is meaningful in a particular context: *'Consequently, a knowledge generation process must evolve together with a dialogue for the necessary restructuring of language to take place'* (Gustavsen 1992: 33). Building on Wittgenstein and his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953), emphasising that language emerges as an integrated part of human practice, Gustavsen establish a dialectical relation between dialogues and practices: *'From this it follows that language can, as a point of departure, not be restructured without a parallel restructuring of practice'* (1992: 34). In an action research approach, Gustavsen assumed that there is a link between the elements of language, understanding, practice, and the construction of language. He summarises this in a model establishing the links (Fig. 2-1): *'Understanding is linked to language, which in turn is linked to practice. Language, and hence understanding, can be changed, but only – in principle – by a mutually dependent development of language and practice where the dependence is mediated by dialogue'* (1992: 35).

Figure 2-1 Linking dialogues and practices



(Source: Gustavsen 1992: 35)

Gustavsen's argument is that dialogues have a crucial role in the processes where change in understanding and practice takes place. This represents an interesting approach to learning and knowledge generation. If learning is understood as a qualitative change in the understanding of a situation we find ourselves in and the practices we are involved in, dialogue (construction of language) becomes the prominent activity in learning processes.

The above argument is linked to the processes established through the VC 2010 programme (Gustavsen 2003). It is argued that the programme is mainly a learning process for regional partners, and one that establishes a broader set of dialogues, not as political discourses but as arenas for connecting parties in dialogues and learning. When fulfilled, a democratic process should lead to reflection and learning. The logic of this reasoning is found within John Dewey's works, where he links the ethics of participatory democracy into knowledge generation processes (Levin and Greenwood 2001). The model also indicates anticipated outcomes from these reflections and learning processes. This is in line with the argument of Kurt Lewin and John Dewey, that democracy is something that has to be learned anew for each generation. Lewin and Dewey also saw democracy as a much more difficult social structure to maintain than autocracy. Lewin believed that action research (AR) supports this learning, because AR increases our understanding of democracy. He considered AR as the experimental use of the social sciences to enhance democratic processes (Lewin 1948).

In light of this concept, democracy should not be comprehended in static and linear terms, but as a dynamic and interactive learning process, a process that requires conscious and long-term work. Learning is about developing understanding and reflective capacity to handle challenges.

2.3.2 Dialogue Conferences

Grounded in the theoretical approach outlined above, dialogue conferences represent an organisational structure used as a methodological 'tool' to facilitate such open reflexive dialogical processes. Two dialogue conferences were the point of departure in the case of Vennessla. I will briefly present some characteristics and criteria for the outline design of such conferences, in order to later discuss possible outcomes in relation to the experience from Vennessla.

In addition to the ground rules based on the idea of a 'democratic dialogue', some principles for the organisation of dialogue conferences are discussed (Gustavsen 1992; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999). First and foremost, it is important to prevent the establishment of hierarchy in terms of what is recognised as the most important knowledge, for example knowledge communicated through introductory lectures. The participants themselves constitute the resources of a dialogue conference and represent the relevant competence. The efforts aim at the development of an organisation. Time resources should be equally distributed and should be seen as a key resource. There should also be a distribution or rotation of tasks generated by the conference. Within the time frame some results should be reached, and all participants are equally responsible for this. There are basically two ways of working, discussions and conclusions and/or decision-making, where the latter is performed in groups. Decision-making presupposes a phase of synthesis. It should also be emphasised that discussion is important. Finally, these basic rules of dialogue conferences should not be presented 'up front', but rather should be implemented and 'shown' throughout the process.

What, then, can we expect to be the outcome of such democratic dialogues? I will, in line with Shotter and Gustavsen (1999), focus on the social processes and construction of meaning:

Our central concern in discussing 'dialogue conferences' ... has been with how those involved in them can gain an overall 'inner sense' of their region as a resourceful environment. ... The beginning of such a shared sense can be found, we have suggested, in the spontaneous relational-reactions of regional members to each other, in the course of the conference, beginnings which once noticed can be elaborated and refined. Indeed, something very special happens in the meeting and intertwining of two or more living, responsive consciousnesses with each other that cannot happen in any other way: a new 'world' is created. (Shotter and Gustavsen 1999: 28)

The focus is on outcomes as new relations and the creation of 'new worlds' and the intersubjectively shared constructions of meaning and knowledge. In addition, procedures and rules, based on the ideal model of a democratic dialogue, contribute to the legitimacy of a dialogue and the validity of the outcomes. This is also a forceful contribution of democratic dialogues to regional development and change processes.

2.3.3 Regional Development Coalitions

Below, I will continue to elaborate more explicitly on the concept of development coalition, building on Ennals and Gustavsen's (1999) book *Work Organization and Europe as a Development Coalition*.

The publication of *Work Organization and Europe as a Development Coalition* launched a new European research agenda. Rather than arguing for a stronger role for the state, or the market, Ennals and Gustavsen present a 'third way' based on networks and coalitions, exemplified using current European case studies which provide explanations for developments at the level of enterprises, regions and the European Union itself. The authors argue that 'development coalition' is one of a cluster of concepts that pertains to the ability of organisations to learn, innovate, and change (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999).

Ennals and Gustavsen trace the idea of development coalition from 'its roots in the diffusion problem surrounding experiments with new forms of work organisation, up to the broadly conceived types of inter-enterprise collaboration characterizing the front

line of today's processes of organization development' (1999: 57). They argue, 'it was a recognition of the importance of inter-enterprise processes that came to emphasise the need for a concept like development coalitions as something significant in its own right' (ibid.: 49). They link the concept to the idea of learning organisations:

In this sense, development coalitions, characterised by the ability to change and take on new forms, is linked to the idea of learning organizations and a historical development from the early phase of the socio-technical approach to organizational change in the 1960s to the network approach in contemporary organizational development. (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 49)

Pillars in 'Development Coalitions'

Within the work life research literature explored here, the concept of development coalitions express a reconceptualisation of what has been called the Scandinavian collaboration model in work life. The concept consists of several distinct arguments that together are the normative foundation of their approach to organizational change processes and the epistemological basis of the concept. I will now present some basic elements based on the elaboration in Ennals and Gustavsen (1999) and relate them to a wider scope of literature. I argue that these elements represent some pillars on which the concept rests, and should be understood as a representation of a distinct and comprehensive theoretical and epistemological approach to organisational change.

The idea of 'learning organisations':

As an expression of the idea of learning organization, development coalitions are fluid, transitional, continuously reshaping themselves to meet new challenges. Essentially they are made up of horizontal relationships, constituting channels through which information flows, experiences are compared and new solutions are worked out, through extracting the best out of a broad range of experience and ideas. (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 57)

Ennals and Gustavsen define a learning organisation in the following way:

A dynamic flexible 'learning organization' can be defined as one that promotes the learning of all its members and has the capacity of continuous transforming itself by rapidly adapting to changing environments by adapting and developing innovations. (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 114)

Development coalitions are thus closely linked to the organisational development literature¹⁰ and theories on learning organisations¹¹ (Schön 1973; Senge 1990) or organisational learning (Argyris and Schön 1996).

The merging of theory and practice: It is a distinct aspect of the conceptualisation of development coalitions that a constructive meeting should occur between theory and practice, between researchers and practitioners. The approach is founded on the assumption in pragmatism about the false dichotomy of knowledge and action, and thus on an argument for the integration of knowledge and action in organisational (and regional) development.

The participation of those involved in a change process: Broad participation and the possibility for all those affected by a given change to take part in the change and development process is highlighted. This approach is thus oriented towards a bottom-up process, characterised by participatory and democratic principles. This is a strong normative element in the concept of development coalitions and builds on the legacy of the 'industrial democracy' tradition (Emery and Thorsrud 1976; Pateman 1970).

The relevance of field experiments: Implicit in the conceptualisation of development coalitions is a pragmatist's perspective that builds on the idea of knowledge creation from practical action and learning from concrete problem solving experience. This relates to the work of

¹⁰ Schön (1973), in his idea of the 'learning society', addresses the loss of the stable state and the uncertainty that appears when constancy in central aspects of our lives changes. He emphasises the 'dynamic conservatism' of institutions or the tendency to fight to remain the same. He provides a theoretical framework linking the experience of living in a situation of an increasing change to the need for learning. I shall return to this approach when I address learning in planning.

¹¹ 'Learning organizations [are] organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.' (Senge 1990: 3)

Kurt Lewin (Lewin 1948), developed in the industrial democracy tradition as an approach to implementing an alternative rationalism to Taylorism (Taylor 1911).¹²

The potential of local theory: There is an emphasis on the importance of local, contextual knowledge as the basis for change in the development coalition concept. This is in contrast to imported concepts and ideas common in organisational development literature (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 1996). Instead, a reference is made to 'local theory' (Geertz 1983) and an immanent potential to mobilise local resources in development activities.

The internal and external relations: Linked to the two elements above, an emphasis can be identified in the concept on both internal and external linkages. That is, a shift from focusing on individuals at specific workplaces involved in efforts at change to focusing on the relations with others in an enterprise, making an enterprise as a whole the unit within which social relations to promote change have to be created. This in turn goes beyond the individual enterprise, towards network co-operation between enterprises and regions as the 'unit of change' (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 29).

Action as a constructivist activity: Instead of seeing action as simply a form of implementation of identified reasons, action is seen as a constructivist activity. Through the medium of language, ideas, experience, and problems are constructed. That is, discussions are to the foreground and the main figure in change is a 'discourse formation', often with a substantial number of actors (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 31).

The role of research in development coalitions: The role of research in development coalitions concerns the relevance of field experiments. This approach, related to the work of Kurt Lewin and the inspiration he gave to an action research approach, is an important element in this tradition:

¹² Frederick Winslow Taylor published his ideas in *The Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911, arguing that to prove the best management should be seen as a true science. Scientific management rests upon the foundation of clearly defined laws, rules and principles.

Essentially, we see the role of the researcher in the light of the main concept of the study: as partner in development coalitions. In a development coalition the point is not to become alike but to pool resources, supplement each other, help each other, provide complimentary resources. (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 33–34)

Ennals and Gustavsen elaborate further on the role of research in the context of establishing development organisations. They emphasise these tasks as follows (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 175):

- Help set up arenas for dialogue
- Help create frames of reference for placing enterprises in alternating figure-ground relationships to each other
- Help create, test, and use methodologies and forms of work according to what a given process requires
- Help perform evaluations and other efforts to assess the speed and scope of a processes, within frameworks agreed upon by all the partners
- Help develop knowledge about development coalitions, ranging from important groups in specific workplaces to ‘learning regions’.

I have identified eight pillars in the conceptualisation of development coalitions, among which there are four main sources or groundings:

- An explicit link to the *learning perspective* in organisational development
- An *experimental approach* and the knowledge-action relations of pragmatism
- A *dialogical or communicative turn* in enterprise development emphasising the importance of discussions as a constructivist activity
- An action research approach.

2.4 A Model for Regional Development

The merging of two distinct research traditions thus constitutes the Agder project. The project is inspired by a research tradition related to organisational development and work life, and research on regional development and regional innovation systems. Two distinct theoretical discourses and empirical contexts are merged in a third approach. The question is, what do we get from this merging of theories and approaches to research. First of all, emphasis is put on the regional level and collaborative organisational innovations in order to support economic growth and enterprise development. Second, the conceptual framework and research strategies of the work life research approach are seen as important in regional development processes. This implies an action research strategy, and a bottom-up approach to regional development. In order to transform and support change processes, a more proactive approach to regional development is needed. This is valid for the role of both research and other development agents. It reflects a need to develop more actionable knowledge with relevance for regional practice. An argument for actionable knowledge is seen in both academic and policy making discourses (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzmann, Scott, and Martin 1994; Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons 2001). This might be a more realistic perspective on regional change and economic growth in contrast to imported conceptual frameworks which have been applied throughout the history of regional development in Norway. The most important element in the 'third way' to regional development is, however, the shift from the descriptive to a participatory role of research.

Our development model was presented in our application to the VC 2010 programme in 2001 (Johnsen and Normann 2001a; Johnsen and Normann 2001b). We argued that in order to enhance development at Agder we needed to mobilise knowledge on different levels. More specifically, our goal was to: develop existing knowledge in businesses through broad participation, develop new forms of cooperation between businesses, build relations between businesses and research institutions and/or universities, enhance coordination in the public sector, and build relations between public sector and business. The two latter goals were addressed in close collaboration with the regional and local authorities trying to establish new collaborative development projects within the VC

2010 programme. The Vennesla project became the only project at municipal level to be established on this basis.¹³

Our development model was inspired by business strategy. We intended to use communication as a tool and to stage communicative and learning processes with different phases. We foresaw five development phases that would represent a learning loop: 1) initiation, 2) design, 3) involvement and legitimating, 4) implementation, and 5) evaluation. These learning loops were related to our research questions. As a research group, we wanted to address the issues of development through a better understanding of the development dynamics between the different actors and institutions in the region: the regional development coalition, sub-region coalitions, business networks, and business internal processes. In addition, we initiated a debate on regional economic development, introducing new concepts in innovation, such as learning regions and regional innovation systems.

2.5 Dialogue and Development – a Learning Perspective

In order to link the dialogical development concept to learning, the key focus in this thesis, I distinguish between different types of learning. In a more basic discussion, I relate my approach to learning to two different philosophical positions, one related to the linguistic turn and a communicative action theory, the other to the tradition of American pragmatism. In the next section I aim to make a clearer distinction between these two philosophical positions.

2.5.1 An Epistemological Synthesis – Pragmatism and Linguistic

Pragmatics

I will try to make a distinction between the philosophical positions that underlie the concepts that have been discussed. American pragmatism, as it was developed by Charles Sander Peirce, William James and John Dewey, takes a starting point in the

¹³ It is difficult to give a single reason why Vennesla Municipality became the only municipal project but the timing of the initial contact was important. It also became a strategy in the Agder region to focus resources on a long-term engagement instead of on several short-term projects.

empirical testing of truths. Only truths that prove to be useful in life are entitled to be called truths. In contrast, Habermas relates to philosophy of language in his communicative action theory, also called a transcendental-pragmatics/philosophical-pragmatics, related to the 'linguistic turn'. A main element in this pragmatic philosophy is that the meaning of sentences cannot be isolated from the use of the sentences in communication. This turns the attention to the use of language and has been called the 'pragmatic turn' by Habermas (1984). Drawing on the influence from Wittgenstein and others, Habermas seeks the meaning of sentences in the practices of communication in which the expressions find its use.

My aim here is to make an epistemological distinction in order to identify how pragmatics are positioned in relation to the knowledge generation. It is not a sharp distinction, but rather an attempt to identify nuances which I argue have impact on the form that learning takes in the context of local (municipal) development and planning.

First, pragmatism denotes a concern for the practical, taking human action and its consequences as the basic measure of truth, value, etc. On this basis, Rorty rejects the need for a philosophical concept of truth, including an 'idealised' correspondence between justification and truth as seen in Habermas. A justification is enough, according to Rorty (Rorty and Skirbekk 2004; Skirbekk 2004):

The idea of going beyond context-dependent validity claims and an unlimited audience is rejected as impossible and unnecessary. (Rorty and Skirbekk 2004: 5–6; my translation)

In relation to the concept of *truth*, this emphasises an important difference between Habermas and American pragmatism as represented by Rorty.

Second, the concept of *action* represents a difference. In emphasising practical human actions, American pragmatism operates with a broader definition of action than a communicative (discursive) approach. In the concept of *communicative action*, Habermas (1984) offers procedures and conditions for democratic dialogues. In order to establish a justification for claims to truth, communicative rationality is seen as equivalent to truths merely based on facts. The concept of communicative action thus

represents conditions for the constitution of truth. This is a more limited concept of action than found in the philosophy of pragmatism. Reason and Bradbury (Reason and Bradbury 2001) refer to the Scottish philosopher Macmurray, claiming that in acting both the body and the mind are in action. Action is thus a full concrete activity of the self in which all our capacities are employed. This point is similar to the one made by Levin and Greenwood (2001; Greenwood and Levin 1998) referring to Dewey, Rorty, and other pragmatist philosophers. They emphasise that pragmatism unites theory and practice in an integrated knowledge production process, and that the central actions taken are *purposeful and aim at creating desired outcomes*, evaluated according to how well they produce those outcomes (Levin and Greenwood 2001: 104). However, both communicative action and purposeful action in the pragmatist sense share an understanding of action as both reflexive and intentional.

Third, the nature of knowing is related to the action approach, calling for an extended epistemology when we draw on diverse forms of knowing, encountering and acting in our world. With lines back to Aristotle and the concept of ‘*phronesis*’,¹⁴ Polanyi (Polanyi 1964; Polanyi 1966) describes his concept of *tacit knowledge* as a type of embodied know-how that is the foundation of all cognitive action.

Thus far, my aim has been to identify some main elements in the two positions selected as the ontological and epistemological grounding of my further analysis of the case study. First, the position of pragmatism and the significance of human action, understood as purposeful activities in order to solve local problems and the establishment of learning loops, is identified as central in the action research approach. However, I identify a second and complimentary perspective, which is based on Habermas and the communicative action theory focusing on discourses. The purpose is to distinguish between two analytical perspectives, thereby giving me the opportunity to present complimentary arguments about the nature of learning in development projects.

¹⁴ I will return to a discussion about the concept of ‘*phronesis*’ later in the method chapter (Chapter 4)

2.6 Learning in Regional Development Coalitions

The main features of the development process presented above are aimed at enhancing learning among the participants in the process. Yet what kind of theory about learning does such a perspective on change and development subscribe to and build its argumentation on? We still lack a theoretical perspective on what learning is and what kind of learning occurs in relation to the process.

As a starting point to my discussion on the concept of learning, I address a theoretical contribution to the importance of learning in local and regional development and planning. The concept of *learning regions* has been widely applied in the regional development literature in recent years (Asheim 1996, 2001; Florida 1995). The concept indicates an emphasis on a learning dimension in regional development processes based on references to both empirical and normative assumptions. In the following, I present the concept of learning regions and critically discuss the perspective on learning in the literature on learning regions.

The concept of learning region was introduced and coined in 1995 by Richard Florida in an article titled 'Towards the learning region' (Florida 1995). The concept emphasises a perspective on innovation through interaction and collective learning in regional clusters and networks in order to promote the innovativeness and competitiveness of firms and regions in the globalising learning economy (Asheim 1996; Asheim 2001; Asheim and Isaksen 1997). This approach was inspired by the economic development in the 'Third Italy', emphasising the importance of collaboration between small and medium sized enterprises in industrial districts (Piore and Sabel 1984), in order to strengthen their role in global competition. Florida defines learning regions as:

collectors and repositories of knowledge and ideas [which] provide an underlying environment or infrastructure which facilitates the flow of knowledge, ideas and learning. (Florida 1995: 528)

Asheim (2001) identifies two building blocks in the concept of 'learning region', in addition to the approach of geographers represented by Florida (1995). The second approach relates to the emerging knowledge and learning-based economy (Lundvall and

Johnson 1994) and cluster theories (Porter 1990), while the third approach is reflected in the emerging literature on regionally based development coalitions, coming from the socio-technical school of organisational learning. In relation to the latter approach, Asheim argues:

Learning regions should be looked upon as a policy framework or model for formulations of long term partnership-based development strategies initiating learning-based processes of innovation, change and improvement. In the promotion of such innovation supportive regions the inter-linking of co-operative partnerships ranging from work organisations inside firms via inter-firm networks to different actors of the community, understood as 'regional development coalitions', will be of strategic importance. (Asheim 2001:76)

All blocks in the concept of learning regions build on the assumption of innovation as an interactive learning process and an emphasis of learning as a localised process embedded in a regional and/or local context.

The problem is, however, that the concept of learning region, building on a learning-based process of innovation implicit in all approaches to the concept, lacks an explicit theory of learning. The collaborative and interactive processes between firms are tagged as learning processes without addressing the question of what learning is and how it happens in this particular regional context. The 'learning region' literature (Asheim 1996, 2001; Florida 1995) expresses a normative argument about the importance of interactive learning processes in regions in order to promote economic growth and prosperity but fails to develop a thorough understanding of the concept of learning. That is, they fail to address both how participants learn on an individual level and most importantly on a collective or systemic level through interactive and collaborative processes and how such social learning processes could be facilitated. These critical reflections on the concept of learning in regional development concepts and innovation system theory have been addressed particularly by Åke Uhlin (Uhlin 1996; Uhlin 2000), also together with Jan-Evert Nilsson (Nilsson and Uhlin 2002).

I agree with the point made that learning is important in order to promote local and regional development, as stated in the learning region perspective. However, I argue

that in order to understand and facilitate local and regional development and planning as learning processes, an explicit learning theory should be developed in order to address how learning is possible on such a collective or systemic level. I find it problematic to explore learning as an individual and instrumental activity interpreted as one means among others in the development of regional advantages. I find it more promising to explore learning as woven into contextual processes, and thus a heterogeneous and deeply cultural embedded activity. In the following, I will continue to explore a framework for the analysis of social learning processes in regional development and planning.

My starting point is Mezirow's definition of learning:

Learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action. (Mezirow 1991: 12)

2.7 Social Learning Theory

2.7.1 Introduction

The focus on individuals as seen in Mezirow's definition of learning (1991) apparently fails to address an important challenge when studying collective or social processes. As seen in the dialogical approach focusing on the social construction of meaning (Gustavsen 1992; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999), learning seems to be a social product, evolving through social interaction. This perspective is related to the broad group of social learning theories associated with American pragmatism, especially with John Dewey, and the Soviet cultural-historical school represented by Lev Vygotsky in particular. What is most important in these social learning theories is that it is impossible to separate individual learning from collective learning processes. Learning is thus a process in which action is mediated in relation to the social and cultural context it is a part of. Again, language and dialogues are the key transmitters in learning processes.

In this study, my focus is on the social learning processes. I am interested in social learning because it bridges the gap between individual actors participating in municipal development and collective processes organised to mobilise for change. The fundamental viewpoint is that knowledge develops through social interaction, taking place or 'localised' in a particular context. In order to address social learning processes some theoretical perspectives will be presented in the remaining part of this chapter. My main reference is to the organisational learning theory of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1996). Their focus on learning through the conceptualisation of single- and double-loop learning provides a frame that is elaborated in order to contrast different levels of learning.

In order to frame the theoretical approach under study, Table (2-1) is presented. The key category in the Table will be presented successively below.¹⁵

¹⁵ Cogenerative learning is closely related to the action research strategy and will be presented in Chapter 4 (Methods and Action Research Strategy)

Table 2-1 Comparing Social Learning Theory

	Single-loop learning	Double-loop learning	Cogenerative learning
Perspective on learning	Learning from experience: 'learning by doing'	Meta-learning, learning to learn, or second order learning	Co-generation of knowledge through a collaborative process
Phenomena described	Action and reflection circles	Shifts from single-loop, or first order learning, to double-loop learning through dialogue, questioning the initial problem definition	Learning through action-reflection circles/in and on action through interaction on communicative arenas
Factors considered	Continuous circles of action and reflection	Changing contexts through reconstruction of meaning	Continuous circles of cogeneration of knowledge
Underlying assumptions	Instrumental, problem oriented	A communicative and contextual approach, emphasising the shift to the social construction of knowledge	Pragmatic action research, social constructivism

2.7.2 Organisational Learning

One of the most predominant approaches to social learning is the action science (Argyris, Putnam, and Smith 1985) and organisational learning approach of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (Argyris and Schon 1978; Argyris and Schön 1996). These authors have also been very influential in the action research literature, providing a line of development from the action research approach of Kurt Lewin and pragmatic philosophy. In the next section, I present the ideas of Argyris and Schön based on their second book *Organizational Learning II* published in 1996, because it links

perspectives on action science (Argyris, Putnam, and Smith 1985), reflective practice (Schön 1983; Schön 1987), and organisational learning (Argyris and Schön 1996).

In the Preface to the 1996 edition of *Organizational Learning II* Argyris and Schön state that the idea of organisational learning has shifted from being a 'rare species' to conventional wisdom in organisational research since they first published their book *Organizational Learning* in 1978 (Argyris and Schon 1978):

Now in the mid-1990s, it is conventional wisdom that business firms, governments, nongovernmental organizations, schools, health care systems, regions, even whole nations and supranational institutions need to adapt to changing environments, draw lessons from past success and failures, detect and correct the errors of the past, anticipate and respond to impending threats, conduct experiments, engage in continuing innovations, build and realize images of a desirable future.

As a starting point, they list the main elements of their approach to organisational learning (ibid.: xxi–xxiii), which refers to organisations' acquisition of understandings, know-how, techniques, and practices of any kind and by whatever means. It is normative and practice oriented, determinate to investigate the generation of productive organisational learning in real-world organisations. Argyris and Schön adopt a method of research combining directly observable behaviour in particular cases aimed at producing generalisable, empirically disconfirmable propositions. They take the individual practitioner as the starting point because it is the latter's thinking and acting that influences the acquisition of the capability for productive learning at organisational level. They apply an approach to causality that goes in two directions: the learning of individuals who interact with one another on an organisational level, which feeds back to influence learning on an individual level. This also implies the importance of organisational culture, including environments for knowledge, attitudes, and values, but also organisational artefacts such as maps, memories and programmes.

Argyris and Schön's focus is on organisational inquiry, in a Deweyan sense, through the intertwining of thought and action. They emphasise, within the process of inquiry, the special importance of surprise, the mismatch of outcome to expectations, which they see

as essential to the process by which people can come to see, think, and act in new ways. Further, they recognise the importance of distinguishing between coming to see things in a new way and coming to act on the basis of new insight. Finally, their approach focuses on both single- and double-loop learning. Some kinds of learning take place within existing systems of values and the action frames in which values are embedded, while other kinds of learning involve changes in values and frames and argue for reflective inquiry that cuts across incongruent frames. In addition, Argyris and Schön emphasise the complex interactions between types of single- and double-loop learning.

One kind of double-loop learning consists of restructuring values and fundamental assumptions built into an organization's theory-in-use, which includes its strategy, values, views of its environment, and understanding of its own competence. (Argyris and Schön 1978: xxiii)

Argyris and Schön hold the view that organisational double-loop learning depends on the 'organisational learning system', and that learning systems may promote or inhibit organisational double-loop learning. They claim it is '*primarily constrained by the inquiry-inhibiting theory-in-use that shapes normal patterns of organizational inquiry under conditions of threat or embarrassment*' (1978: xxiv). In the following, I will elaborate on some key concepts in the organisation learning approach.

Argyris and Schön distinguish between two forms of action theory, 'espoused theory' and 'theory-in-use', applied on both an individual and organisational level. They emphasise the distinction between the way people as individuals or collectives explain or justify a given pattern of activities (espoused theory), and how an observer constructs a theory of action implicit in the performance of patterns of activities that she/he observes (theory-in-use).

The potential for conflict between the above-mentioned forms of action theories is important in order to reveal tensions and to overcome the problems of starting critical inquiries into a group's own actions. According to Argyris and Schön, it is in 'defensive reasoning' revealed in the conflict between espoused theory and theory-in-use that important mechanisms of learning might be discovered. It is, however, in the theory-in-

use that the authors find the strongest potential for change and the most powerful explanation of behaviour.

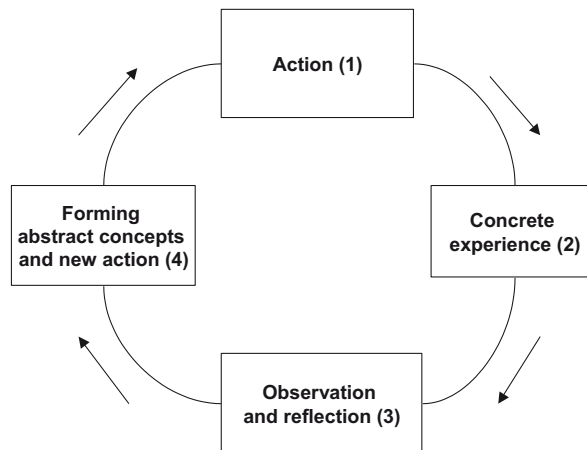
2.7.3 *Single-loop Learning*

In the concepts of single- and double-loop learning, Argyris and Schön distinguish between what they find to be two distinct and different way of learning in organisations.

Single-loop learning refers to the type of instrumental learning that changes strategies of action and behaviour but proves incapable of questioning the behavioural strategies (or theory of action) that initially bring about a problematic situation.

Single-loop learning is closely related to the type of learning emphasising continuous circles between action and reflection. Reflective learning builds on the past and includes four basic sequences in a learning circle: (1) action, (2) concrete experience, (3) reflective observation, and (4) abstract conceptualisation, and new action (Kolb 1984). According to Kolb (1984: 38), '*Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*'.

Figure 2-2 Reflective learning (Kolb 1984)



The basic learning model shown in Fig. 2–2 summarises variations in learning cycles in reflective learning. It is also an important starting point in the widely applied organisational learning theory of Argyris and Schön (1996).

2.7.4 *Double-loop Learning*

Double-loop learning refers to feedback loops that connect the observed effects of action with behavioural strategies and governing values. Thus, it refers to the reformulation and reframing of a given initial problem or task.

In the organisational learning approach, the ability to foster double-loop learning is emphasised. In order to develop a conceptual frame through which we can understand the nature of the contrasting environments for learning, Argyris and Schön discuss the characteristics of both ‘theory-in-use’ and the ‘learning systems’ connected to the single- and double-loop types of learning.

The action approach to learning presented by Argyris and Schön builds on a social theory emphasising the defensive reactions to change and perceived threats.¹⁶ These mechanisms constitute barriers to the realisation of an idealised model of double-loop learning. They address important issues such as trust and security as social psychological prerequisites for the quality of the learning process. I will, however, emphasise Argyris and Schön’s notion about the importance of *meta-learning*, or *learning how to learn*. Argyris and Schön (1996) build on Gregory Bateson’s work (Bateson 1972) and what he calls *deuterolearning*. Deuterolearning is second-order learning, or ‘learning how to learn’. Argyris and Schön relate this closely to an organisational *double-loop learning*, or ‘organisational deuterolearning’, depending on an ‘individual deuterolearning’ that in turn relates to a shift from a defensive behaviour (Model I, theory-in-use) to more collective and collaborative strategies of behaviour (Model II, theory-in-use): ‘*These correlated shifts are at the heart of the concerns that have led us to write this book*’ (Argyris and Schön 1996: 29).

¹⁶ See Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985)

I will address what I see as limits of the reflective learning approach. First, I will discuss the problems of reflective processes focusing on an individual learning process. It is important to recognise the collective learning process in relation to a collaborative approach to planning. Second, I will address the instrumental and objectivistic elements in the reflective learning process. My argument is that an additional approach taking into account a meta-learning perspective could enable complimentary analysis of the learning processes.

In Gregory Bateson's (1972) learning theory we find ideas particularly relevant to understanding how meaning schemes or meaning perspectives are transformed. Bateson's learning theory rests centrally on changes of context as much as on the mere acquisition of data (Mezirow 1991: 89). Bateson argues that we each create our own world in that we look at our reality through our own presuppositions, premises, and expectations; these form the context in which we learn. We open ourselves to some interpretations but block out others that make us feel uncomfortable, and often fail to recognise that our own perceptions are only partial. Bateson insists on the crucial importance of our inescapable biases, or what he called our own parochialisms (Bateson 1972; Mezirow 1991). Bateson acknowledges the importance of communication which anticipated Habermas, in the processes of consensual validation of our parochialisms through which we separate ourselves from reality and the perspectives of others.

The above discussion suggests that a meta-learning approach with attention to the question of 'learning to learn' should be understood in relation to the context in which learning processes take place.¹⁷ This adds an important element to the understanding of learning. Reflections on new experiences from practice and an experimental approach to local development cannot in themselves bring about double-loop learning. Actions and experiences need to be related closely to the context that constitutes the construction of meaning in a particular place in order to enable the collective reformulation of problems

¹⁷ Amdam (2005: 156–157) relates Bateson's work (1972) and his concept of *deutero learning* to learning on an institutional level and institutional planning, i.e. planning the planning process, establishing a system for learning on operative, tactical, strategic, and institutional level. This could thus contribute to the justification (legitimisation) of the planning process and the existence of the planning institution.

identified in the initial phase. Only through the questioning of the premises that constitute the problems identified, can a double-loop learning process (and thereby a meta-learning process) unfold.¹⁸ This means that learning needs to be contextualised and understood in terms of the social construction of knowledge through interaction (Berger and Luckmann 1967). When the focus shifts to the social processes of knowledge construction embedded in the context in which this interaction takes place, a new perspective on learning emerges. This perspective adds a new dimension to the more instrumental problem solving approach of the reflective learning theory. It also implies a shift from a more individual to a more collective process building on communicative processes.

I will emphasise the importance of a shift to a social constructivist position that follows with the contextualisation of the learning process. This supports the argument that knowledge and understanding are produced through collaborative social learning processes (Healey 2006). I will emphasise the dialogical process of questioning the context, building on the reflection based on experiences. This is in contrast to the instrumental and objectivist position that is often immanent in a reflective learning model (Schön 1983).

¹⁸ Bateson identifies four categories of learning:

Zero Learning: extending a pre-existing habitual response (meaning scheme) to cover additional facts.

Learning I: includes learning about our own habitual responses, but still learning within our meaning schemes and perspectives do not change. Would thus involve thoughtful action without reflection.

Learning II: involves learning about contexts (meaning schemes) and thus may change the premises we base our learning upon, although we are unaware of such changes. As a consequence, we learn how to learn in a different way. Learning II might be interpreted as involving content or process reflection, the process by which we make changes in our meaning schemes (Mezirow 1991: 91).

Learning III: involves learning about the context of context, and the awareness of the premises on how we perceive the world. It is thus a process of perspective transformations.

2.7.5 How to Get from Single-loop to Double-loop Learning

The simple question of how we get from Single-loop to Double-loop Learning is complex in nature. It is, of course, not possible to turn organisations into learning systems that enhance double-loop learning overnight. The answer Argyris and Schön bring to the table is a model of intervention. In order to explain the different modes of learning, they identify different learning systems.

Argyris and Schön find that when human beings deal with issues that are threatening or embarrassing, their reasoning and actions conform to a particular model of theory-in-use that the authors call Model I. The model refers to a unilateral strategy and protection of actions leading to defensive behaviour and norms. It characterises an environment that is based on a single-loop learning strategies that in turn decrease the long-term effects. Thus, it is an environment of hostility, individualisation, distrust, and a lack of risk taking. According to the authors, Model I is a common theory-in-use but seldom espoused.

Connected to the Model I action theory, Argyris and Schön framed the Model O(rganizational)-I learning system, which is a system that inhabits the double-loop type of learning, of reasons embedded in the Model I action theory. It is a system that is highly unlikely to learn to alter governing variables, norms, and assumptions that are required if double-loop learning should occur. In order to overcome the resistance of Model I theory-in-use, and to move from a limited to a more productive learning system, the authors call for an alternative learning system, one that moves towards a Model O(rganisational)-II. This presupposes a shift from Model I to Model II theory of action.

Model II values are not the opposite of those in Model I, but relate to valid information, free and informal choice, and internal commitment. This is a commitment towards more collective and collaborative strategies of behaviour, and a sharing of knowledge and power unknown in a system of unilateral control. It highlights the sharing of problems that lead to productive inquiry, and is evaluated in terms of the degree to which it helps individuals involved generate valid and useful information.

In order to overcome the forces that inhabit double-loop learning, Argyris and Schön frame an alternative learning system, Model O(rganizational)-II. In Model O(rganizational)-II, the focus is on the ability to produce double-loop learning through individuals who collectively act out the characteristics of a Model-II theory-in-use.

Argyris and Schön distinguish between limited and comprehensive interventions, although admit that their intervention theory is ‘extremely primitive’ (1996: 112). Their interventions refer to the enhancement of Model II theory-in-use. In order to make this move to Model II, the authors prescribe an action research strategy, and in collaboration with the participants, bring about an awareness of the Model I theory-in-use characteristics of an organisation. This implies a focus on how practitioners could become more reflective inquirers into their own practice.¹⁹ Accordingly, Argyris and Schön this strategy to what they regard as both an effective research approach and a model of reflective practice by making references to the theory of inquiry developed by John Dewey (1938). Dewey emphasised inquiry as both mental reasoning and action, highlighting the inquirer as an actor, not a spectator. A learning outcome from inquiries thus yields both thought and action.

2.8 ‘Simple’ and ‘Radical’ Learning

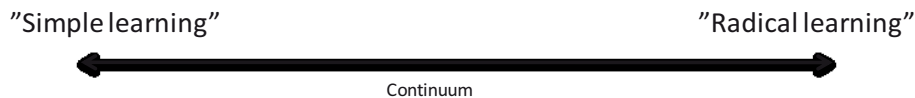
I have identified two perspectives on learning. The first is a theory of reflective learning and single-loop learning grounded in a pragmatist approach. In the following chapters I term this *simple learning*. I have identified the second perspective as a meta-learning approach emphasising dialogue and context in collaborative social (double-loop) ‘learning to learn’ processes. In the following chapters I term this *radical learning*.

I have also made a distinction between learning and the organisation and facilitation of learning. The ‘conditions’ for learning consist of both an organisational model, that is the participatory and dialogue-based approach, and motivation among the participants for collective and collaborative strategies of behaviour.

¹⁹ In Argyris, Putnam, and Smith’s book *Action Science* Argyris, Chris, Robert Putnam, and Diana McLain Smith. 1985. *Action science*. San Francisco, : Jossey-Bass. the key concept connected to such interventions is ‘confronting’.

In the analysis of the learning process I will relate my data to the continuous line between ‘simple learning’ and ‘radical learning’ (see Fig. 2–1).

Figure 2-1 Learning categories



Where the learning process is placed on the continuous line is in accordance with the theory presented and affected by the strategies taken:

- A dialogical approach opens possibilities for reasoning that go beyond a ‘learning by doing’ perspective related to ‘simple learning’ and embeds actions in local realities and identities, thereby contributing to a more ‘radical learning’ process.
- A pragmatist approach focuses on action and collective learning through experimental design, and thereby contributes to a more ‘radical learning’ outcome.
- A focus on learning through action, with emphasis on the social construction of knowledge through dialogue, takes the learning process towards a more radical result.

In this chapter, two interlinked issues have been discussed. First, a research programme and a distinct tradition within work life research have been presented and reviewed. The historical development of the industrial democracy tradition has been outlined, with the distinct features of the action research approach related to this tradition.

In addition, I have suggested that learning processes are both central in the industrial democracy model, particularly in the strategy of action research. I have thus identified learning theory related to the industrial democracy tradition and discussed the features of these learning theories.

My main interest is however social learning as collective and discursive processes. An argument for the close relationship between individual and collective learning has been developed in this chapter. First and foremost, this is based on the perspective of social

constructivism (Berger and Luckman 1967). Learning is seen as interactive, and a division between individual and collective level is thus abolished to some extent.

An important point to make is that what I intend to analyse is not simple or radical learning understood as individual psychological processes but rather social learning as collective and discursive processes.

One distinct observation relates to the importance of a shift from simple to radical learning, or in other words, the realisation of meta-learning (deuteron learning). I have identified this shift as closely related to the contextualisation of learning processes. In order to explore the elements constituting the local context in the study of a municipal restructuring project, I now turn to what I see as important conditions for learning. In this particular study, these conditions relate to the differences between an industrial context and a municipal context, and the activation of additional theories on place, planning, and governance.

3 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT INSPIRED BY INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

Without acknowledgement of the cultural embedding of reasoning processes, Schön's double-loop learning becomes an exercise in the more effective domination of the powerful. (Healey 2006: 264)

3.1 Introduction

The conceptualisation of a regional development model based on broad participation, linked to the idea of industrial democracy, is the foundation of the VC 2010 Agder approach to regional and municipal planning. There is, however, an important challenge related to the application of this approach to change and development in this particular context. My aim is to discuss some differences between the context of the industrial democracy model and a municipality context relevant to the development process in question, and the conditions for learning in a municipal planning context in particular. Accordingly, two interlinked aspects are discussed, the differences in context and the implications of these differences for learning.

I have identified three related and broad elements that constitute my understanding of context in this particular case: a) the turn from government to governance and changes in the *political economy*, b) the importance of *place and time* to local and regional development, and c) the *planning practice* established in the regional or municipal setting. I anticipate that a development model aimed at facilitating learning and

organisational change, based on the idea of industrial democracy in work life, faces the challenges of qualitatively different contexts. I address the implication of context to learning and the facilitation of learning processes.

In this chapter, I find it relevant to address theories about planning, regional governance and conceptualisations of place in order to make a contrast between the industrial democracy tradition and these theories. The relevance of planning relates to the established practices and discourses on development and change processes on a local and regional level, practices and discourses which application of the industrial democracy model meets and needs to relate to when applied in this new context. These planning processes are closely linked to models of regional governance. Regional governance is thus the organisational structures that planning processes take place within. I find it also relevant to discuss conceptualisation of place. Place, or localisation, represents the economic, political, social, and cultural contexts that frame a planning process. It is, however, not a constant context but dynamic and reproduced through social interaction.

Although knowledge from the application of a industrial development model or elements such as dialogue conferences and development coalitions, aimed at broad participation, in the regional context has been gained previously (e.g. Ennals and Gustavsen 1999; Fricke and Totterdill 2004; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999), the challenges of the new context have not been discussed thoroughly by many researchers. The challenges identified in the new regional context are, however, addressed in several publications by the VC 2010 research team at Agder Research (Johnsen et al. 2005; Johnsen and Normann 2004; Johnsen, Normann, and Fosse 2005).²⁰ There is a need to

²⁰ It is not the first time an action research strategy has been applied in a community development project. In the 1980s several municipalities collaborated with researchers from a Norwegian university in what has been called the Community Development Projects (Nærmiljøforsøkene). The projects concentrated mainly on the mobilisation of local resources (Almås, Reidar. 1985. *Evaluering av lokalt utviklingsarbeid : erfaringar frå Budal, Mausundvær og Salsbruket*. Trondheim, Levin, Morten. 1988. *Lokal mobilisering*. Trondheim: Institutt for industriell miljøforskning.) in the context of depopulation problems and economic decline. Critique was raised both from the researcher themselves (Almås 1985) and from outside (Hansen, J.K. and T. Selstad. 1999. *Regional omstilling- strukturbestemt eller styrbar?* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.) towards the project based on the problems of continuity in the development work in the period after the researchers had left the municipalities. In that sense, the mobilisation had only a limited effect on the community development.

thoroughly understand the potential of and barriers to the industrial democracy concept in order to enhance learning and change in regional planning. This knowledge could contribute to the facilitation of learning in planning.

3.2 Changing Condition for Local and Regional Development

I argue that there are two main debates in regional policy that are central to the discussion on local and regional development. These debates concern the *territorial impacts of economic change* and *political and institutional aspects of local and regional change*. I will address these debates in the following discussion, and emphasise the latter debate in particular in order to argue for some main challenges relating to a planning approach to local (municipal) development.

3.2.1 Territorial Impacts of Economic Change

According to Herrschel and Newman (Herrschel and Newman 2002), perhaps the most significant shift in economic understanding of regions comes from Storper's insights (Storper 1997), and his focus on the 'soft infrastructure' and 'untraded interdependencies'. This includes the focus on labour markets, public institutions, customs, and values. Economic geographers have identified the qualities of successful regions (Amin and Thrift 1994; Cooke and Morgan 1994). This is also the case in the literature on industrial districts pointing out the ways in which '*cooperative industrial networks and supportive institutional environment were regarded as guarantors of high employment and income levels, economic growth, increasing export rates and high tax revenues*' (Herrschel and Newman 2002: 18). These characteristics were supplemented with ideas of the importance of innovation and learning: '*The current phase of global economic development seems to demand reflexive actors in both public and private sectors who can ensure supportive institutional environments*' (Herrschel and Newman 2002: 19). This understanding is captured in the concept of learning regions (Asheim 2001; Ennals and Gustavsen 1999; Florida 1995). A key feature of a learning region is the organisation and integration of training and enterprises in networks, based on a basic

assumption of the need for new ways of purposive and informal interaction between business and government.

3.2.2 *Political Economy and Regional Change*

A political and institutional approach to political economy includes two main debates. The first and possibly the dominating debate concerns the shift from government to governance, while the second, particularly important in political geography, concerns the rescaling of the state.

Rescaling of politics

In political geography the debate on the role of the state in the globalised world focuses on the issue of rescaling as a main characteristic of the situation (Featherstone, Lash, and Roberston 1995; Smith 1993; Swyngedouw 1997). It addresses the question of how nation states have been 'hollowed out' and how much of the potential for societal steering and coordination today has been up-scaled to a supra-national level, such as for example the European Union, or simultaneously a down-scaling of influence and responsibility to the local and regional level:

The interventionism of the state in the economy, for example, is rescaled, either downwards to the level of the city or the region, where public-private partnerships shape an entrepreneurial practice and ideology needed to successfully engage in an intensified process of inter-urban competition, or upwards. (Swyngedouw 1997: 172)

This rescaling process is linked to the accelerating globalisation:

The hypermodern pulverization of time and space, the transformations of everyday life and the still accelerating globalization of commodification and commodified relations junk geographical scales we have taken too long for granted as fixed, stable and frozen moments, as static containers that organize and regulate life, and render our existence apparently transparent and intelligible. (Swyngedouw 1997: 168)

Swyngedouw applies the concept of ‘glocalisation’ to communicate the consequences of globalisation, linking it to both the restructuring of the institutional, regulatory level, and strategies of global localisation of key forms of industrial, service and financial capital.

Swyngedouw discusses the rescaling process in relation to the political importance of the process and how rescaling should be seen as strategies that have the potential effects of empowerment and disempowerment, and of repression and emancipation.

Building on Lefebvre, Harvey and Massey (Harvey 1985; Harvey 1996; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994), Swyngedouw (1997) argues that spatial scale has to be theorised as something that is ‘produced’, a process that is always deeply heterogeneous, conflicting and contested. In contrast to the perspective on spatial scale as a static containers, he emphasises how space is an implicit dimension of social relations and social practice, and that all social relations are situated in space (and time). Such social relations are always constituted through temporal and spatial relations of power. They address ‘*the multiple relation of domination/subordination and participation/exclusion through which social and physical nature are changed*’ (Swyngedouw 1997: 169).

In Norwegian regional policy the debate on spatial scale and the division of labour between scales is growing, and takes two related forms. First, the organisation of the regional (county) level is in a process of change (Stortingsmelding nr 12 (2006-2007)). This concerns both the role and tasks of the regional level and the geographical size of these administrative regions. The political debate has started with the task issue and will continue with the geographical size thereafter. A total reform of the regional level is heralded within 2010.

Second, the numbers and size of municipalities are discussed, however more de-emphasised after the election and change into a centre-left/social democratic government in 2005. This debate is also about tasks, roles and size (Stortingsmelding nr 19 (2001-2002); Stortingsmelding nr 31 (2000-2001)). I will not go into these discussions in depth, but refer to them as snapshots into the struggles between interests on different scales and in different political parties, reflecting differences in interests

and power play. (NOU 2001:7; NOU 2003:14; Stortingsmelding nr 12 (2006-2007); Stortingsmelding nr 19 (2001-2002); Stortingsmelding nr 21 (2005-2006); Stortingsmelding nr 31 (2000-2001))

The important point to be made in relation to scale is the identified down-scaling processes of the state's intervention in the economy to a regional and local level. This suggests in consequence emphasis on the importance of endogenous resources in local and regional development, and the ability to mobilise steering capacity in regional and local governance.

3.2.3 Governance

The reorganisation (transformation) of regional policy to support growth and development calls for an exploration of the shift from government to governance and from centralised and bureaucratic forms of decision-making to a plurality of coexisting networks and partnerships that interact as overlapping webs of relationships at diverse spatial scales. Much of the literature on governance starts with the assumption of the failure of a market economy to co-ordinate actors. A general definition of governance is that '*governance refers to the self-organizing, interorganizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource-exchange, rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the state*' (Rhodes 1997:15). In contemporary governance formal authority is also seen in, for example, the form of negotiated patterns of public-private coordination. Accordingly, Pierre (2000) argues that the emergence of governance cannot be taken as proof of the decline of the state but rather of the state's ability to adapt to external changes. He points to the dual meaning of governance, first the empirical manifestations of state adaptation to its external environment as it emerged in the late 20th century, and second, how '*governance also denotes a conceptual or theoretical representation of co-ordination of social systems and, for the most part, the role of the state in that process*' (Pierre 2000: 3). Pierre divides the latter meaning further in two categories. First, investigation about how and with what conceivable outcomes the state 'steers' society and the economy through political brokerage and defining goals and making priorities, and second, the more generic coordination and forms of formal or informal types of public-private interaction (ibid.).

The overarching question coming out of these developments is what new forms and shapes can and should the pursuit of the collective interest take and to what extent we need to rethink the traditional, liberal-democratic model of state. The question emphasised is whether the state's capacity to steer is impaired by economic globalisation, what other means does the state have of imposing its will on society and the economy?

However, the discussions about the turn to governance are by no means new. Stoker (cited in Pierre 2000) emphasises that urban political theory has for a long time been concerned with different models of public-private exchange and co-operation to compensate for urban institutional fragmentation, for example 'urban regimes' (Lauria 1997) and 'growth coalitions' (Stoker 1998).²¹

Discussing the development of local governance in Western Europe, John (2001) emphasises how traditional structures and institutions of local government have been transformed in response to increased economic and political competition, new ideas, institutional reform and the Europeanisation of public policy. Also in John's approach, the main point is the perceived transition from local government to local governance. The underlying idea and normative basis of John's argument is the classic justification of local self-government made by J.S. Mill (Mill 1861): local democracy offers citizens the potential to exercise their freedom and to express their local identities in a manner that is different from and complementary to higher tiers of government. The idea is that local political institutions can be closer to citizens than national governments (John 2001).

John traces the causes of governance from several distinct forces of economic and political development: the internationalisation of economies, greater demand for the private sector to be involved in public decisions, the Europeanisation of public policies, new policy challenges, and the move to the post-bureaucratic state. I will not go into the

²¹ Keating has suggested the concept of 'development coalitions' Keating, M. 1998. *The New Regionalism in Western Europe. Territorial Restructuring and Political Change*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing., an idea adapted from the literature on American urban politics, meaning a cross-class, place-based alliance of social and political actors dedicated to economic growth in a specific location.

historical evolution of a governance approach but rather emphasise a reorientation in the literature from seeing governance as a substitute for government and a representative democratic system to the understanding of governance as a way to enhance development and obtain a more effective steering.

Another approach to governance comes from regime theory, which attempts to explain the division between public administration and the private sector (market economy). 'Regime' can be understood as unofficial arrangements surrounding and reinforcing the work of local authorities (Stone 1989). Stoker and Mossberger (Stoker and Mossberger 1995) emphasise the assumption that local authorities' effectiveness relates to cooperation and coordination of resources between public and non-public actors. One important question in regime theory is related to power and locus of power in the administrative structure. Locus of power is defined through the development of governing capacity (Orr and Stoker 1994): 49). The focus is on policy development, not decision-making. The idea is to see the regime as a way of conflict solving between private capital accumulation and public administration.

In the contemporary debate about urban governance, planning and development, the concept of governance has been given various interpretations. It can be seen as *'a process in which local political institutions implement their programs in concert with civil society actors, and within which these actors and interests gain (potential) influence over urban politics'* (Pierre 1998): 5). As a regime theorist, Jessop moves explicitly to identify 'governance' with an alternative model for managing collective affairs. He defines governance as *'horizontal self-organisation among mutually independent actors'*, emphasising that self-organising governance operates with a reflexive rationality and thereby avoids the failures of state and market as ways of organising collective action (Jessop 2000).

Critics of a more normative use of the term 'governance' fear that the promotion of the model condones the tendency to offload areas of government activity back onto citizens, and to develop more or less formal ways in which privileged groups, usually from the business sector, are able to influence how public agendas are set and public funds spent, escaping the constraints of accountability which operate within the formal government

arenas. The democratic concerns discussed are the notions of transparency, accountability, and exclusion of some groups and interests (Elander and Blanc 2000). Elander and Blanc conclude that governance does not replace government, but rather it is complimentary and should be subsumed under representative democracy. This could be linked to the notion made by Pierre (Pierre 2000) emphasising that the emergence of governance should not be taken as proof of the decline of the state but rather of the state's ability to adapt to external changes. However, I believe that this assessment of the influence of governance is too narrow. It is important to have a critical approach to strong neoliberal influence on the development of these new governance arrangements. Governance as a normative concept should therefore be treated with caution. Governance as an analytical concept framing the changing relation between state and market in the post-Fordist era may, however, be useful in terms of explaining the position of these new partnerships and coalitions.

An alternative normative approach to governance may be possible. The concept of governance could be used as a general heuristic term to encompass all of the above-mentioned modes and models. Cars et al. (2002: 15) state that the term governance should represent a wider lens with which to explore the transformation we are interested in:

Used in this way, it serves to highlight processes as much as organisation (Pierre 1998); active agency as much as formal structures; and roles, relationships and mobilisation capacity (the power to act) as much as power over recourses and regulations. It explicitly recognises that the activities of formal government are never hermetically sealed from the outside world. Therefore analysis needs to focus overtly on the complex relations between formal government and the wider society. (Cars et al. 2002: 15)

Rethinking territorial boundaries

It has been argued that the turn from government to governance represents a shift from a territorially to a functional principle of organisation (Madanipour, Healey, and Hull 2001). New governance models could thus result in a territorial organisation based on a

functional integration of actors and institutions across the territorial boundaries of the government system.

3.2.4 Summary

Governance theory provides us with a backcloth emphasising a changing political economy. Governance theory is as seen occupied with legitimacy and democratic pitfalls as a consequence of the reorganisation of the local state. In accordance with the rescaling of the state and the adaptation of new models of governance in local and regional development, new stakeholders and institutions are involved in the mobilisation of local resources. The relevant question is thus how this reorganisation affects the possibility to enhance learning processes in local development. It certainly represents a potential to involve new stakeholders and institutions in planning and development processes in line with the idea of broad participation and participatory democracy. There are, however, challenges related to it because of the differences in both attention and interests among the participants. To bring participants together does not automatically realise learning processes. The challenge relates to the process of collective reflections on the basis of shared experiences and references. However, there is the possibility of designing models of governance aimed at exploring participatory and collaborative processes, as identified by Cars et al. (2002).

I pay particular attention to the shifting role of the local state in the development of local governance. I find it important to stress the challenge of local authorities to develop new roles in order to increase local steering capacity and at the same time secure the role of a democratic decision-making system. The ultimate challenge seems to be the ability to mobilise local resources and institutions without a unilateral transfer of power.

3.3 Local and Regional Planning

A central question in planning theory is what role planning can play in developing cities and regions within the constraints of a capitalist political economy and a democratic political system (Campbell and Fainstein 1996). As Campbell and Fainstein (ibid.) explain, it is a difficult task to define planning theory, and they give four reasons for

this. First, fundamental questions in planning belong to a much broader inquiry into the role of the state in social and spatial transformation. Thereby, planning theory overlaps with theory in all the social sciences. Second, the boundary between planners and related professionals is not mutually exclusive. Third, the field of planning is divided between those who define it according to its object, which are the thematic boundaries, e.g. land use planning or economic planning, and those who define it according to its methods, which are the decision-making processes. Fourth, planning commonly borrows diverse methodologies from many different fields so that its theoretical base cannot be drawn from its tools of analysis (ibid.: 2).

In this chapter, I initially present a historical context of an instrumental and rational approach to planning that I argue is still relevant for the understanding of planning in contemporary society. Thereafter, contemporary planning theories are discussed, finally with particular attention to planning as a learning process.

In everyday language, 'planning' is given a variety of meanings. Planning is in some cases related to project management and the logistics of industrial production, while in other cases it is related to the design of cities. Healey (2006) has identified three traditions of planning thought. One tradition relates to *economic planning* aimed at managing the productive forces of nations and regions, contributing to the building of the welfare state. The second tradition relates to the management of the *physical development* of cities and towns, focusing on health (hygiene), economy and design. Healey's third tradition is the management of *public administration and policy analysis*, aimed at effectiveness and efficiency in the operation of the welfare state. In the social sciences, planning often refers to all of these traditions in relation to different geographical scales. This is also the case in my approach to planning. In order to discuss the role of planning on local and regional levels in contemporary society, I argue that these traditions are interlinked. Before I turn to the contemporary theoretical 'landscape', a short historical presentation is given in order to develop a point of reference for further discussions.

Planning evokes a variety of associations. First and foremost it relates intuitively to the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe before the period of glasnost, and their perspective

on the 'planned' society. In the Norwegian context the undemocratic and authoritative aspects of planning is not that obvious. There are, however, elements in public planning approach that reflect underlying assumptions about societal steering. These elements relate to the instrumental rational approach that dominated in the public administration regime of the 1970s. In the following, a review of the rational planning approach is given, and second, the historical development of the Norwegian Planning and Building Act is discussed.

3.3.1 Rational Process Theories of Planning

Banfield focuses on planning as a decision-making process and the means and ends in planning (Banfield 1973). Banfield refers to planning as the process by which an actor (*he*), i.e. a person or an organisation, selects a course of action:

Planning is the process by which he selects a course of action (a set of means) for the attainment of his ends. It is 'good' planning if these means are likely to attain the ends or maximize the chances of their attainment. It is by the process of rational choice that the best adaptation of means to ends is likely to be achieved. (Banfield 1973: 139)

This approach to planning is linked to the influential Chicago school of planning theory and research in the immediate post-war years, in which Banfield was a central character. The Chicago school approach is based on the idea of rationality that typically involves clear policy goals, systematic analysis, logical generation of policy alternatives, evaluation, and monitoring of performance (Allmendinger 2002a). Thus, the irrational forces of life were seen as needing to be tamed through rationality and the rules of science. Accordingly, planning should concentrate on formal rationality, and is part of the means by which irrational forces could be tamed (Allmendinger 2002a; Friedmann 1987). A well-known statement by Karl Manheim, that planning is the rational mastery of the irrational, summarises the essence of this approach (Allmendinger 2002a). It was the methods of physical science that became the model for planning practice.

The Norwegian context

In the Norwegian context, as in the Anglo-American (Allmendinger 2002a), the influence of rational planning approach in the 1970s and after cannot be overestimated. In terms of municipal planning, five aspects of the development are identified by (Bukve 1997). *First*, there is a tendency in municipal planning that focus has shifted from land use regulation to more coordinated economic, physical and social planning. The 1985 Planning and Building Act (Plan og bygningsloven) articulates this shift in focus, taking a more holistic approach to local development. *Second*, there has been a shift from a dominating public technical sector, which is the regulation of land use and the maintenance of the building legislations, to more equality between different public sectors. *Third*, a shift from disposable planning to continuous planning, revised (action plans) at intervals of four years. *Fourth*, there has been a shift from knowledge orientation to action orientation. The massive gathering of information and documentation of the municipal plans (*generalplaner*) in the 1960s became problematic. The rational planning process often stopped after the documentation and analysis because politicians could not agree upon the objectives. They were not able to prioritise between many desired objectives, a prerequisite of the rational model discussed above. The introduction of action plans (or action programmes) was vital in this turn to a stronger focus on action. The *fifth* shift relates to participation in the planning process. This was a turn from public hearings of plans to a more participatory approach in the organisation of planning processes. It is stated in the 1985 Act that individuals or groups of individuals with a stake in a particular case should have the opportunity to participate actively in a given planning process.

As can be seen, the distance from a rational planning model became apparent in the new planning legislation from 1985. The shifts identified are, however, not of a fundamental character. Too often, new planning forms and methods are forced into rational models in which planners are portrayed as analytical and politicians as rational providers of ends (Bukve 1997: 311).

The most prominent spokesmen in the participatory planning discourse in Norway have been Jørgen and Roar Amdam. They have argued for a strategic and mobilising

planning practice founded on bottom-up processes and social mobilisation (Amdam and Amdam 1990; Friedmann 1987), with strong reference to Habermas and communicative planning theory (Amdam and Amdam 2000). In one of his most recent books (Amdam 2005)²² Roar Amdam discusses the role of planning in a time of regionalisation. He concludes that regional planning can support the legitimacy of regions as political actors in the context of a new regional policy provided a planning process in line with a communicative practice based on Habermas' theory.

I am also interested in planning as learning processes, as expressed in Amdam (2005: 156–157). Amdam relates learning to the identification of different planning levels: institutional-, strategic-, tactical-, and operative planning. On the operative level, according to Amdam, learning is related to problem solving based on existing instrumental knowledge. On the tactical level, learning is related to reflection on both the problem solving activity and the organisation and structure producing the activity. On the strategic level, learning is based on the two former loops, but in addition a third loop is added, reflection over values, models, and realities as a basis for the organisation. On the institutional level, Amdam uses Bateson's concept of deutero learning (Bateson 1972). This is used in meta-learning in which organisations activate learning as an integrated process in their practice.

3.3.2 *Planning Theory*

As mentioned in the Introduction (3.1), it is now 40 years since the Industrial Democracy Programme was introduced in the Hunsfos factory. Today, in the VC 2010 project, the industrial democracy concept is the foundation of a municipal development project. This change from an enterprise to a municipal context needs to be explicitly addressed. On the municipal level, a different institutional landscape is present and a well-established representative democratic system is working. In addition, planning has been the means of public and private institutions in their efforts to steer development towards a desired future result. In order to establish a contrast to the industrial

²² *Planlegging som handling* [Planning as action] is a tribute to Jørgen Amdam on his 60 years anniversary.

democracy approach outlined in the previous chapter, in this chapter I address the contemporary landscape of planning theory and practice which exists on the municipal level. First, differences in context are addressed through a planning theory review, and then the implications for learning are discussed based on these differences.

A focus on learning in planning is particularly strong in the social learning tradition (Friedmann 1987). The idea of learning is recognised as articulated through change in practice.

3.3.3 *The Social Learning Tradition in Planning Theory*

*Social learning ... begins and ends with action, that is, purposeful activity.
(Friedmann 1987: 181)*

Social learning tradition derives from the philosophical pragmatism of John Dewey. The application of a social learning approach in planning stands firmly on the ground of the development in the explicit tradition of organisational development, linked to philosophical pragmatism. According to Friedmann's (1987) selective group of scholars in organisational development, it builds on the line of development, starting with the approach to social experiments by Kurt Lewin, and taken further by, for example, Argyris and Schön (1996) in their organisational learning theory:

It is the essential wisdom of social learning tradition that practice and learning are construed as correlative processes, so that one process necessarily implies the other. In this scheme, decisions appear as a fleeting moment in the course of an ongoing practice. They are embedded in a learning process that flows from the attempt to change reality through practice. (Friedmann 1987: 182)

Principle features of social learning

What is action in the social learning approach? Friedmann explains that action is purposeful activity undertaken by an actor, either an individual or a collective. He further distinguishes between activities as either working practice or historical practice, i.e. between repetitive and often codified working practice and unprecedented and unique historical practice. He emphasises that action must overcome resistance, in

particular forces of historical practice, and therefore is in need of a strategy or tactics that will guide an actor through the action itself. When resistance is overcome, cumulative learning might appear based on the information available from the experience, that later becomes a basis for present actions.

Who is the actor in the social learning approach? Several actors may be identified: individual persons, small groups, human organisations, and communities all appear as actors in the approach. The principle focus is, however, on task-oriented action groups: ‘Collective actors, such as organisations, communities, and social movements, may be disassembled into component action groups’ (Friedmann 1987: 185).

Who learns in the social learning approach? Actors and learners are assumed to be one and the same. There is, however, a strong emphasis on the importance of collectives or groups of actors: ‘*It is the action group that learns from its own practice*’ (Friedmann 1987: 185). There is also a shifting emphasis on the notion of the relevant actor, whether it is top management in organisations or privileged groups.

It is the principle modes of learning in the social learning approach that I find most important to emphasise here. Three points are made by Friedmann (1987: 185), the first of which is that learning is articulated as change in practice:

Directly woven into social practice, it is rarely systematized or articulated in the formal language of scientific discourse. Social learning is typically a form of tacit and informal learning (Polanyi 1966). (Friedmann 1987: 185)

Friedman’s second point is that a type of change agent is often involved in the activity, one that brings certain kinds of formal knowledge to the ongoing social practice. Third, and using terminology from Argyris and Schön (Argyris and Schon 1974; Argyris and Schon 1978) that has been presented in the previous chapter, simple and radical (single- or double-loop) learning should occur. That is a learning process in which both implies a change in the actions to solve given problems (simple learning), and adjustments of the norms governing the action process (radical learning).

Does Social Learning Require Theory? This intriguing question is very relevant and of fundamental importance to the social learning approach. Friedmann states that all learning requires theory, '*where theory is understood as a set of categories that will guide practice and help to process information generated in the course of the action itself*' (1987: 186). Using the concepts of historical practice, he distinguishes between two different types of theory needed, a *theory of practice* and a *theory of reality*. Friedmann explains theories of practice as sets of expectations about appropriate behaviour. The *theory of reality* can be subdivided into a theory of *history* and a theory of the *situation*. A theory of history is a view of the world, while a theory of the situation is the actor understanding of the situation in which he or she is engaged.

Friedmann links appropriate behaviour to normal practice within different professions. I find it important to emphasise that normal practice in relation to planning should also be linked to the particular place (or context) where this practice is embedded. I find it also important to emphasise the perspective on the interlinked social constructions of both theories, a theory of history and of the situation.

The conceptual scheme of social learning (Friedmann 1987: 186–187):

- 'Actions in the public domain usually involve many collaborators acting through small, task-oriented groups which, in their internal relationships, display psychosocial dynamics that are not reducible to the characteristics of individual participants. Continuously forming and reforming, action groups are temporary social systems.'
- 'Embodied in the group relationships, social learning is a cumulative process that lasts for the duration of a given action cycle. When a cycle terminates and the group dissolves or undergoes a major change in composition, what has been learned is dissipated and lost. Action groups are a form of collective memory.'
- 'Action groups are organised around specific tasks. In addition to the objective requirements of the tasks, group behaviour is influenced by the way the personal needs of its members for love, esteem, and self-expression are addressed within both the group and the larger environment of which it forms a part.'

- ‘Social learning in small groups takes place primarily through face-to-face relations, or dialogue. However, dialogue requires interpersonal skills, such as the art of listening, the ability to trust others and make oneself vulnerable to them, a willingness to suspend rank and material power, and a responsiveness to others’ needs. These and related skills of dialogue can be acquired, at least in rudimentary form, through appropriate training.’
- ‘In social learning, objectives tend to emerge in the course of an ongoing action. To bring about a significant redirection of objectives, however, may involve a long and painful process of radical learning.’

It is the cultural and social influence upon thought that provide us, as individuals, with a ‘mass’ of ideas that helps structure our thoughts. This helps us to develop strong instincts that are difficult to alter, even in the face of evidence. These ideas guide our approach to action, and thereby form the theory that we choose to apply in a given setting. It is upon whether the outcome is a success or not that a theory is proven good enough according to the pragmatist (Allmendinger 2002b).

Related to the ‘mass of ideas’ is the issue of biases, an ‘apperceptive mass’ of beliefs and values, i.e. bias as an inherent part of acting and thinking. An implication of this emphasis on individual bias and the difficulties of altering biases is the potential for conflict between different beliefs. The only way around such differences is through discourse and language (Allmendinger 2002b: 118). The role of the philosopher and planning is in the pragmatist approach to help facilitate discourses by suggesting new perspectives on issues. The central role given to language has some superficial parallels to the collaborative emphasis but the big difference is the rejection of absolutes, consensus or transcendental truths. I will turn to the communicative approach to planning shortly (3.3.4).

The emphasis on personal perspective and biases has other implications. It breaks down the concept of theory and practice. This relates to the notion by Kuhn that we cannot test theories empirically or objectively: ‘*Theories therefore become little more than expressions of beliefs – a pick and mix collection of thinking that we choose because*

they resemble what we already believe to be the case' (Allmendinger 2002b: 118). It is with respect to this need for open and reflective discourse to develop and challenge established beliefs and morals that Dewey and Rorty explore the role of liberal democracy. In the search for knowledge, Dewey introduces two fundamental truths: first, that liberalism concerned with the individual and freedom, is the best basis for a pragmatic society; and second, that a scientific methodology to this liberalism is the best method for open-ended search:

The two aspects of Dewey's pragmatism are obviously related: liberalism providing the political and societal framework best suited to pragmatism, while scientific method with its emphasis on continual criticism and reflection allows democracy and liberalism to evolve to meet changing needs and desires. (Allmendinger 2002b: 119)

Neo-pragmatism

The pragmatist understanding emphasises practice and the application of critical intelligence to concrete problems, rather than *a priori* theorising, and became popular in planning through the work of Richard Rorty (Rorty 1989). There is some overlap with both postmodern thinking when it comes to absolutes, consensus or transcendental truth, and the collaborative concern with conversations as a medium through which disagreement can be overcome (Allmendinger 2002b: 14). Charles Hoch (1984) builds on Dewey's interpretation of pragmatism. There are two themes in focus. Firstly, there is the role of experience in providing truth and as an agent for progress; experience provides the only real test of truth and practicality. Secondly, following the idea of contingent truth, Dewey focuses on the search for practical answers to real problems. Hoch states that:

When we test plans of action, we try to determine which plan will work best, that is, which plan is right for us. For Dewey, this sort of thinking constitutes the appropriate form of understanding ... truth emerges when an idea (alternative hypothesis or plan) proves successful in solving problems. (cited in Allmendinger 2001: 15)

Finally, Hoch argues for Dewey’s emphasis on practical activity or inquiry through socially shared and agreed means achieved through democratic association. A pluralistic competition of ideas following an experimental method serves freedom best. Furthermore, similar to the communicative planners, Hoch believes that conflict will be defeated through intelligent and reflective discourse. Hoch’s focus on power is also explicit and in this respect he comes close to the work of John Forester and his critical pragmatism (Forester 1993). Both Hoch and Forester argue the need for a plurality of styles in planning and a negotiative attitude which emphasises a communicative or collaborative basis for planning. There have been critiques against this approach both regarding the lack of focus on power relations, and the relativism at the heart of pragmatic approach. Allmendinger (2001) states that there is no privileged position within pragmatism. However, he claims there are limits imposed as pragmatism is firmly founded within liberal democracy.

The pragmatist approach is perhaps best known and conceptualised in Friedmann’s (1987) ‘social learning’ tradition. In his classification of planning thought, social learning as a category, together with policy analysis, social reform, and social mobilisation, reflects a political ideology and attention towards aims, either as societal guidance or social reform (see Table 3–1).

Table 3-1 The politics of planning theory: a tentative classification

Political Ideology		
KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION	Conservative	Radical
In societal guidance	Policy Analysis	Social Reform
In social transformation	Social Learning	Social Mobilisation

Reproduced from Friedmann (1987: 76)

Friedmann relates the social learning tradition to a conservative political ideology, but with a social transformative approach. There are, however, thin lines of demarcation between the social learning category and the social mobilisation category. Distinctions

relate to the degree of radicalness and the bottom-up approach in the social mobilisation approach. The conservative nature of a pragmatist approach is also a general critique of this particular approach to planning. There is also a distinction related to the aim of continuous planning in the social mobilisation approach and the more project planning approach in social learning. I have chosen not to go into depth in all categories, but concentrate on the social learning tradition in order to develop the pragmatist approach to planning theory. I will, however, return to the classification in a critical discussion about pragmatic planning.

The explicit turn to a learning approach to planning is of particular importance. I therefore find it relevant to follow the pragmatist approach in more depth in order to identify the perspective on planning that is applied. I do this by elaborating on the tradition of social learning.

I close this section with a short summary and reflections on pragmatic planning theory as follows.

- A renewed interest in the pragmatist planning theory highlights the practical approach to real problems. The strengths of this approach are, in my perspective, the focus on knowledge–action relations.
- The critique of pragmatism and Dewey in particular for providing the basis for ‘technocracy’ and instrumentality as scientific methods which invade the political and social realm, is important. This relates also to the critical reflection of the social learning tradition by Friedmann (1987), emphasising the social construction of knowledge perspective, in contrast to experience-based knowledge generation about an ‘objective’ outside world. I argue that this is an important critique if a pragmatist approach should become relevant in contemporary society and potentially strengthen the legitimacy of planning practice.
- Pragmatic planning theory highlights the idea of ‘planning’ rather than ‘planned’ society, and thereby is more prescriptive regarding process and less regarding content. This is important in my perspective, because it places planning in a more proactive position to society development.

3.3.4 *Communicative Practice and Collaborative Planning*

What might be the most significant school of planning theory is the communicative approach building in particular on the work of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas has examined the concept of rationality and its relationship to problems of social action, intersubjective communication and social-historical change, drawing heavily on the writings of George Herbert Mead, Émile Durkheim and Aristotle. Through the influence of the Frankfurt school in criticising Enlightenment rationality, Habermas consequently seeks to finish the ‘unfinished’ project of modernity rather than abandoning it as some postmodernists would. This leads to the project of providing an alternative form of rationality, a communicative rationality. In the planning theory literature a range of terms have been used, including: ‘communicative planning’ (Forester 1989), ‘argumentative planning’ (Forester 1993), ‘planning through debate’ (Healey 1996), and ‘collaborative planning’ (Healey 2006). Allmendinger (2001) identifies three categories within the communicative approach. First, the micro-political interpretation of planning practice usually based on a combination of Habermasian ideal speech and post-structuralist concern with language (Forester 1989, 1993). Second, and following this tradition, are the ethnographic studies comparing this ideal to practice (Healey 1996). Third, there are prescriptive studies aimed at using the communicative rationality presented as ‘deliberative’ or ‘collaborative’ planning (Forester 1999; Healey 1996, 2006).

Although communicative theory does not address learning in a direct manner, at least not on an individual level, I find it important to discuss the intersubjective knowledge generation through communicative action. I choose to include this system level approach in my analysis of learning in planning because of the collective nature of planning activities. Attention to the integration of an abstract system level and the individual life-world level support the conversion of subjective knowledge into intersubjective social knowledge through discourses. It is not an individual who learns in this case, but rather a collective cognitive dimension of learning. A communicative

approach to learning thus provides a contrast to other approaches that I discuss in this chapter.

Based on the writings of Jürgen Habermas, and his work on the nature of communicative action, a social theory is developed that takes us beyond the instrumental model of pragmatism. In his critique of modern society, Habermas directly attacks the narrow, instrumental approach to rationality that has become dominant. The optimisation of means and the prioritisation of effective goal-oriented action systems pervade the modern technological-capitalist society. At the cost of more political and ethical-based debates and decisions, expertise and social engineering, supported by a narrow positivist view of science, have the task of solving societal problems to an increasing degree. Technology, science, and administration have taken over, and politics is reduced to a matter of administrating the social apparatus.

Habermas applies the concept of abstract systems to identify the structure of economic and political order that he argues constrains daily life. A system refers to the aspects of our society that have been detached from man's immediate cultural context, and thereby is opposed to his or her concept of the life world. The life world 'coincides' with these abstract systems and refers to the spheres of concrete experience close to human's daily life. It is the proximity of perceptions on which we as human beings interpret and make sense of our environment and the situation we are in. Normatively, Habermas seeks to reverse the tendency of abstract systems to colonise the life world, and seeks to reconstitute the public realm in order to redesign abstract systems and make them more sensitive to our life world (Habermas 1984; Healey 2006).

Parallel to the critique of a dominating modern technological–economical rationality, Habermas suggests an alternative rationality. Based on the level of development and a 'modern consciousness', there is an immanent potential in modern societies for receptivity to the opportunities provided by language and communication to go beyond established ideas and norms. This consciousness is, according to Habermas, socially formed in interaction with others. In order to establish an alternative to instrumental rationality, Habermas offers a basis for reasoning that goes beyond narrow scientific materialism. He addresses the separation between the world of theory and the world of

practice in daily life. Through the influence of Wittgenstein, Habermas subscribes to the hermeneutic understanding of language and the view that the meanings of words can only be understood in the context of their use.²³ This approach to the theory–practice split opens new perspectives on the interwoven relations between the ‘system world’ and the ‘life world’. By addressing the way people reason, and by making a distinction between three forms of reasoning, an instrumental–technical reasoning, a moral reasoning, and an emotive–aesthetic reasoning, Habermas makes explicit how the first form of reasoning has become dominant. The latter two have been treated as external reasons, the irrationalities of the practical world, and part of the life world (Healey 2006: 51). Habermas’ argument, repeated by others (Forester 1989; Forester 1993; Healey 2006), is that the dominant position of instrumental–technical reasoning both hampers public debate because it neglects the importance of a moral and emotive–aesthetic reasoning in public as well as private life, and separates public policy from people’s daily life.

Communicative action

Communicative action contains the possibility of dialogue aiming to arrive at mutual understanding and agreement. Habermas builds on the potential of language to support mutual understanding in meetings between individuals. However, this mutual understanding does not arise without friction, and Habermas focusing explicitly on the potential distortions of communication (ideology, power and restrictions). In a normal situation we can expect that every statement is comprehensible, credible, legitimate, and sincere. Without these expectations, communication would be meaningless to us. Yet such expectations cannot be seen as happening automatically.

There is a fundamental possibility for testing speech acts critically, through dialogue, and for reaching consensus about what is regarded as intelligible, true, morally good,

²³ Habermas comes close to the pragmatism of Richard Rorty and his argument about the connection between meaning and action. Rorty argues that what we potentially mean by our concepts is related to what we potentially are able to do. That is, our potential actions are related to the language at our disposal. To change is then to re-describe and apply the new description in changed practice (Rorty, Richard. 1989. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)

and honest. It is within this fundamental possibility that Habermas finds a basis for another broader and more basic view of rationality than the instrumental version. The crucial point is therefore the potential for undistorted communication, or ideal speech situations, as a basis for a communicative rationality. The basic assumption is that the strengths of a good, well-founded argument could concur with the distortions of power, status, prestige, manipulation, the rule of experts, fear, etc., and become the basis for a broader and more reflective rationality.

In the communicative perspective, focus is thus on the communicative structures and how people interact in the form of meanings, construction and interpretation through dialogue. The communicative perspective focuses on integration through discourses between an individual (the subjective world), the intersubjective social world, and the system world. Integration between the 'objective' social system and the subjective life world represents a discourse. The concept of discourse characterises different communicative situations according to their norms and rules and the content of the communicative process itself. Discourses therefore convert subjective knowledge to 'objective' social knowledge.

This integration is a result of interplays between different social processes that are at the same time subjective, social and objective. First, there is intention. A person can intend to be social. Communicative action is an example of intended social action. Second, there is the binding effect of certain social processes. Communication has such a binding effect, since we use common words and common norms of speaking in order to be understood. Third, there is a system level of integration through laws and through the binding effects of the system. Examples of this might be the integration of social institutions such as money, private property and market economy, which are interrelated at the system level.

In what Healey calls a 'process route', 'exploring the communicative dimensions of collectively debating and deciding on matters of collective concern' (Healey 1996: 235), she argues for a communicative turn in planning theory. Healey builds on writings by Habermas on the concept of communicative rationality and reasoning, within intersubjective communication. This helps us to escape the confines of rational

scientific principles: right and good actions are those we can come to agree on, and planning becomes a way of acting that we can choose, after debate.

Planning practice in the communicative approach emerged during the 1980s. Although this approach hardly can predefine a set of tasks, which planners must address, since these must be discovered and understood through intercommunicative processes, a set of propositions relating to planning can be identified (Healey 1996): 1) it is an interactive and interpretative process, 2) it assumes the pre-existence of diverse and overlapping ‘*discourse communities*’ with their own meaning systems, 3) it involves respectful discussions within and between discursive communities, 4) it involves inventions not only through action but also in the construction of the arenas within which these programmes are formulated and conflicts are identified and mediated, 5) it involves all dimensions of knowing, understanding, appreciating, and experiencing, and judging may be brought into play, 6) a reflexive and critical capacity should be kept alive in the processes of argumentation, 7) it includes democratic pluralism by according ‘voice’, ‘ear’, and ‘respect’ to all those with an interest in the issues at stake, 8) it involves mutually reconstructing what constitutes the interests of the various participants, 9) it has the potential to change, to transform material conditions and established power relations through the continuous effort to ‘critique’ and ‘demystify’, and finally, 10) *‘The purpose of such an intercommunicative planning is to help to “start out” and “go along” in mutually agreeable ways based on an effort at interdiscursive understanding, drawing on, critiquing, and reconstructing the understandings we bring to discussion’* (Healey 1996: 249).

While rationalistic and instrumental elements still hold a position in planning processes in many Norwegian municipalities, as in most countries, other municipalities have developed more dialogically based processes. However, it can also be argued that the strong position of market liberalism in Western countries (including Scandinavia) from the 1980s revitalised the ideas of a rational instrumental planning tradition (Nilsson and Uhlin 2002). This calls for critical reflections on relations between the dominating capitalistic logic in market liberalism and contemporary planning practice, and a

different planning practice, one more occupied with the power relations that always have an influence on planning.

In John Forester's (1999) approach to planning practice there is an effort to develop such a participatory (deliberative) planning practice, 'radicalizing the argumentative turn' (Dryzek 1993), and closely linked to action research strategies. Forester assesses planning '*as deliberative action that shapes "others" understanding of their cities, their selves, and, crucially, their possibilities of action, for better or worse*' (Forester 1999: 6). He recognises participation, not only as a matter of advocacy and legal rights, and not only to present well-known dangers of manipulation, '*but also to present real political opportunities for deliberative, even transformative, learning and participatory action research*'.

Forester's focus is on planning practice that seeks to expand practical democratic deliberations rather than to restrict them, to encourage diverse citizens' voices, and in the case of 'planners', more social and political interaction: '*The point is not to celebrate planning, but to encourage its more politically astute and ethically critical practice*' (Forester 1999: 8). I find the perspective on planning practice presented by Forester to be compatible with important elements in my understanding of an action research approach to municipal (and regional) development.

The most important process in a deliberative planning practice is learning. Learning is the essence of deliberative reflexive processes, closely related to the dialogues in communicative arenas. Yet in addition to a focus on reflections and dialogue, a supplemental approach seems to be relevant.

Forester (1999) identifies two related models of learning in public participation and participatory action research literature, both dialogical and argumentative, one "indebted" to John Dewey, Chris Argyris, and Don Schön, the other to Paulo Freire and Jürgen Habermas.

The Deweyan model focuses on the ways we learn in dialogical action together by testing our hunches, assumptions, and suggestions for action. The Freirean model

focuses on ways we learn in dialogue by probing our political possibilities for speaking and acting together:

The brilliance of the Deweyan model as refined by Chris Argyris and Don Schön lies in its reflective pragmatism, in its ability to make sense of the trial-and-error reflection-in-action of practical experience. The brilliance of the Freirean model lies in its insight into relationships of knowledge and power, voice and growth. (Forester 1999: 130)

Forester suggests an additional third approach, to supplement the first two approaches with accounts of deliberative practice and ‘a transformative theory of social learning that explores not only how our arguments change in dialogues and negotiations but how we change as well’ (1999: 130). He emphasises the importance of what he calls participatory rituals:

We can think of participatory rituals as encounters that enable participants to develop more familiar relationships or to learn about one another before solving the problems they face – for example, the informal drink before negotiations; the meal during focused workshops; the small break-out groups complementing problem solving sessions; the early story-telling phases of mediation processes, and so on. (ibid.: 131–132)

Forester argues further that preliminary participatory rituals might be more time-effective than the alternative of pushing for solutions too soon, before parties have been able to listen to one another. He thereby suggests a model of learning consisting of three interrelated approaches. The first approach is an experience and action-oriented approach and the development of knowledge from experiments and concrete action. Second, he focuses on more dialogical and argumentative processes, and third, he suggests a transformative theory of social learning through deliberative practice and participatory rituals.

3.3.5 *Power and the Postmodern Planning Critique*

Postmodern planning critiques can be subdivided into critiques of existing planning practices, and those which are more prescriptive. The former are also a part of a wide critique of planning as a modern enterprise (Allmendinger 2001; Beauregard 1996; Sandercock 1998; Soja 1997). For Beauregard, who approaches in a more prescriptive way, postmodern planning follows the tenets of postmodernism generally, where the text of the postmodern planner should be consciously fragmented and contingent, non-linear, and without aspiration to comprehensiveness, singularity or even compelling authority (1996: 192).

If the postmodern is defined as a social theory, not as a historical phenomenon or epoch, the so-called 'French school' of thinkers becomes relevant. One such thinker was Foucault, who was concerned with the ways social norms and codes structure people's lives. To Foucault, power was the key to understand these norms and codes. He saw the real political task in contemporary society to be to criticise the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent, to unmask the political violence inherent in such institutions, in order to fight them (Allmendinger 2002a; Allmendinger 2002b).

In the debate on postmodernism and planning, new ways to understand the role of planning in society regarding society control and power are discussed (Flyvbjerg 1998). Focusing on power relations in planning, Flyvbjerg concludes that *power is more concerned with defining a specific reality than with understanding what reality is, thus, it is fair to say that power seeks change, not knowledge* (Flyvbjerg 1998: 36; also quoted in Allmendinger 2002b: 168).

The contribution of postmodern planning theory to the analysis of power and power relations in planning practice deserves particular attention. I find it important to emphasise the conclusion in Flyvbjerg's study of city planning, and thus indicate that learning and knowledge generation might be hampered by power play. Building directly on planning practice, Flyvbjerg analyses power and rationality building on Foucault.

In the postmodern critique of planning as a modern enterprise, Allmendinger sees several problems. First, it separates theory and practice and draws a picture of planning as a homogeneous practice, ignoring how planning is actually undertaken. Second, the ways in which planning are portrayed as modernist by postmodernists, act as a 'straw man' whereas the reality is that planning practice implies aspects of both modernism and postmodernism, e.g. fluid, contingent, irrational, and at the same time guided by overarching themes.

The critique against the communicative approach in planning theory relates both to the idea of a communicative rationality and the lack of translation into practical approaches and advice:

As such, collaborative planning is the theoretical zeitgeist of the 1990s. I emphasise theoretical because there has been no rush from planning practice to take on the collaborative approach. ... The lack of practical application has left collaborative planning largely in the academic realm. Nevertheless, its potential importance in making changes to planning practice, as well as its undoubted usefulness as a tool for examining planning practice, means that it needs to be included as a potentially new paradigm for planning. (Allmendinger 2001: 123)

In order to develop a new collaborative planning practice, this critique should be taken seriously. One reason for the problem could be related to the focus on an institutional level, dominant in the communicative approach to planning theory (Healey 1996; Healey 2006). This could be related to the critique of the communicative approach and its foundation in the communicative rationality:

The distribution of power between individual stakeholders is recognised, but communicative rationalists suggest that by building trust and confidence across these fissures in interpersonal relations, 'new relations of collaboration and trust[will] shift power bases' (Healey 1997: 263). To say that this is optimistic would be an understatement. The theorists are advocating a redesigning of institutions to foster collaborative social learning processes; that is, they are arguing for the replacement of existing power structures with inclusionary argumentative governance, and this is the theory's weakness. Habermas and his planning interpreters argue for communicative rationality to foster an alternative to existing power structures. By simply changing the institutional framework of governance, it is argued that an open discursive style of governance can develop. This, however, displays little regard for individual perception and motivation. It only tackles the institutional aspects of power structures, and denies the existence of power inherent within the individual. (Allmendinger 2001: 130)

The quotation above suggests a naivety regarding the issue of power, related to individual motivation and perception.

The question of power is central in the communicative theory, as we have seen, focusing on procedural aspects in the validation of knowledge. This reminds us that *planning practice is deeply political, carrying values and expresses power*. With reference to Lukes' (Lukes 1974) three dimensions of power, Healey (2006: 84) argues that *'power lies in the formal allocation of rights and responsibilities, in the politics of influence, the practices through which "bias" is mobilised, and in the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in cultural practices.'* In addition to the structural power, it is important to understand that power also lies in the implicit assumptions about how to organise and the potential in broad participation. Healey thus argues that as a result questions of process are as important as questions of substantive content. In addition, Healey argues that these processes aimed at learning and social change need to be aware of the cultural embedding of reasoning processes:

Without acknowledgment of the cultural embedding of reasoning processes, Schön's double-loop learning becomes an exercise in the more effective domination of the powerful. (Healey 2006: 264)

The conceptualisation of regional development coalitions is, as argued above, occupied with such a concern for learning process. The relevance of such a focus on power relations is obvious, in particular when changes in the political economy reinforce the development of informal arenas where power is mobilised.

3.3.6 Planning in Stakeholders Society

Literature on governance has had a general tendency to discuss the governance-government dichotomy with emphasis on the perspectives of power relations and alternative democratic forms. I will take another approach, and focus on the practical implications and expressions of these new modes of governance. I will, however, argue for critical considerations of new practices in the light of democratic norms and values, power relations, and participation.

The collaborative approach to planning is a particular style of governance (Healey 2006). I recognise that planning processes are central exercises in municipal administrations and historically planning has been directly linked to government organisations. A governance approach does, however, imply a wider understanding of the role of planning, i.e. to see the explicit relevance of new modes of governance to planning processes, and to see how these modes of governance call for integration of regulating activities with a focus on local development. In general terms, systems of governance of a society or community refer to the processes through which collective affairs are managed (ibid.). Planning should hence be seen as a particular style of governance activity (ibid.). In order to identify relevant elements in the governance approach for planning practice in a municipality, some implications will be discussed.

Jessop identifies a shift from government to governance as:

reorganization of the local state as new forms of local partnership emerge to guide and promote the development of local resources. In this sense we can talk of a shift from government to local governance. Thus local unions, local chambers of commerce, local venture capital, local education bodies, local research centres and local states may enter into arrangements to regenerate the local economy. (Jessop 1994: 271)

Jessop identifies a transformation of what once were powerful local governments with a high degree of control over political economy of a spatial territory but which have now been replaced with a fragmented collection of agencies, engaged in territorial governance. In public planning, the challenge has been to adjust to this change from government to governance, where political and economic power lies with not one powerful government but a multiplicity of agencies and interests.

As new forms of horizontal articulation are being built up around spatial alliances in order to complement or replace vertical, sectoral linkages to the central state. A key characteristic of many of these initiatives of horizontal linkages is their interactive quality. As Jessop has shown, people and agencies are being drawn into new activities in new ways. Place-making activities involve a wide universe of those with a 'stake' in a place. Reflecting the multiplicity of stakeholders, collaborative ways of developing and implementing policy, focusing on building new relationships through which to manage and mobilise for change, are appearing around the procedures and practices of planning systems (Freeman, Littlewood, and Withney 1996; Healey 2001; Vigar, Healey, Hull, and Davoudi 2000). In a society of multiple stakeholders, with diverse concerns, hierarchical forms of articulating public policies and firm boundaries between public and private action are being displaced by more fluid and horizontal relationships.

Who are the multiple stakeholders involved in horizontal relationships? Jessop suggests they are representatives of local unions, local chambers of commerce, local venture capital, local education bodies, local research centres, and local states. In the context of municipalities, this corresponds very well with the situation in the case under study here. It is, however, important to acknowledge the role of the local authority itself, its administrative and political leaders, and their role as facilitator of economic growth and

development. This is important particularly in an advanced welfare state such as Norway, including the broad scope of public services and the role of public planning. With the financial and competence resources in municipal organisations, it seems to be difficult for others, such as public–private development agencies, to replace local authorities in place making and planning processes.

Some problems of the strong position held by local authorities could be identified. Healey (2001) argues, based on experiences from Britain, that this new, collaborative, multi-party form of ‘regulating’ the relations between stakeholders in urban regions sits uncomfortably with the regulatory form driven by performance criteria advocated by neoliberal principles. She argues further that the practice of the planning system is still in the grip of a performance criteria approach. The planning system is thus at risk of being a narrow regulating activity, rather than becoming an active force and core arena in which the new collaborative forms can develop. In Table 3–2, adapted from Healey (2001), the contrast between regulatory forms of planning systems is drawn, indicating a normative argument for a turn to place-making and collaborative planning practice in the context of local and regional governance.

Table 3-2 *Emerging regulatory forms of planning systems compared*

	Conflict management (performance criteria)	Place-making (collaborative planning)
Regulatory object	Right to use and develop land	The way of thinking policy discourses' frames of reference
Context	Efficient land and property development, market conflicts between development and environmental interests	Multiple stakeholders complex, political claims for attention, markets prone to failure
Discourses	Norms, standards and criteria, political legitimacy and legal interpretation, public interests versus private rights	Qualities of places, spatial organising ideas, strategic projects, coordination and collaboration
Functions of plans	<i>Product</i> : store of norms, policy statements, etc. <i>Process</i> : arena for conflict mediation	<i>Product</i> : store of 'framing' principles about qualities of places and supporting arguments <i>Process</i> : collective social construction of strategic organising ideas, images, etc.

(Source: Healey 2001: 275)

In contrast to the concept of 'government' related to the formal hierarchy of administrative institutions within a territory, governance is a 'looser' way of managing (Lauria 1997):

there has been a decline in government (the role of directly elected local government institutions) and the rise of 'governance' – the exercise of authority by non-governmental institutions coupled with claims (no more than that) to legitimacy. (Lauria 1997: 25)

In my approach to a municipal development project, I take the starting point in the shift from government to governance and the challenges this represents for local planning and development. As identified by (Madanipour, Healey, and Hull 2001), contemporary planning faces the challenge of contributing positively to economic development and environmental care:

Spatial planning, therefore, essentially faces a main challenge: how to fit in a new political and economic configuration where many new actors are involved, proving that it is not only engaged in regulating environmental change but also positively contributing to economic development and environmental care. (Madanipour, Healey, and Hull 2001:2)

3.3.7 Summary

Taking this challenge as a starting point, I argue that this calls for attention to the way we think of planning, not only as regulating activities within government organisations but also as an implicit part of local development activities. This links the dialogical approaches to regional development, as in VC 2010, explicitly to the role of planning in local and regional governance and the way we organise planning processes in such contexts.

I have presented planning theory and identified challenges to planning practice (e.g. to be legitimate and relevant activities in the context of regional governance) in order to emphasise diverging concerns between the industrial democracy ideas and planning in the public sphere. Some main concerns in planning have been identified related to *power, communicative practice, and social learning processes*. I argue that all of these concerns are relevant in the transformation of planning practice in the context of governance. As well as in the transformation of planning practice, my thesis is that these concerns are essential to the facilitation of learning processes in a municipal development project. I will therefore readdress these concerns about power, communicative practice and the facilitation of social learning processes in my analysis based on the data in this study (see Chapter 7).

In the first section, shifting conditions for local and regional planning have been presented. In the last section, a particular challenge to planning in these changing times has been identified. My reasons for bringing these aspects into the discussion are that, a) re-scaling of state intervention and a turn to governance in local and regional policy both represent a challenge to the legitimacy of planning and a potential for rethinking the role of planning in regional and local development, and b) in order to link the learning perspective presented in the previous chapter to planning, a new context

appears with a different historical development and different regulatory institutions and stakeholders. At the same time, the reorganisation of the local state and the efforts to enhance collaborative planning practice in this particular context beg for new ideas and development processes.

The context of regional political economy and the reorganisation of regional governance and planning practice thus represents a complex environment and challenges unaddressed in the industrial democracy tradition attempting to realise learning processes and broad participation in a regional development.

Thus far, I have presented four main paradigms in contemporary planning theory, and these are summarised in Table 3–3.

Table 3-3 Categories of post-positivist planning theory

	Neo-pragmatism	Postmodernism	Communicative	Deliberative
Theoretical foundation	Pragmatic philosophy	Post-structuralism and social constructivism	Critical theory, communicative action	Communicative theory and pragmatism
Phenomena they describe	Concrete problem solving without prior theorising, relating knowledge and action	Power play/rhetoric	Communicative action and collaborative social learning	Learning in deliberative planning processes
Factories considered	Legitimacy/work-ability of plans, experience, language	Shifting rationalities	Language, power, intersubjectivity, discourses	Action, communication and deliberation
Underlying assumptions	Learning from experience	End of transcendental truth	A communicative rationality	Deliberative democracy

First, I will point at the overlapping aspects of the theories. This is in particular illustrated by the focus on language and communication that is central in both the social learning/pragmatist and communicative approach. Pragmatism also overlaps with postmodern theory when it comes to rejecting absolutes, consensus or transcendental truths. Second, divergence is illustrated both in the degree to which certain aspects are emphasised and more fundamentally in different ontological positions. The former divergence is exemplified in the focus on discourse and communication in both pragmatism and communicative theory, the latter in the fundamental divergence between communicative theory and postmodern theory when it comes to procedural rationality through the procedure of communicative rationality (Flyvbjerg 2001). Third, a deliberative approach integrates, in many ways, the perspectives of social learning/neo-pragmatism and communicative theory.

A postmodern approach to planning offers a critique of planning theory and practice rooted in modernism. This approach is in particular occupied with the question of power relations and shifting rationality. It questions a consensus seeking practice and the existence of transcendental truths. These are the strong sides of a postmodern approach, but at the same time also its weakness. That is, a postmodern critique of planning theory and practice offers no independent alternative planning practice in that matter. I will therefore not build further analysis on this category of planning theory.

Social learning tradition (or neo-pragmatism), as it has developed in the social learning tradition, offers an important perspective on planning as learning processes. It explicitly addresses the relation between knowledge and action, and suggests an action orientation and experience-based approach to planning as a learning process. These are the strong sides of neo-pragmatism. The weak sides relate to the lack of attention to a more abstract discursive level. That is, the linking of reflections in and on concrete action to social constructions of meaning in communicative arenas.

Collaborative or communicative planning theory is perhaps the most influential contemporary planning paradigm. It offers a procedural approach to communicative action, based on Habermas, to form a collaborative or communicative planning practice. The strong sides of communicative planning are related to the linking of different communities of discourses on communicative arenas. It offers procedures for consensus based on intersubjectivity and communicative rationality. It is thus based on the social construction of knowledge through communicative action. The weak sides of communicative planning are related to the problems of turning the theory from an abstract/discursive level into planning practice.

3.4 Conceptions of Place

In order to develop a planning approach in the context of governance, attention to place becomes important:

It is just because of this disembedding, the fragmentation of many established relationships, and the way in which the networks of people and firms cut across particular spaces, seemingly disconnected from each other though adjacent, that questions are being raised about the qualities of places. (Healey 2001: 268–269)

All these tendencies, whether speaking of social, economic or political relationships, mean that the qualities of place are being asserted with increasing strength in politics and policy-making today. Yet the meaning of ‘place’ is not straightforward:

Conceptions of place are social constructs, interweaving the social experience of being in a place, the symbolic meaning of qualities of a place and the physicalness of the forms and flows which go on in it. (Healey 2001: 269)

In the following, I will elaborate further on the understanding of place:

In an open society, with multiple relationships crisscrossing across geographical space, any location is likely to carry significance for a wide variety of people, the different stakeholders in what happens there. The stakeholders will give a particular meaning to a location, each in their own social context. Any location may thus have multiple meanings of place layered over it. It is a complex task of collective social construction, often over a long time period, to create an enduring and widely-shared meaning of place. (Healey 2001: 269–270)

However, the reassertion of concern for the qualities of place raises difficult challenges for governance processes. Conflicts may arise not only between what one person wants to do and how this impacts on their neighbours, but also they may arise over the meaning of place which one person wants to express and the different meanings which other stakeholders seek to maintain, promote or develop. In this context, spatial planning systems are being drawn into more than just conflict management and place promotion. They have a role in place-making, in generating enduring meanings of places which can help to focus and coordinate the activities of different stakeholders and reduce levels of conflict. This is a well-established role for planning systems. The challenge today is to develop a capability for place-making in full recognition of the

complexity and openness of the relationships which flow across the space of a place, and the consequent diversity and multiplicity of stakeholders who actively assert, or potentially could assert, a concern about a place. This requires planning systems and practices to face the hard challenge of reorienting their conceptions of place and redesigning the processes through which stakeholders' concerns are taken into account.

3.4.1 *Place Identities*

A focus on identities implies a connection between place and people. Identity is how we make sense of ourselves, and geographers, among others, have argued that the meanings given to a place may be so strong that they become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them. Used in this way, the term identity has some quite specific connotations. It refers to lived experiences and all the subjective feelings associated with everyday consciousness, but it also suggests that such experiences and feelings are embedded in wider sets of social relations. As Rutherford (Rutherford 1990) argues: *'identity marks the conjuncture of our past with the social, cultural and economic relations we live within'*.

In my approach to place identity I follow the work of Dyrberg (Dyrberg 1997). Dyrberg draws on recent developments in discourse analysis and Lacanian theory. Central to his analysis are the concepts of hegemony, antagonism and undecidability, which he mobilises to show the imaginary nature of identity. According to such a perspective, every 'identity' is the result of a process of *identification* which always takes place within a complex set of power relations. Once power is no longer conceived as an external relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities but as shaping the identities themselves, democratic politics appears under a different light:

Indeed, if relations of power are constitutive of the social, the main question of democratic politics cannot any more be how to eliminate power but, instead, how to constitute relations of power that are compatible with democratic values. (Dyrberg 1997: 9)

However, this also means that the very identity of a subject, as well as social and political constructs in general, cannot be taken for granted or reduced to the structural positionality of the subject per se:

Rather, I am going to suggest that it must be studied in terms of an immanent process, that is, in the becoming of identity. It is to be able to grasp this moment of becoming, or this process in which identity is constructed, that the conceptualisation of power has to be non-derivative. The reason is that in so far as power derives from something else, say, agency or structure, or a combination of the two, the moment of the becoming of identity cannot but presuppose what, in fact, needs scrutiny. (Dyrberg 1997: 137)

It is this constitutive incompleteness of identity that triggers the process of identification in which the subject 'finds itself'. The construction of identity through identifications can be seen as a hegemonic project because identity is never given, but is made up by the articulation of various elements which do not possess an internal coherence. This understanding of identification processes may be related to the parallel process of construction of place:

Power relations are a major element in the construction of place. (Paasi 2001: 21)

Massey (Massey 1995) in particular has strongly argued that we should understand places – that exists at all spatial scales – not as strictly bounded entities but rather as open constellations of social relations that cross boundaries in many ways. She notes that places do have boundaries around them, but also makes some reservations regarding their nature. First, boundaries do not embody any eternal truths of places. Rather, they are socially constructed and power relations are decisive for their construction. This means that the 'truths', too, can change. Second, boundaries inevitably cross some other social relations that may be momentous in the construction of social space. Spatial scales are fused in places and boundaries become more flexible and overlapping. Third, boundaries matter, because they are a means of organising social space – they are, in fact, part of place making. Massey's latter claim is significant since boundaries have been of vital importance, for instance in nation-building

processes. They still are, and nationalism and national identity discourses often exploit boundaries very effectively. Fourth, Massey reminds us that the drawing of boundaries is always an act of power.

Place is too often seen as a context that frames planning activities. It is hardly discussed and nuanced, and thereby makes reference to a stable and enclosed environment. Place is often seen as a product, a result of a distinct historical development, and the drawing of boundaries around a place defines that place as different and unique. I see places as processes, continuously shaped and reshaped. My interest is in how places change as an implicit part of planning and development activities.

In this chapter an argument for the role of place in local economic development and place making is presented. The argument finds its foundation both in an understanding of place as a socio-cultural frame in which local development is enhanced and on a constructivist approach where places are continuously reconstructed through social practice and local discourses.

It is important to make the distinction between an objective and social constructivist approach to the concept of place explicit in order to put forward the argument that local planning and development projects both are constituted by place but also constitute places through new discourses and social change.

The trajectory of the theoretical debate on place has moved from an essential to a constructivist approach. The literature has, however, become more occupied with bridging the gap between an objectivist (material social structures) and subjectivist (discursive/symbolic meaning) approach to place (Berg and Dale 2004).

In the literature, new understandings of places have been discussed in relation to the globalisation debate. It is argued that by the late 20th century, spatial movement, interaction, influence, and communication had become so available, fast and extended, that borders and boundaries which once were important in defining places as distinct and unique had lost most of their meaning. We are now in a phase where 'time-space compression' is qualitatively new and dramatically intensified (Harvey 1989a; Harvey 1989b). This calls for a new perspective on place as interconnected to other places in a

‘space of flows’ (Castells 1996), in contrast to separable entities that are settled, enclosed, and internally coherent. It is argued that changing social organisation of space disrupt our existing forms and concepts of place (Giddens 1990). This gives us two quite different definitions of place, either as settled and bounded, or as open and nodes in a relational space (Massey 1995).

However, a third approach can be identified that rethinks the relationship between space and place. If we understand places as meeting places, keeping both the idea of bounded and open places in mind, a multidimensional perspective emerges. It is such a perspective that Doreen Massey (Massey 1994) presents in her idea of a ‘global sense of place’. An important element in the ‘opening’ of places is that it addresses a particular problem in the concept of place. The problem is that the concept often seems to require the drawing of boundaries. It draws the attention only towards a unique history and essential local identities, including the differences from ‘the other’. An alternative interpretation of place is possible, however. Massey (1994: 154–155) argues:

what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of particular constellation of social relations, meeting and waving together at a particular locus. ... It is, indeed, a meeting place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.

A direct implication of such an understanding is that adequate explanations of different types of local changes (economic, social or cultural) need to see the local in a wider geographical context:

‘Places’ are temporary ‘fixes’ or nodes in flows of ideas, of goods, of people etc. They also exist in a flow of time. They were like something, they are as something now, they could be something else. (Madanipour, Healey and Hull 2001: 7)

Four ways of understanding place should be highlighted based on the argument presented above. *First*, places are not static: they are processes of social interaction tied together in a place. *Second*, places do not have to have boundaries in order to

conceptualise place itself. They can also be defined through the linkages to the outside. *Third*, places do not have single, unique identities, but are full of internal conflicts. Conflicts over what their past has been, conflict over what should be their present development, and conflicts over what should be their future. *Fourth*, the uniqueness of place should not be denied. The specificity of place is continually reproduced, based on a number of sources, not only the results from some long internalised history.

In an argument of why the subjects of territory, identity and spatial planning are interesting and essential at the present time, and with reference to the UK context characterised as a fragmented nation, Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger point to the potential that now exists to identify and build more meaningful and democratic processes:

These new political spaces should be distinctive and embedded in particular places, where citizens feel able to interact, voice their opinions, and utilise the forum of participation, policy making and governance to create places and futures that they feel are their own. In essence, we believe it is time that sub-national territories are allowed to re-create a new sense of civics. Spatial planning can become a central mechanism in this pursuit if used as an interactive, integrative and participatory mechanism, but with a realistic assessment of the handicap that institutional government and state power can frequently hold over such opportunities. (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 2006: 17)

In this section, I have presented a definition of place as a social construction and an understanding of place identity as identification processes constituted by conflicting interpretations of what a place has been, what it is, and what it should become. I find it important to present these perspectives because of the immanent role spatial and temporal contexts have in local and regional planning and development.

3.4.2 Summary

Places as social products have been highlighted in this presentation. Place making projects are concerned with this construction of place, and mediation of conflicting interests and realities are an implicit part of such projects. The facilitation of learning in

the context of place making processes represents different challenges. The interpretation and mediation of the meaning of place becomes implicit in the learning process, and actions are related to the outcome of such processes. The interrelation between action in place making projects and the construction of place thus seems to be important.

What, then, is the implication of this interpretation and mediation of place for learning processes? It reminds us of the broader context of learning process and the complexity of these multiple images and interpretations of place. More explicitly, the challenge of realising radical learning seems more complex than in an organisational setting (Argyris and Schön 1996). Healey (2001) reminded us about the complex task of collective social construction to create enduring and widely shared meanings of place. The reason for this complexity may be related to the ability to transform meaning schemes or contexts among participants in order to experience simple learning and radical learning in place making projects (Argyris and Schön 1996; Bateson 1972).

In addition, to transform meaning schemes comes close to the process of identification (Dyrberg 1997). As emphasised by several researchers, such processes always take place within a complex set of power relations (Dyrberg 1997; Paasi 2001). In the industrial democracy tradition, the implication of power relations for learning does not seem to have been addressed. In place making, an explicit focus on the relevance of power to learning should, however, be emphasised in order to understand both how the reasoning processes are culturally embedded (Healey 2006) and how learning could be hampered by power.

3.5 Readdressing the Research Questions

Learning is a central concept in the collaborative development model in Norwegian work life presented above. As a direct articulation of the action research approach to work life development, regional development coalitions are grounded on the same rationale of development, e.g. through the development of 'learning organisations', broad participation of those involved in the change processes, and theory–practice relations. As seen in the elaboration of the development coalition concept, a distinct and complementary emphasis on action orientation through the use of field experiments and

an action research approach, and a reflexive approach based on dialogue in knowledge construction processes, is the foundation of the perspective on learning. A thorough review of the learning theory with relevance to regional development coalitions has been presented. Four related theoretical approaches have been presented, representing a focus on reflective and experience-based learning, organisational learning, a learning to learn perspective (or meta-learning), and the integrated perspective of the co-generative learning model.

The challenge I find represented in the theoretical perspectives is the function in the learning process of respectively action as problem solving activities and experience from such activities on the one hand and dialogue and reflective processes on the other hand. The theories emphasises both the independent function/role of action and dialogue and their interdependency. I shall explore the relations between action and dialogue as a starting point of my discussion of how learning occurs in regional development coalitions.

Although the analysis of action and dialogue are important to the understanding of learning in regional development coalition, my discussion of the turn from an organisational and intra-enterprise context to the regional or 'sub-regional' context in the VC 2010 programme brings additional challenges regarding the complexity of the context. A second challenge to our understanding of the learning process in regional development coalitions is thus the role of the context or place where the project is situated. I relate this to Batesons' theory of second-order learning where he emphasises learning as our ability to change contexts and question the mental frames that guide our attention.

It is important to acknowledge the emphasis put on the action in the approach to learning as the starting point of the analysis. This is why I start with the reflective learning circles. It is, however, my point that this is not sufficient in order to understand important aspects of the learning process. Important issues in the learning processes are the contextual aspects, and not only the actions taken. This is thus my contribution to understanding the learning process in regional development coalitions. Learning is a truly contextualised process embedded in the unique aspects of a place and the history

of a place. It is the contextual issues, not the concrete actions taken, that are actualised in the reflective processes.

The contextual presentation of a place and its history and culture is thus presented and actualised as a part of my analysis and not as a passive backcloth.

Based on the theoretical review above, a more comprehensive presentation of the research questions is possible. My main research question is:

main research question: How can action research and development concepts adopted from the industrial democracy tradition enhance the learning capacity in municipal economic planning and development processes?

In the question, an explicit relation between planning and learning is established. It also includes a reference to collaborative planning. In addition, municipal planning and municipal development are assumed to be very much alike, or even the same.

First, the explicit relation between planning and learning is made because the study explores the application of a particular approach to regional and local development aimed at change and learning in a municipal development project. Second, collaborative planning seems to be the relevant parallel to the VC 2010 approach to regional and local development within planning theory. In addition, it is a significant perspective on planning opposing established rational planning traditions. Third, planning and development are very closely interlinked. I do, however, include a more normative approach, suggesting that planning needs to be reinterpreted as a means in proactive place making processes, not isolated as only a regulatory practice (Healey 2001).

The main question forms the basis for the conclusions drawn in the final chapter of this study (Chapter 8).

In order to address the main question, two subsidiary questions have been developed. The first is:

First subsidiary research question: How can municipal economic planning and development processes become learning processes?

This question relates to the explicit focus on learning in action research and regional development coalitions. It explores different perspectives on learning, and is aimed at identifying features of both the learning process and the facilitation of learning. The question heralds the discussion on learning theories presented in Chapter 2 in relation to the case in question in this study. A thorough understanding of how learning processes unfold is also an important basis for the interpretation of learning in planning.

The first subsidiary question is addressed in Chapter 6.

The second subsidiary question is:

Second subsidiary research question: Is it so that regional learning processes are different from social learning processes within enterprises, and what are the implications for an action research strategy in a regional context?

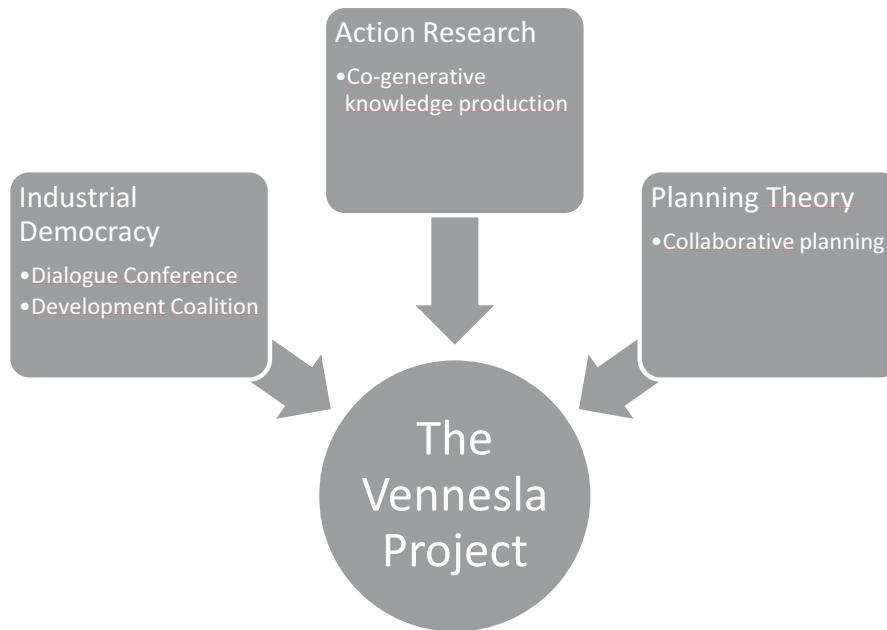
In this question, I explore the role of context (understood as the territorial place with a distinct economic, cultural and social historical trajectory, established planning practice, and local governance models) to the learning process. Based on a learning perspective that emphasises the contextual aspects of radical learning, I find it important to understand what parts of a local context become central to the learning that takes place.

The question is explicitly linked to the application of the VC 2010 development model in a municipal development project. The project was closely related to the planning and development activities in the municipality and hence activated a discussion on the local planning arrangements. Consequently, planning theory, conceptions of place and local governance become relevant as the counterpart that is met in the adoption of the VC 2010 development concept in a municipal setting.

The second subsidiary question is addressed in Chapter 7.

A revised version of the analytical frame presented above (in Fig. 1–2) may help to summarise the theoretical approach presented so far (Fig. 3–1). Figure 3–1 shows three theoretical approaches. The revision consists of key theoretical concepts applied in the analyses of the case study, the Vennesla project.

Figure 3-1 Analytical frame revised



In this chapter, the industrial democracy tradition and planning theory have been presented. In the next chapter, the third approach, an action research strategy and the theory of co-generative knowledge production will be presented.

4 METHODS AND ACTION RESEARCH STRATEGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will relate my theory of inquiry, based on Dewey, to the operative development concepts that constitute the action research approach in the Value Creation 2010 programme in the Agder region. Theory of inquiry refers to the epistemology of the pragmatist John Dewey (Dewey 1929). It is a particular approach or theory of knowledge that is associated with the work of Dewey. He saw the stark distinction between thought (knowledge) and the world of fact to which thought was referred to as a problem in the traditional epistemology approach of rationalist and empiricists. Dewey takes a different stand and argues for a close relation between thought and action.

This chapter thus includes two main parts. First, there is a presentation of the rationale in an action research approach. Second, I will give a presentation of an action research process and a discussion of the methods used in the collection of empirical material, and finally a discussion of the qualities and analysis of the data.

The VC 2010's Agder project had a qualitative research design where we predominantly work with partners in development processes in order to enhance democratic development and develop new democratic practices. This type of social processes where democracy is related to reflection and learning has to be understood from the inside and from taking part in the processes, following the general understanding of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Greenwood and Levin 1998; Reason and Bradbury 2001; Toulmin and Gustavsen 1996; Whyte 1943; Whyte 1991).

I will now discuss some basic features of an action research approach. The first feature is the relation between the inquirer and the inquired. This relates to the epistemological grounding for action research, acknowledging the legitimacy and necessity of both insider and outsider actors in the inquiry, understood as a learning process (Greenwood and Levin 1998). As stated above, an action research process should relate to democratic principles, i.e. enhancing the democratic potential of actors through learning based on local knowledge and participation. The second feature relates to the definition of research focus and problem identification. In action research, the inquiry is grounded on local challenges, i.e. a practice oriented approach, contributing to a theoretical discourse on the basis of a problem solving process. Third, the role of the researcher as an integrated part of an inquiry process is important. The role is twofold, both directed towards solving the identified problem in the local context (insider), and to extract experiences and learning from the same process in order to take part in the communication within an academic discourse (outsider).

In my work in Venneśla Municipality, all of the above-mentioned features corresponded with the approach that was taken. I will return to each of them in the following discussion of methods and research design. The action research project at stake here has many sides, however. It could be presented in terms of a case study (Stake 1995), not to emphasise a methodological choice but rather a choice of what is to be studied, saying little about the methods chosen to study the case. It could also be presented highlighting the design and methods used in the collection of the data in a qualitative constructive inquiry process. In order to identify significant aspects of the project at stake, I will need to do both. In the following, some main elements in the inquiry process will be discussed in order to prepare for an argument concerning inquiry design, methods and data quality, the role of the researcher, and finally, the strengths and limitations of the inquiry. The chapter ends with a presentation of my approach to data analysis.

4.2 A Co-generative Learning Model

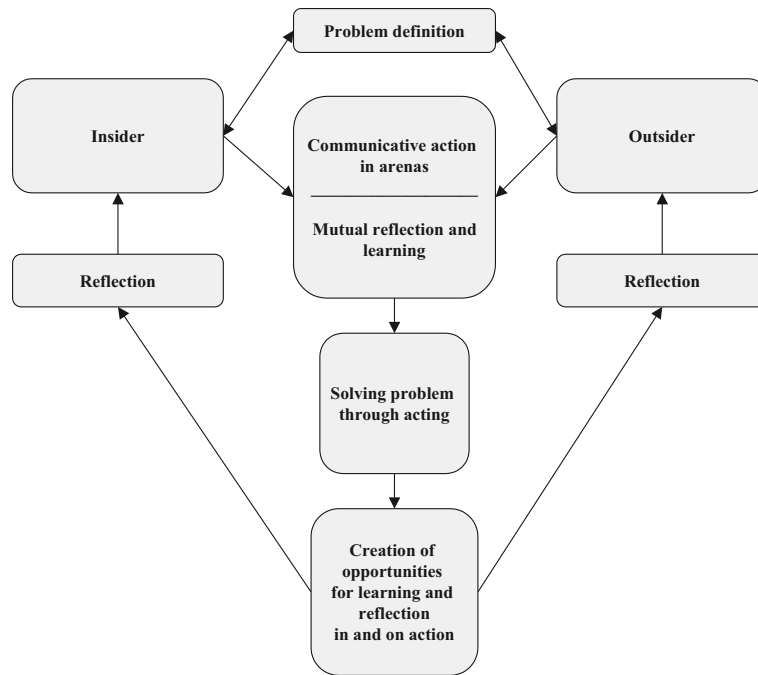
Building on the philosophy of American pragmatism, a particular epistemological grounding has been developed in relation to action research. In their pragmatic action research, Greenwood and Levin (1998) explore an epistemological foundation that

evolves from the writing of John Dewey, Charles Peirce, William James, Kurt Lewin, and more recently, Stephen Toulmin and Bjørn Gustavsen. It is particularly John Dewey's theory of inquiry with an action approach to science that most explicitly stands out as the pioneer in the field of pragmatic action research. In the following, I will discuss some important features of an action approach to the generation of knowledge.

In Dewey we find an important refusal to make a distinction between thought and action. He states that the only source of knowledge is to be found in action. Thus knowledge (also scientific knowing) is a product of continuous cycles of action and reflection (Dewey 1991 [1927]).

The co-generative model (Elden and Levin 1991; Greenwood and Levin 1998) integrates both a focus on action and dialogue in its perspective on learning in action research. Although inspired by a pragmatist–philosophical approach, dialogue is seen as an important element. Emphasis is put on both the organisation of communicative arenas and on communicative action in these arenas (see figure 4-1).

Figure 4-1 The Cogenerative Action Research Model



(Reproduced from Greenwood and Levin 1998: 116)

4.2.1 Problem Definition Process

An Action Research (AR) project takes its starting point in the questions of the participants in the process. It is argued that ‘an AR process deals with solving pertinent problems for the participants. (Greenwood and Levin 1998: 116). Researchers from the outside and participants from the inside should collaborate to organise a problem definitions process as the first step in a mutual learning process. Such a process should be organised with special attention to communication and the rules of democratic dialogue in the social construction of mutual understanding in a new discourse. This is also emphasised in the next stages.

4.2.2 *Communicative Arenas and Communicative Action in Arenas*

Central in the co-generative learning model is the creation and design of arenas (see Fig. 4–1). In order to create a trustworthy learning process for all participants the process should be designed to meet the needs of the issues at stake and be open for communicative action. It is in the interplay between the insiders and outsiders that new discourses may be formed: ‘In arenas, communication between insiders and outsiders can produce learning and open up a process of reflection for the involved parties’ (Greenwood and Levin 1998: 118). Again, the concept of place becomes important. The distinction between insiders and outsiders in a learning process refers, in a planning perspective, to both insiders and outsiders to a place. Insiders to a place have the essential contextual knowledge that always is the starting point for a discourse on local development. It is therefore important to develop an understanding of place as something more than an empty frame or container that activities of actors take place within. The distinction between the participants is also a distinction between skills and experiences that are brought into the arena. It is in this diversity in skills and local knowledge that we find the force in cogenerating new understandings (ibid.)

In such an asymmetrical situation there is always a power issue that needs to be handled. In the AR literature, the power relations between insiders and outsiders are discussed and a transfer of skills and knowledge both from outsiders to insiders and from insiders to outsiders is emphasised as balancing the relations. It is, however, a question of timing and the importance of strong involvement from the action researcher in the early phase to a less active role later in the process.²⁴

4.2.3 *Action and Problem Solving*

In the AR approach, focus is set on local problems. It is the action taken as a result of a co-generative process that becomes central to the learning process. The actions taken bring new experiences into the dialogical-based co-generative process. In a reflexive

²⁴ These issues will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 5

process, new social realities are continuously reconstructed, always building on the discourses from earlier phases in the process.

What are these actions that are taken? Is it the realisation of strategies and action plans, or is it the reformulation of strategies and plans based on discussions and new ideas? I find it important to include many types of actions in my perspective. A focus on communicative action includes the dialogical process that brings arguments to the table. Yet this is not sufficient in order to understand the learning process. An AR project also includes realisation of action plans and efforts made to implement a strategy through concrete actions. Actions may therefore be seen as complex sets of purposeful activities (Friedmann 1987).

4.2.4 Reflection and Learning

It is the reflection circles that bring new knowledge and experiences back into the co-generative learning process that I see as the crux of the AR approach. It is in the facilitation and participation in such circles that action researchers contribute to the local problem solving process. It is possible to identify at least two distinct contributions: first, a concrete attempt to solve real problems and challenges at stake in the local situation; second, an attempt to facilitate a process that focuses on local collective learning and control.

4.3 Value Rationality and Practical Knowledge

In the book *Making Social Science Matter*, Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) builds an argument about the strong sides of social science. In line with Habermas' (1984) focus on the life world and a value-rationality in his communicative theory, Flyvbjerg builds on Habermas' and others' thinking when he argues that value-rationality has for a long time given way to instrumental rationality. The strong position of an instrumental rationality in science is linked to the prominent role of *epistemic* science with emphasis on theories, analysis, and universals. In contrast, and based on Aristotelian philosophy, Flyvbjerg distinguishes between *epistemic* science and a more context-, practice-, and experience-based knowledge named *phronesis*, founded more on common sense, intuition, and practical wisdom. In addition, a distinction is also drawn with *techne*, i.e.

pragmatic, context-dependent knowledge oriented towards production, or technical *know how*.

Concerned with the analysis of values and ethics as a departing point for action, phronesis is based on a practical value-rationality. Flyvbjerg (2001) argues explicitly '*in their role as phronesis, the social sciences are strongest where the natural sciences are weakest*' (Flyvbjerg 2001: 61). He summarise the point of departure for *phronetic* research in three value-rational questions: Where are we going? Is this desirable? What should be done? Phronesis is thus seen as that intellectual activity that is most relevant for praxis.

To seek phronetic knowledge, focusing on practical implications through a pragmatic and action-oriented approach is very much in accordance with the essence of action research. A particular attention to the context dependency of such knowledge comes in sharp contrast to episteme, or what often is seen as scientific, universal, and context-independent knowledge. To develop phronetic knowledge requires experience from practice. I thus find experience to be essential in the knowledge generation process aimed at producing both actionable knowledge, judged by its workability, and more generalised phronetic knowledge.

4.3.1 Inquiry Approach and Rationale

It is important to acknowledge that I take action research to be a strategy, not a method. In other words, to take an action research approach is to take a particular inquiry approach with normative and epistemological implications, not including preferences for selected methods. The essence of this has been briefly presented above, but needs to be treated more in depth. I will address this in close relation to the steps in the research project scrutinised here.

Reason and Bradbury (2001: 1) define action research as:

a participatory democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

This definition includes the main features of action research. It is, however, of a general kind and comprises a broad tradition with many nuances in practice (Greenwood and Levin 1998; Reason and Bradbury 2001). I will point to two of these contributions to the understanding of action research: first, the dialogical and collaborative approach (Gustavsen 1992; Gustavsen, Finne, and Oscarsson 2001; Johnsen 2001), and second, pragmatic action research (Greenwood and Levin 1998). Although these traditions are closely linked, they emphasise on the one hand the importance of dialogue, and on the other hand the importance of action.

According to Toulmin (Toulmin and Gustavsen 1996), action research seeks the kind of knowledge Aristotle called *phronesis* (practical wisdom) in contrast to *episteme* (theoretical grasp), and action research should be judged by its practical results, not by theoretical propriety: *‘As we shall argue, the subject matter of social research is not just practice rather than theory: its focus is also particular not universal, local not general, timely not eternal, and above all – concrete not abstract’* (ibid.: 3).

In general terms, the line of demarcation goes between perspectives on dialogue as either an end or a means, namely to focus either on the solution of practical problems and the co-generation of knowledge based on dialogical reflections on experiences, or on the development of new social relations and the construction of meaning in the interaction of different discourses. In the former, dialogue is seen as a fundamental element in the journey towards problem solutions and knowledge production, in turn seen as a process of meaning construction, while in the latter the meaning construction process becomes a product in itself. To take action becomes either to facilitate the preparation for action or to approach and define real problems and find solutions to

them. This calls for a distinction between the pragmatic philosophy related to communicative action theory and a more empirical and action orientation coming from pragmatism.

I argue that these perspectives, in a municipal planning context, should be seen as complimentary in order to bring out the potential for learning in such planning processes. This indicates that learning takes different forms, as discussed in the first part of this dissertation.

4.4 Insider and Outsider – Analysis in an Action Research Project

The distinction between insiders and outsiders is emphasised in the co-generative model (see Fig. 4–1). This distinction is imminent in all action research projects and thus something I find central to the methodological discussions in action research. In the model, the dichotomy ‘insider–outsider’ refers to the difference between local participants as insiders, and the researcher as an outsider. It is, however, a dichotomy that also refers to the changing roles of the researcher throughout the research process. I will now discuss some important points concerning the dichotomy ‘insider–outsider’. This distinction regarding the role of the researcher will also determine the organisation of the remainder of Chapter 4.

As emphasised above, the municipal development project was designed according to the research and development model embedded in the regional VC 2010 project at Agder. This model was based on the principle of broad participation by those affected by the project and a collaborative design of the inquiry. Presentation of the design of the inquiry is thus also a presentation of the development project. My emphasis now will be on the collaborative design and the collection of data.

In contrast to a conventional design of an inquiry into local or municipal spatial and economic development, an action research design may represent a strategy for an inquiry into a holistic development process. Social sciences are often seen as only partly relevant to such processes as long as inquiries are restricted to demographic, economic, or cultural analysis. At the core of this conventional approach lies a division between the activities and thinking of researchers (those who know) and the subjects they

investigate (those who not know) (Werlen 1993). This is problematic in an action research perspective. In the terms of Skjervheim (1976),²⁵ action research is occupied by the role of the researcher as a *participant*, not merely as a *spectator*. I will return to the role of the researcher but first I will discuss the collaborative process of data generation. Kemmis and McTaggart have described this position, to which I subscribe, as follows:

We [hold] that participatory action research is best conceptualised in collaborative terms. Participatory action research is itself a social – and educational – process. The “subjects” of participatory action research undertake their research as a social practice. Moreover, the “object” of participatory action research is social; participatory action research is directed toward studying, reframing, and reconstructing social practices. If practices are constituted in social interactions among people, changing practices is a social process. ... Participatory action research offers an opportunity to create forums in which people can join one another as coparticipants in the struggle to remake the practice in which they interact – forums in which rationality and democracy can be pursued together, without an artificial separation ultimately hostile to both. In his book ‘Between Facts and Norms’, Jürgen Habermas describes this process in terms of ‘opening communicative space (Habermas 1996)’. (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005:563)

The focus on *coparticipants* in the citation from Kemmis and McTaggart does, however, contribute to blur the difficulties of insider–outsider relations. I will now discuss some challenging aspects of such differentiations in roles. Some common dichotomies from the social science field are presented in Table 4–1.

²⁵ Skjervheim’s essay was first published in 1957 by the Department of Sociology, University of Oslo.

Table 4-1 The role of the researcher

Dichotomy		Field of application
Insider	Outsider	Action research ²⁶
Participant	Spectator	Sociology/Social science ²⁷
Reflection in action	Reflection on action	Action research
Closeness	Distance	Social science ²⁸ /Professional ethics ²⁹
On stage	Back stage	Organisational learning/action research ³⁰

In Table 4–1 differences in the roles of the researcher are exemplified. Common to these dichotomies is that there has to be a balance between the roles, and an ideal that the researcher needs to be aware of the differences but to some extent take on both roles at the same time. It is thus fair to say that these dichotomies reflect different methodological techniques to be aware of in an inquiry. The most important reflection I make is that these dichotomies become problematic in action research when we state, as Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) do, that practices are constituted in social interactions

²⁶ Greenwood, Davydd J. and Morten Levin. 1998. *Introduction to action research: social research for social change*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

²⁷ Skjervheim, Hans. 1976. *Deltakar og tilskodar og andre essays*. Oslo, : Tanum-Norli.

²⁸ Repstad, Pål. 2007. *Mellom nærhet og distanse kvalitative metoder i samfunnsfag*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

²⁹ Henriksen, Jan-Olav and Arne Johan Vetlesen. 2006. *Nærhet og distanse grunnlag, verdier og etiske teorier i arbeid med mennesker*. Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.

³⁰ Eikeland, O. and A. N. Berg. 1997. *Medvirkningsbasert organisasjonslæring og utviklingsarbeid i kommunene*. Oslo: Kommuneforlaget.

among people, and that changing practices are thus a social process. In action research, theories are developed from the facilitation and participation in such change processes. The role of the researcher is therefore first and foremost one of insider and participant, but at the same time, always facing the need for documentation and analytic reflections. The difficulties regarding the combination of a role as researcher and participant in action research is related to the inescapable involvement in both the quality and success of the action research project. The role of the researcher is thus always both an insider and an outsider in an action research project: an insider because he or she is dependent upon trustful relations with other participants when taking part in the local learning process, and an outsider because of his or her lack of insight in local discourses and also the need to communicate the aim of his or her participation as researcher. It is thus cognitively difficult to differentiate between the two positions. One way to handle these dilemmas could be to actively create a distance in different phases (time) of the process such as through the evaluation of the project and in the writing of this thesis. Another way is of course to take part in the reflections about the project on different arena such as in the research group. I have focused on distance in both ways.

In this chapter on action research and methods, I will differentiate between the role of the researcher as insider and outsider. The aim of such differentiation is an attempt to argue for the relevance of different analytical perspectives. The local dialogue-based development process in which I as researcher participated will be based on a social constructivist perspective. The data collected throughout the process when I, as the researcher, was particularly involved as an insider will be analysed with a more outsider perspective in the following chapters. I will, however, argue for a moderate version of social constructivism, emphasising the importance of such a perspective on the social world. The process of social construction of knowledge will also be contextualised, taking an outsider perspective. That will acknowledge how such local development processes are taking place within a larger contextual frame with more structural and institutional limitations (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000). As argued by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (ibid.) a major problem of the postmodernists and linguistically minded scholars is that *'they limit the horizon too narrowly. The social element in attempts at emphasizing the dialogical dimension becomes a question of interpersonal interaction*

in the constructing of reality, while political, historical and social relationships are neglected (ibid: 247).

The data are analysed in two sections. First, the Vennesla project is analysed as a learning process building on theories about dialogical approach to social change and the facilitation of such processes. The learning process is explicitly related to theories about learning. Second, these learning processes are contextualised. Differences between an enterprise level and a regional level are identified and presented based on relevant theories about planning, governance and place. The analysis is thus based on these differences in context and the implication for the learning process.

The first analytic chapter (chapter 6) builds on data, presenting the phases in the project and the outcome of these phases. Conference reports, agendas and minutes from meetings, political documents, and field notes constitute the data used to analyse the evolving process throughout the project. In the second analytical chapter (chapter 7) additional data are used, such as newspaper articles, field notes (referring to mediation processes) and interviews. I have made a conscious choice in my presentation of empirical data in the analysis not to include citations from individuals. Rather, I present citations from public documents, development plans, newspaper articles, and reports written based on dialogue conferences in order link empirical data to my analysis. The aim is to emphasise the collective and social processes within a territorial setting based on the dialogues in the project. A focus on the individual reflections of participants is thus represented in the dialogues that formed the direction of the planning and development process.

4.5 Selecting the Case

In an action research project, the case at stake is selected on the basis of close interaction with local actors. In the Vennesla VC 2010 project, this was a process of establishing a relation based on trust and mutual understanding. This process took place in early meetings and preparations in the project. The main element in this process was the identification of a local challenge related to the economic restructuring process and a presentation of the action research approach and development model in the VC 2010

project. The most important incitement in this process is found in the limited economic support of the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (Kommunal og regional departementet). It was the local authorities in Vennesla that received this support and initiated a new project.

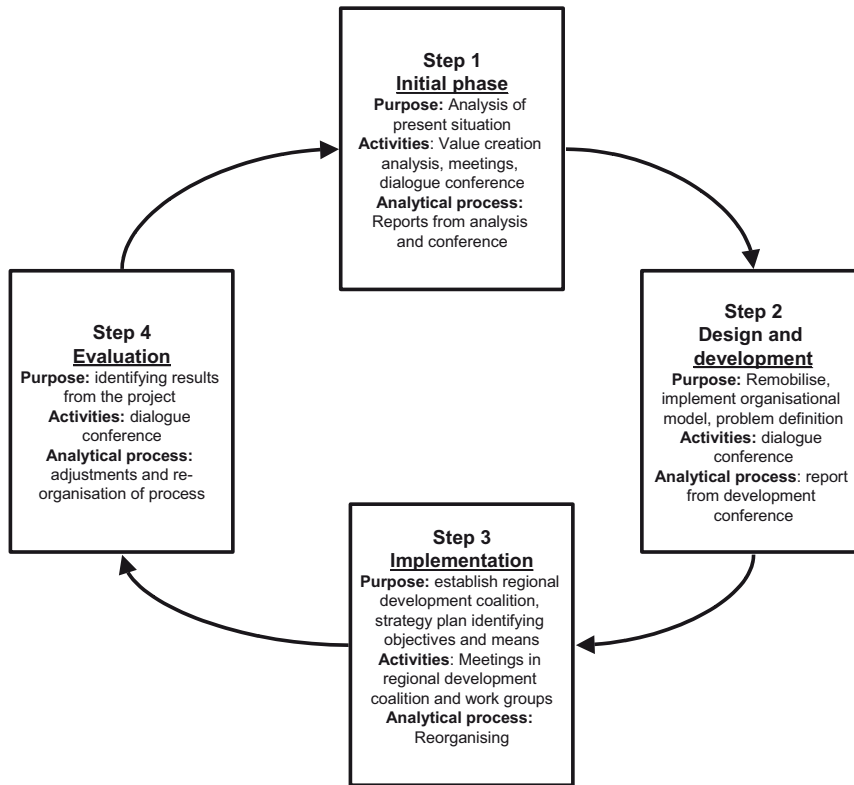
In this study, the process within a territorial setting is the main unit of analysis. In addition, Vennesla Municipality as both a political-administrative organisation³¹ and a defined territorially category is a key unit. Territorially, the municipality frames the activity in the project, the development coalition in particular, and as political-administrative organisation it represents the host of the project and the organisation of key stakeholders, such as project leader and leader of the development coalition representing both the political and administrative level. The territorial and organisational frame of the project was thus somewhat given, although the project, through the organisation of the development coalition, in many ways challenged the territorial and organisational structure of the local government institution. I will return to a comprehensive discussion of the territoriality later in my analysis.

4.5.1 Steps in the Research Process

I will return to a more comprehensive presentation of the phases in the Vennesla project in the next chapter. Here, I will briefly illustrate the phases in a model in order to link the main research activities to the data collected from the project.

³¹ I use the term 'local authorities' when referring to the municipal political-administrative organisation, and 'municipality' when referring to the territorial area.

Figure 4-2 Steps in the research process



(Based on Johnsen 2001)

Table 4-2 shows the research activities linked to collected data.

Table 4-2 Data from the project linked to activities

Activities	Data from 'Vennesla development coalition'
Dialogue conferences (dc) I, II & III	Content/programme, participation, plenary presentations, group work discussions/write-ups, observations, summary report, further plans, evaluation of process (dc III),
'Coalition' meetings (6 meetings)	Participation, strategy process, strategy document, decision-making, meeting memos and minutes, observations
Between meetings with project leader and secretary of the coalition (2 meetings)	Planning documents and observations, meeting memos, interviews
Work group (economic development, competence development, place marketing) meetings (12 meetings)	Participation, decision-making, action plans, observations, meeting memos and minutes
Documents	VC 2010 research programme, Agder Research strategy/application, 'Kommuneplan' Vennesla, previous research on economic development and cultural elements (e.g. attitudes to education in the municipality, economic development agency, labour movement–community relations),
Media	Newspaper articles ³²

4.6 Methods and Data

The research undertaken has been based on qualitative methods and techniques. In the list presented in Table 4–3, I summarise the methods used.

³² A list of articles is presented in Appendix 3

Table 4-3 Data collected from the chronological activities in the project

Date	Activity	Data
2002.01.12	Dialogue conference I	Conference report
2002	National economic restructuring status (application)	Economic study, ³³ application including action plan, answer letter from the Ministry with results of application
2002.12.18	Restart meeting between the research team and the municipality	Minutes, field notes
2003.01.14	Dialogue conference II	Conference report, field notes
2003.02.19	Meeting development coalition	Minutes, field notes
2003.02.26	Intermediate meeting	Draft strategy plan, field notes
2003.03.18	Meeting development coalition	Minutes, field notes
2003.04.07	Intermediate meeting	Draft strategy plan, field notes
2003.04.29	Meeting development coalition	Agenda, draft strategy, minutes, field notes
2003.06.10	Meeting in executive committee of local council	Recommendations, decisions, field notes
2003.08.27	Meeting development coalition	Minutes, field notes
2003.09.24	Meeting in 'place making' work group	Minutes, field notes
2003.10.14	Meeting in 'place making' work group	Minutes, field notes
2003.11.03	Meeting in 'vocational training' work group	Minutes, field notes
2003.11.04	Meeting in 'place making' work group	Minutes, field notes
2003.12.01	Meeting in 'vocational training' work group	Minutes, field notes

³³ Bedriftskompetanse. 2001. "Ringvirkningsanalyse Vennesla kommune." Bodø.

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2003.12.03	Meeting development coalition	Agenda, minutes, field notes
2003.12.09	Meeting in 'place making' work group	Minutes, field notes
2004.01.19	Meeting in 'vocational training' work group	Minutes, field notes
2004.01.27	Meeting in 'place making' work group	Minutes, field notes
2004.02.20	Meeting in 'innovation' work group	Minutes, field notes
2004.03.04	Meeting in 'place making' work group	Minutes, field notes
2004.03.05	Meeting in 'innovation' work group	Minutes, field notes
2004.05.03	Meeting development coalition	Agenda, strategy plan, action plans, minutes, field notes
2004.05.18	Meeting in executive committee of local council	Minutes, field notes, recommendations, and decision
2005.11.22	Dialogue conference III	Programme, presentations, conference report, field notes

4.6.1 My Role as Researcher and the Action Research Approach

When I started the action research project in Vennesla, I was relatively unfamiliar with the action research approach to social science. I had, however, been involved in evaluations of regional policy programmes in Norway based on the principle of a 'fourth generation evaluation'³⁴ (Guba and Lincoln 1989). Through my participation in the international PhD action research programme Enterprise Development and Work Life Research (EDWOR) at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, and through experience from a municipal development project

³⁴ A continuous evaluation focus throughout the process where the evaluator functions as a negotiation leader between stakeholders, and results are constructed and distributed in the collaboration between all participants in the process.

over four years, I have gained a clearer understanding of the strengths and limitations of the action research approach. I will address some of the strengths and limitations in the following.

First and foremost, I find the strength of action research in the ability to generate knowledge through a meaning construction process linked to action aimed at solving practical problems. That includes a strategy for learning involving all stakeholders in a democratic participatory process. This may also be related to the potential in action research to support the development of a local capacity to solve future challenges (Gualini 2002). Action research acknowledges the relations between knowledge and power. Action research should be understood as a democratic process supporting the creation of new knowledge that potentially could be liberating. This opportunity addresses core challenges to collaborative strategies in planning and development and thus represents a normative concern for re-establishing dominating power relations.

There are also challenges to address. In the VC 2010 Agder project difficulties with an action research approach in a complex regional context have been discussed thoroughly (Johnsen et al. 2005; Johnsen and Normann 2004). Different dilemmas related to conflicts between research and practice became a reality in the project and led to comprehensive discussions within the research team.³⁵ An important challenge related to the question of how the action researcher is to combine the roles of being a collaborator and having a critical reflective capacity when engaging in project for radical change in a conflict-ridden social field with strategic stakeholders (Johnsen and Normann 2004). The experience was that strategic power play and strategic action by stakeholders in the region represented a clear threat to collaboration, reflexivity, and democratic dialogue in the action research approach. The solution suggested by the research team was that in some situations the action researchers must have a legitimate right to abandon collaboration and present a critical voice in the public deliberation (ibid.).

³⁵ The conflict was on the regional level, related to the steering and priorities in the VC 2010 Agder project.

The above-mentioned problems have relevance for the Vennesla project but the conflict line and the conflict issues were different in many ways. There were no conflicts between the researchers and stakeholders in the municipality. Comparing the experience from a regional and a municipal level gives an indication of how fragile an action research project potentially could be. There is an immanent dependency in trustful relations in the social relations established in collaborative practice. It relates to the ability to communicate, and to turn strong notions of the role of research into a question of mutual understanding and to respect diversity. Yet sometimes this seems problematic and the foundation of an action research approach is lacking.

I have emphasised above that knowledge generation takes place through the construction of meaning linked to problem solving. I argue that this might be problematic in strategic planning processes. Some of the participants central in the project were able to dominate discussions defining the issues to address and thereby disconnect others from the learning process. I argue that this exemplifies the importance of an action approach aimed at solving problems both to legitimate planning activities and also, and perhaps more fundamentally, the ability to include all participants in a collective reflective learning process.

Retrospect reflections

When it comes to the collection of data, the role of the researcher in an action research project is somewhat challenging. To participate in such a project gives the researcher first and foremost a direct view on what goes on, how people behave, what they say and do not say, and how they collaborate with others. Observing these situations gives rich and important material, written down as it was observed and interpreted by the researcher. Such data, mostly consisting of field notes, may be termed *process data*. In addition, other documentation about the process observed might be collected, consisting mainly of written documents and articles, such as agendas and minutes from meetings, strategy plans, newspaper articles, reports, etc. In many cases, as in the Vennesla project, initial quantitative analysis (demographic, economic) is also carried out, representing valuable data. Finally, previous research from the same geographical area often proves to be relevant data to include in a study.

What is lacking in the above approach, however, is the more qualitative, individual, in-depth type of data. My experience is that without an explicit strategy in the collection of data based on conventional use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in an action research approach, valuable insights into individual reasoning and meaning construction processes could be missing. My experience is also that attention should be directed towards the interplay between individual perceptions and collective processes in order to fully understand social learning. Although such an attention was implicit in this study on which this thesis is based, a stronger focus on supplementing individual data could have been favourable to shed light on the process as the core unit of analysis.

Observation, the role of the researcher

I have touched upon the issue of the researcher in an action research approach several times already. It is, however, appropriate to present a more systematised discussion related to the municipal project, in which I will emphasise the shifting roles in the process.

It is insufficient to reduce the role of the researcher to merely an observer in a conventional sense. My role in the project was multidimensional, one actively engaged in the facilitation of the project focusing on the organisation of the process and the development of collaborative and communicative arenas in the project. My role as a researcher in the project is characterised in the following points:

- Observation through participation in all parts of the project documented in extensive field notes
- Contribution to the organisation and development of collaborative arenas, such as dialogue conferences, development coalition, work groups, and evaluations
- Continuous feedback of the reflections in the research team to the development coalition throughout the process
- Continuous fuelling of the conversations with questions about ‘*how*’ and ‘*why*’.

Field notes

A comprehensive use of field notes is characteristic of an action research approach. I have used field notes systematically through the project and used these notes as important reminders and references for other types of data. Through the use of observation and field notes, a researcher becomes an instrument in the data generation. Based on the qualitative and naturalistic approach associated with Lincoln and Guba (1985), I see this more as a possible advantage and strength of the research than a threat.

Interviews

In the inquiry, there was close contact with stakeholders in line with the collaborative research design. To supplement the data from the ongoing participation and observation, five interviews with key stakeholders were undertaken. The interviews took the form of unstructured or semi-structured conversations. In some of the interviews I used a recorder, while in others I took notes. The interviews focused on the core issues in the inquiry, namely the learning process and the reorganisation of a municipal development process. I have interviewed the key stakeholders in the project, political and administrative leaders in the municipality, and the director of the local development agency.

Conference reports

Conference reports represent an important part of the data gathered through the dialogue conferences. The reports represent more or less directly the dialogues in the conference through the repetition of work group presentations and a minimum of analysis (Gustavsen 1992). These analyses take the form of thematic categorisations of the issues discussed. My data from the conferences build partly directly on the reports³⁶ and partly on my own observations documented in field notes.

³⁶ I was the author of two of three conference reports; the first was written by H.C.G. Johnsen and H.K. Lysgård

Documentation

The development process is represented in numerous official municipal documents, including agendas, minutes, strategy and action plans, preparations and/or recommendations and decisions made by the county council. Most of those documents are available to the public on the municipality's website.³⁷

Media

Throughout the process, both the regional newspaper, *Fædrelandsvennen*,³⁸ and the local newspaper, *Vennesla Tidende*,³⁹ published news reports on the project in particular and the municipal in general, and commented on the development in the municipality. The newspaper discussions about the future of Vennesla Municipality are not new, however. I have done a systematic search for relevant articles about Vennesla Municipality in the regional newspaper in the period from 2002 to 2006. The collection and analysis of these articles represent an important basis for the identification of local and regional response to the municipal development project.

Secondary data

As seen in the presentation of the local context above, several researchers have studied different sides of the economic, social and cultural context of the municipality. I have built on these, both as background information about the context and also in my attempt to mirror some characteristics of the local context regarding industrial history, the role of the local authorities and the political and administrative situation today. Together, these studies provide an important backcloth to the case study presented here. The data are selected and presented based on the criteria of relevance to the project at stake.

³⁷ <http://www.vennesla.kommune.no>

³⁸ <http://www.fevennen.no>

³⁹ <http://www.vt-nett.no>

Triangulation

As argued by Denzin (1978), different types of triangulation (sources, methods, investigators, and theories) could strengthen a claim for credibility. In my work on the Vennesla case I have applied a triangulation of methods, both of investigators (in the use of a research team (Lincoln and Guba 1985)), and of sources in order to approach the case from diverse angles.

4.7 Data Quality and Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln and Guba 1985) have developed an argument for the distinction between a positivistic and a naturalistic (constructivist) paradigm. They emphasise the radical difference between ontology and epistemology. I will focus on the constructivist paradigm, as described in the following.

It is the view in a constructivist paradigm that realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic. This is an ontology that is in contrast to the positivist version. However, it has become less controversial in the social sciences since the mid-1980s. The contemporary debate is thus more nuanced when it comes to the ontology in social sciences, debating the role of materiality and relativity in the constructive approach.

Accordingly, I will not neglect the conventional approach to social sciences. It is my aim to present social, cultural and economic analyses of the local context as an introduction to the development project and the geographical setting in which it is located. This analysis is based on data collected from statistics and qualitative studies. I find such institutional data to be more suitable for traditional testing in terms of validity and reliability. This approach acknowledges that an outsider position in the action research process represents a more conventional approach to the analysis of the local setting.

As an epistemological position, social constructivism emphasises the interactive and inseparable relationship between the knower and the known, i.e. between the inquirer and the 'object' of inquiry. In the social constructivist approach, the possibility of generalisation is discussed in terms of 'working hypothesis' (Cronbach 1975). This is

linked to the continuum between the poles of general (nomothetic) and specific (idiographic) and the basis for transferability:

When we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion. (Cronbach 1975: 125, cited in Lincoln and Guba 1985: 123)

In short, local conditions make it impossible to generalise in terms of transcendental truths, conclusions are only true under certain conditions and circumstances. There is, however, a learning potential with relevance beyond the particular context (Greenwood and Levin 2000):

The action research view of generalization means that any single case that runs counter to generalizations invalidates it (Lewin 1948) and requires the generalization to be reformulated. (Levin and Greenwood 2000: 97)

In my consideration of the research process and the findings that lead to my conclusions, a thorough discussion of the elements that make up the inquiry should be presented in order to establish a solid warrant for my assertions. It should address the question of why the findings are worth paying attention to and taking account of. I build on the alternative set of criteria to a conventional inquiry process presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Instead of talking about internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, they suggest the criteria of trustworthiness (*ibid.*), based on the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the inquiry. In the following I will bring the alternative set of criteria supporting trustworthiness in relation to my research process.

4.7.1 Credibility

Credibility is suggested as an alternative to the internal validity criteria in conventional research in order to demonstrate 'truth value'. The aim of the criteria is '*to carry out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced and, second, to demonstrate the credibility by having them approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied*' (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 296). These aims resonate with the action research approach. The inquiry in Venesla was

designed and carried out based on an action research approach. That involved explicit attention to the organisation of the inquiry building on a collaborative approach to research.

The project lasted for almost four years, from the early meetings and initial discussion about the collaboration with the local authorities and the local development agency, until the final dialogue conference that focused on evaluation and experiences from the project. The duration of the project was a significant element in terms of establishing trustful relations in the field. Given the historical context of the municipality as discussed above, and articulated through the industrial culture, the explicit and implicit focus on difference and the otherness of the outsider were expected from the local community. During the project, divisions between the researchers (outsiders) and the local representatives (insiders) were, however, overcome and turned to relations based on the acknowledgement of complementary roles and contributions. This was also explicitly addressed by the researchers and emphasised as an important potential obstacle to a collaborative design.

The period of time when the researchers were engaged in the project contributes to the scope of the inquiry, adding to and enabling a more holistic perspective. The scope of the inquiry is a significant characteristic of the Vennesla project, and gives an increased complexity in the analysis of data collected. At the same time, the duration of the project contributed to the depth of the inquiry, enabling the researcher to follow the most relevant characteristics and elements in the situation emerging in the field related to the problem and issue studied. Together, the scope and depth of an inquiry contribute to a *prolonged engagement* and *persistent observation* as activities in the field, supporting the credibility of the findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

In action research design the use of multiple methods in the data collection is an open alternative. This was applied in the Vennesla project. In addition to the participation of the researcher in the field discussed above, the changing use of different sources, methods, investigators, and methods known as the *triangulation* technique (Denzin 1978), supports a claim for credibility. I have presented the collection of qualitative methods applied in the Vennesla project above, in an attempt to apply triangulation. In

addition, different sources were used in the collection of data (see the list of sources presented above. These sources, both direct involvement in the field and secondary sources such as research by others in the same local context, support the credibility of the inquiry. In addition, the use of different investigators, as part of a team, in the inquiry was applied in order to maintain a critical discussion of the inquiry process and the findings (Guba and Lincoln 1989). I now turn to this team organisation and the division of work between the members.

The organisation of a 'home base' research team was important as a supplement to my work as a single researcher in the case. The research team contributed in several ways. First, the VC 2010 research team located in the regional research institute (Agder Research), had overall responsibility for the research in VC 2010. The team was engaged in several projects, but one or two researchers were responsible for each project. In the Vennesla project, I had responsibility in collaboration with the regional VC 2010 project leader. We participated in the project on a regulatory base. In addition to our participation, the whole research team participated on some occasions. I will successively present my own participation, the participation of the VC 2010 project leader, and the role of the research team in the following, in order to discuss the element of *peer briefing* in the inquiry.

The inquirer, i.e. the author of this dissertation, was engaged in the project from an early phase, although not from the very beginning. The initial phase of those involved getting to know each other, discussing the preliminary design of the inquiry, and negotiating the expectations of the relation between the researchers and the local representatives started before I entered. I did, however, take advantage of this process and easily became a part of the relations. Gradually, I also became the most involved researcher in the project. I will return to the more epistemological discussion of the role of the researcher and the use of the individual as an instrument in the inquiry, and here only relate the discussion to the design of the inquiry.

From the start, I participated in all activities in the project, including all meetings on all levels (executive committee of the local council, development coalition, work groups, and conferences), informal meetings with key stakeholders, and individual discussions

with participants in the project. In addition, a research colleague, and leader of the regional VC 2010 project, participated in the conferences and in the development coalition. He was thus well oriented and informed about the process and contributed actively to the realisation of the project. His participation, together with my own, made it possible for me to discuss and reflect on the project based on a detailed level of knowledge about the inquiry process and the local context.

The regional VC 2010 research team was also included in the Vennesla project, both through the direct participation of the members in dialogue conferences, and through discussions in the team based on reports from the project that I presented. This gave the opportunity to discuss the project in relation to different perspectives and for critical reflection on some preliminary hypotheses in different phases of the project. At the same time, a comparative element was present in the discussions among the research team members, linking the municipal project to other research projects in the regional development.

There is a similarity in the *member checks* of data, analytical categories, interpretations, and conclusions with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, which Guba and Lincoln (1989) have suggested is an activity which supports the credibility of an inquiry,⁴⁰ and the idea of a collaborative research in the action research approach. It is characteristic of action research that those processes necessarily should be fed back to the stakeholders for critical discussions and reconstruction. In the Vennesla case, the member checks were carried out in several ways. First, as a part of the discussions in the development coalition, preliminary analysis and suggestions were presented by the researchers in order to enhance further reflections and suggestions of alternatives. It was a process characterised by the continuing interaction between preliminary interpretations made by the researchers and the responses and alternatives suggested by the participants in the coalition. This was thus a continuous process of member checking throughout the process. Second, member checks could also be seen as a part of the interaction with a larger group of stakeholders

⁴⁰ Guba and Lincoln (1989: 314) hold member checks to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility.

beyond the development coalition. The design of the project prompted a third conference towards the end of the project, after a period of implementation and realisation of action plans. This conference focused on the status of the implementation and the experiences from the whole project. It was an arena where the researchers could present some perspectives on the project pointing to important results and suggesting explanations. The aim of the conference was thus to enhance learning and reflection from the project and to discuss alternative explanations and conclusions.

Transferability

In a constructivist inquiry there is scepticism towards the claim of external validity (Guba and Lincoln 1989). It is a fact that the close relation between the descriptions presented and the time and context that those descriptions hold only allows for conclusions in terms of a working hypothesis. Guba and Lincoln argue that whether such hypotheses hold in other contexts is an empirical issue, and depends on the similarities of the contexts. The inquirer can thus only provide the necessary *thick description* (Geertz 1973) of the context that enables others to consider the potential for parallelism and transferability.

What constitutes a proper thick description of the context is unclear, however. In the case presented in this thesis, I build a thick description of the context on both my own observations and interpretations and also available research on and in the same local context. Together, these constitute the description of the context and a window into the particularities of the history and culture of a place.

Dependability and confirmability

In order to make an argument for the *dependability* of the inquiry, I will emphasise the presentation above of the design of the research process regarding both the process within the research team and the interaction between the participants, insiders and outsiders during the project period. Dependability could thus be related to the credibility of the inquiry discussed above. My action research approach also supports the dependability of the inquiry based on the transparency of a collaborative design. I will argue that the relevance of an audit process (Guba and Lincoln 1989) in order to

strengthen the dependability is low in my case. The project is closely followed by regional value creation alliance, established as part of the regional VC 2010 project, and by participants in the municipal project with a direct and 'hands on' relation.

It follows from this argument that also the question of confirmability finds its answers in the action research approach. It is the local 'problem owners' and their perception of the solutions found to their problem that support the claim for dependability and confirmability. The idea of co-researchers (Greenwood and Levin 1998), i.e. the enabling of all participants to take part in the learning process that builds on reflections based on experiences from practice, is an additional argument in relation to the transparency of action research.

As a consequence of the action research approach an additional criterion for the credibility of the inquiry, and thus closely related to dependability and confirmability, is the question of *workability*. As a distinct characteristic of the evaluation of action research, I will in the following discuss this issue in relation to the case in depth.

4.8 Workability

As the first credibility challenge in action research, Greenwood and Levin (1998) address the *workability* test of the action research questions developed in the local context: '*We must figure out whether the actions taken in the AR process result in a solution to the problem. This is in line with Dewey's (1976) thinking on the inquiry process, where knowledge is created or meaning constructed through acting on the environment*' (Greenwood and Levin 1998: 81–82). This points explicitly in the direction of criteria from pragmatism about the credibility or truth-value of the solutions chosen in the local context. In the pragmatic action research approach of Greenwood and Levin (ibid.) this is the basis for legitimising results from social sciences. In the context of this thesis, I subscribe to such an understanding but will also emphasise additional elements in the establishment of credibility presented by Greenwood and Levin.

Making sense of the tangible results from the inquiry relates to the question about how the outcome can be integrated in meaning construction processes that create new

knowledge. Greenwood and Levin (1998: 82) find support in Berger and Luckmann's (Berger and Luckmann 1967) writing on the social construction of knowledge, but criticise their lack of reflection on the quality of this constructed knowledge: '*For them [Berger and Luckmann 1967], any construction is as right or wrong as any other possible one, a position antithetical to AR.*'

In search of a process that establishes credibility, the more procedural elements are emphasised, suggesting the ideal speech situation of Habermas, operationalised in democratic dialogue, to be an alternative to such a process (Greenwood and Levin 1998).

The relevant question in relation to the Vennesla project is thus to what extent a solution to the problem was given, or in other words, the workability of the action taken. As will be shown in the following analysis of the project, there might be no straightforward answer to this question. Although the problems identified were explicitly addressed and solutions were suggested and implemented, the complex process of problem identification in the municipal context was challenging and hampered the effectiveness of the project. Instead of understanding workability as merely tangible results, it seems to be relevant to include qualitative measures of social reflective processes in which new or deeper understanding of the problem is developed.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the foundation and rationale for the action research approach. In addition, I have presented the methods used and data collected in the project. Together with the theoretical framework presented in Chapters 2 and 3, the methodological perspectives provide the tools by which the data are analysed. In the following chapter, a descriptive presentation of both the geographical location of the project and the action research project is given. This presentation of a place and a development process aims to give insights into the project and provide a basis for analysis.

5 THE VENNESLA PROJECT

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present a thick description of the municipality in which the action research project was located. In order to understand important findings from the project, I believe that a thorough presentation of the geographical setting would be helpful, not because details about the uniqueness of a place would help, but because of the immanent presence of context in the learning process in focus in this study.

This chapter focuses on the economic and social history of an industrial community. It is the interpretation of an ongoing economic and social shift and an emerging crisis related to the decline in the number of jobs in a manufacturing industry that forms the backcloth to the project.

5.2 *Vennesla Municipality*

1966 ... Fog Parish. Factory chimney belches thick smoke; dust is everywhere. A parallel in the south of Odda. Cellulose and chemicals and colourings go straight into the river. The salmon are killed; it is impossible to take a bath. A thick layer of paper pulp covers the river bed. You can hear the pulse from the machines. Power generators give cheap electricity, work places. Most youngsters go straight into the factories. Happiness is a job at Hunsfos factory, in the glowing hot pot rooms at Vigeland Metal Refinery or at Reber Elevators. Then, an early marriage, a self-build house and a tuned-up Volvo Amazon with double Weber carburetors, or a Vauxhall Viva with a vacuum metre on the dashboard, big and round as an old alarm clock. (Aftenposten 24 April 2005; my translation)

5.2.1 *The Characteristics of an Old Industrial Community*

In the municipal industrial history, the establishment of Hunsfos factory on 17 March 1886⁴¹ could be the starting point. This paper mill has held an important and central position as the largest industrial plant for over 100 years. It has been a cornerstone in the municipality and made a difference to the social and cultural development. The number of employees in the factory indicate its relative importance. As late as in 1980, approximately 1200 people worked in the factory. This number had fallen to 177 in 2005.

Bjørn Aase Sørensen has conducted a comprehensive sociological study of the close relations between the labour movement and the industrial community in Vennesla from 1850 to 1975 (Sørensen 1982). Her focus is on the internal social organisation of the working-class population, and the influence of Labour movements on the formation of social and industrial policy. She describes the development of a strong solidarity and a working-class identity in the early years of the industrial development. Several examples are given from the socially stratified municipality in the 1930s. Central in the development has been the labour union in

⁴¹ <http://www.hunsfos.com/>

the Hunsfos factory, which was actively engaged in the social welfare of the working-class population from the early 1920s (ibid.: 439). A local labour movement formed its identity throughout the 20th century, through strikes and confrontation with managers, and through sports and through politics. Another important element in the identity is the local dialect. The dialect is also an ideological line of demarcation that separates the municipality from its neighbours. Today, the dialect is still important in the formation of a place identity, reinforced by a focus developed in the local high school.⁴² Sørensen argues that this distinct ideological position has led to better social service system in Vennessla Municipality than in other municipalities. The identity is illustrated in the following quote:

Through social distance to ‘owners’, to the ‘middle-class’ and to the ‘officials’ and their social organisation, the working-class in the municipality could form a community. ‘We are all alike’. At the same time, narratives underline the unique individual qualities. (Sørensen 1982: 459; my translation)

It is a strong relationship between socialist ideology and Christianity in the local community. Sørensen calls this a ‘socialist-Christianise’ ideology (1982: 462): *‘In all its poverty, the working-class population was part of two powerful movements. The activity in the missionary church and the labour union were a reminder of the larger context that people belonged to and contributed to’* (my translation). Sørensen quotes from an interview with one of the workers on the Hunsfos factory: *‘The former generation loved the revolution – we saw that the solidarity policy worked. Religion always got in the way of revolution here. “The Red”, although we loved it, could be dangerous, said my mother. For us the Red stood as the creation of freedom: freedom from people that made division and injustice and misgovernment’* (ibid.: 464; my translation).

Another characteristic that stands out strongly is the stability of the local workforce:

⁴² A class from Vennessla high school won the national Holberg Research Prize in 2005 with a project that started what has become a well-known website *dialekthjelpen* (the dialect helper). The project was based on an idea resulting from observations of the use of dialect by the winner of the Norwegian TV programme ‘Idol’, Jorunn Stiansen, who was from Vennessla.

Workers at Vigeland were, like the workers at Hunsfos, very stable – built into a lively specialist environment. From father to son – to relatives. And the working-class culture was kept alive verbally through narratives – until today, when narratives are told in the night shift. (Sørensen 1982: 467; my translation)

In the post-war period, the activity increased in the municipality, in all areas. The local Labour Party has called 1940–1949 ‘the period of municipal construction’. A municipal waterworks was built, and the local authorities were engaged in the process of persuading manufacturing industry to localise within the municipality. Reforms in social welfare and an expansive industrial policy grew out of the enthusiasm in the coming decades. During the 1950s a municipal building (town hall) and a home for the elderly were planned and built.

Several examples of the interplay between local entrepreneurs and municipal industrial policy are mentioned. One is the Reber brothers and their engineering workshop and lift factory. After learning about lift construction from Schindler in Switzerland in the 1930s, the eldest brother returned to Vennessla and together with his younger brother started the production of drying racks and tricycles. Gradually their focus shifted into the production of lifts in buildings. Today, lifts from Reber Schindler in Vennessla are a strong international trademark, although the production of lifts ceased in Vennessla in 1996. Today, management, marketing, design, and engineering are still located in the main office at Vennessla, but the company is now owned by the Swiss-based Schindler group.⁴³

Sørensen characterises the period between 1965 and 1975 as a time of prosperity. The municipality has since grown to over 10,000 inhabitants, and two neighbouring municipalities (Øvrebo and Hægeland) have been included in Vennessla Municipality since 1964. More than 50% of the workforce is still employed in the manufacturing industry. In the period 1965 and 1975, young people in Vennessla sought higher education to a greater extent than before, and a high school was planned. Towards the end of the period a more conservative political

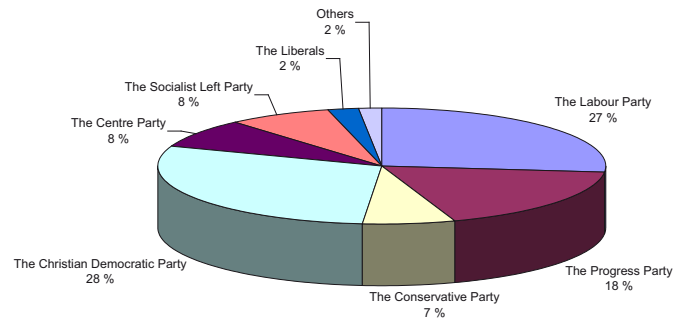
⁴³ Reber Schindler (<http://www.schindler.no>)

situation developed. Questions relating to abortion and pre-school education in Christianity influenced the political debates. In the local elections in 1975 and in 1979, the Christian Democratic Party won.

The historical development presented by Sørensen gives an insight into the social and cultural context and how it has related to the industrial development in the municipality. This gives both an impression of the more general Norwegian industrial development in the post-war period, but also of the local history of Vennessla in particular. In the following, I will summarise some of the main characteristics.

The strong position of the manufacturing industry, and particularly the largest factory for many years, Hunsfos paper mill, was important in the social and economic development of the municipality. Both the engagement of the companies in social development and the strong position of the Labour movement in politics, gave a particular cultural identity to the local community. In addition, the role of the religious community led to a particular type of socialist-Christianity as the dominating ideology in the municipality. These characteristics are also strong in the present-day context, as evident in the most recent local election, in 2003, when only a few votes divided the Labour Party and the Christian Democratic Party, in favour of the Christian Democrats (see Fig. 5-1).

Figure 5-1 Votes for political parties, in percentage, 2003



(Source: Statistics Norway)⁴⁴

Another shift in the historical development related to the period of ‘municipal construction’ in the post-war decades, when the role of the local authorities took on a new form. The building of a welfare system and an expansive industrial policy were important elements. This represented a shift from the significance of the factories and workplaces, and their social responsibility, towards stronger public responsibility.

After the merger of three municipalities, Øverbø, Hægeland and Vennesla, in the 1964 structural reform, a new line of conflict emerged. Before the reform, social conflicts in Vennesla were very much related to class conflicts. After 1964, a centre–periphery dimension was added, between the more agriculture-dominated rural areas and the industrialised centre.

The last characteristic that I will discuss here relates to local entrepreneurship. Many firms that have held a strong position in the municipality regarding numbers of workplaces are based on the efforts of local entrepreneurs. Many of the latter received their training from

⁴⁴ Statistics Norway website: <http://www.ssb.no/kommuner/region.cgi?nr=10> (accessed 4th of May 2004)

larger firms but developed ideas that were turned into small companies; the Reber brothers are one example. Such entrepreneurs have also contributed to the construction of the local identity.

In more recent years, a renewed interest in the socio-cultural dimensions of an old industrial community has emerged. It has related particularly to the level of education and the municipality's scores in educational statistics. A problem was identified regarding the attitudes and motivation among young persons towards higher education. This problem related to the industrial culture in the municipality and the job security for several generations provided by the industry. A lot of effort was put into the analyses of this culture. A research project was started and the awareness among politicians grew (Halvorsen, Jentoft, and Vangstad 2002). I will briefly present main points from the study in the following.

Table 5-1 Level of education 1999, in per cent⁴⁵

		Primary school	High school	Short higher education ⁴⁶	Long higher education ⁴⁷	Unknown
Norway	All	22	55	17	4	2
	Male	20	57	15	6	2
	Female	25	53	18	3	1
Vest-Agder County	All	20	60	16	3	1
	Male	18	62	14	5	1
	Female	23	57	17	1	2
Vennesla Municipality	All	29	60	9	1	1
	Male	25	64	9	1	1
	Female	32	57	10	0	1

Source: Halvorsen, Jentoft and Vangstad 2002

The aim of the study was to provide knowledge about competence, interests and plans for education and training among selected groups. This should in turn be presented in such a form that concrete actions could be taken in order to support development and innovations. The selected groups were teenagers and/or young adults (i.e. final-year students in secondary schools and high schools), the parents of the teenagers and/or young adults, and employees and former employees of two main industrial plants (i.e. the Hunsfos and Vigeland plants).

⁴⁵ Percentage of persons according to highest level of education, total, and by gender. The statistics do not include persons without any completed education.

⁴⁶ Short higher education: maximum 4 years of university and college education

⁴⁷ Long higher education: more than 4 years of university and college education

The aforementioned study (Halvorsen, Jentoft, and Vangstad 2002)⁴⁸ found that among the final-year students in high school less than 25% reported that they would continue their education immediately after high school (n = 217). If the students that reported that they would work first and then start further education are included, the percentage rises to 38%. According to the authors, that percentage was only half of the national average of 70%. The remainder were either unsure of what to do or planned to start work. Among the students that were not taking further education, there was a predominance of boys. Among the parents, 53% expected their children to take a higher education (at college or university level), and 60% expected their children to take on apprenticeship (n = 149). It is also striking that 60% of the parents reported that higher education was emphasised too much in society. Among the employees at the industrial plants (n = 161), almost 25% said they were motivated to start or complete unfinished high school, college, or university education. More than 10% said they wanted to finish their certificate of apprenticeship.

Although there seemed to be high motivation among adults to start or complete some form of education or training, young persons in the municipality evidently thought differently about education compared to young persons elsewhere. This may have been related to the cultural conditions in the municipality. Both the aim and the design of the study suggest that the motivation relating to education could be understood in relation to the local industrial history. This is also reflected in the dialog that is concerned with the 'education problem' in Vennesla. In a study of how important the 'education problem' is to the political and administrative leaders in the municipality, Nilsen (2004) explore the willingness and possibility to handle the education issue. She concludes that there seems to be a lack of attention to the education issue in the municipality, and she explains this situation through the dominant industrial culture and the high status of manual work versus academic work.

⁴⁸ 80% of final-year students in high school and primary school answered the questionnaire, 30% of parents responded, and 50% of employees in the industrial plants responded.

In a newspaper article, presenting the study (Halvorsen, Jentoft, and Vangstad 2002), one of the researchers states: ‘If the distance between Kristiansand and Vennesla had been longer, I could have understood it. The neighbouring municipalities are like different worlds’ (*Fædrelandsvennen* 25 October 2002; my translation). The researcher continues to say: ‘*other regions have taken small steps gradually, but Vennesla has been hanging behind the general societal development. They need to take a long step forward to catch up. This means that the restructuring process, when the workplaces in manufacturing industry are disappearing, will be harder than in regions with a larger service industry sector.*’

These characteristics add to the sociological study conducted by Sørensen (1982). The studies suggest that the manufacturing culture still is influential in the community, regardless of the decline in number of employees in the manufacturing industry. This might illustrate a central challenge to the development of the municipality. On the one hand, an industrial culture affects the choices of the younger generations regarding education. The strong restrictions on the decision to take further education in the Vennesla culture are articulated by Stigen (1998: 46, quoted in Nilsen 2004: 51; my translation): ‘*To choose such a solution could be understood as a break with the labour fellowship and the values that were related to such an integrated system. To break with this implies questioning these values and the fellowship.*’

In my analysis of local identities in Vennesla I build on the presentation of the local industrial history above. I have based my presentation on Sørensen (1982), among others, in order to give a characteristic of the place and its historical development. As seen in Sørensen’s study, the scope and influence of the industrial development and the labour movement on the local culture and identity were comprehensive. Today, this dominating identity is challenged but constantly present in the discussions about future development and present-day identification processes.

5.2.2 Redefining the Role of the Municipality

There has been a comprehensive debate in Norway about the role of municipalities in place making and economic development (Finstad and Aarsæther 2003). In general, the focus has

been on the turn ‘from managerialism to entrepreneurialism’ (Harvey 1989a), from health care and public services in the welfare state to also including a proactive approach to municipal economic growth and prosperity.

Privatisation of industrial development

In a project focusing on changes in the organisation of local industrial development at Nordland Research Institute, the transformation of local business development from ‘public administration’ to ‘limited company’ has been discussed by Andersen (Andersen 2002a; Andersen 2002b).⁴⁹ Vennesla Municipality and the establishment of a local private business development agency, Vennesla Vekst Ltd. was one of the cases studied. The articulation of the privatisation idea in local practice was the main perspective that was discussed in relation to Vennesla.

Small and medium-sized companies and the local authorities in collaboration own the development agency. The manager of the agency also has the role of industrial manager in the public administration. This indicates the close relations between the agency and the public administration. The absence of interest from larger firms to engage in the agency is characteristic of the local situation, and the agency thus represents an alternative industrial development to the larger firms in manufacturing industry. The main purpose of the agency is to attend to the communication between actors in order to create common interests, and also to attend to the relations between public and private sectors and between private actors. A central characteristic of the activity in the agency is the community- and place making approach, which is a broad approach to local industrial development as community development.

The establishment of the development agency was welcomed. The reasons for the transformation from public administration to private development agency were twofold. First,

⁴⁹ This section is based on the empirical material collected by the project from Vennesla Municipality and Vennesla Vekst AS in 2001. Data were made available to me through collaboration with one of the researchers involved.

the economic crisis in the municipality caused a situation where public–private collaboration was seen as a way to mobilise more economic resources. Second, the efficiency and legitimacy of the industrial development work in the public administration were questioned. This view was articulated in the media. Stating that industrial development policy was not a priority because of the poor economy in the municipality, the local newspaper gave the following description of the closure of the public industrial development office:

We remember best the numerous rescue operations, plans and visions. Piles of paper with thoughts about industrial development, written on a desk on the third floor of the city hall, where the only industrial policy overview was a glimpse of the smoke from the factory chimney between the treetops. Who in the industry can forget the arrangement of industrial forums (næringsforum) in the 1980s? The arrangements were like revival meetings, full of optimism and visions. Every meeting promised a new start. Ideas from the previous meeting had not given any results, but that was forgotten. Now, new tunes were played, again. (Vennesla Tidende 9th of September 1998; my translation)

The local authorities in Vennesla privatised industrial development. In 1998 an economic development agency was established and the public administration closed their office regarding industrial development matters. This example points to a division of labour between the local authorities and the agency. That is, a division between the role of the developer (agency) and the role of the administrator (local authorities). This division was supported by the general impression, as expressed in the media, that the public administration did not have the resources or the competence that potentially could strengthen local industrial development. However, the agency met with other expectations. In a study of the symbolic effects of the privatisation of municipal industrial development, Kvåle and Brattvoll conclude that the output and purpose of the local industrial development agencies lies mainly with the production and transmission of symbols in the local community (Kvåle and Brattvoll 2002). They argue that the symbolic meaning of the agencies could be understood along three dimensions: the market orientation, the management of local interests, and community development. The market orientation related to the autonomy of the agencies, i.e. the agencies

as having independent roles regarding both their relation to the local authorities and private businesses. There is also an expectation that these agencies should be commercial and bring profit to their owners. Related to the management of local interests, Kvåle and Brattvoll find that the agencies are characterised locally by metaphors such as ‘spokesman’, ‘arena’, ‘channel’, ‘forum’, ‘jemmy’, and ‘umbrella’. These metaphors indicate how their informants saw the relations between the agencies and the public administration, and role of the agency as a mediator between the local authorities and private businesses. In relation to the market orientation, this creates a position that allows a role between public administration and the private businesses. Finally, the role of community developer relates to the expectation that the agencies contribute to the general prosperity of the local community. This is the role of a collective problem-solver of economic, social and environmental problems and challenges present in the municipality. This role is closely related to the promotion of local qualities and the development of a local identity. Kvåle and Brattvoll (2002) emphasise that this is an important role that gives legitimacy to the agencies as developers of the municipality.

I would add another important feature from the privatisation of industrial policy. Traditional public administration economic planning was outsourced to the agency. This implied a major change from the more long-term industrial development plans to a more ad hoc work method. The agency took the role as the ‘doer’ and engaged in actualised issues important to the enterprises. It was very much the action-oriented role as we find it in the mobilising efforts discussed as the second generation of industrial policy of the 1980s (Bukve 2001). This role represents a contrast to the public administration industrial planning practice including written long-term plans seen in relation to spatial planning.

5.3 The Social Construction of a Crisis

5.3.1 An Emerging Crisis?

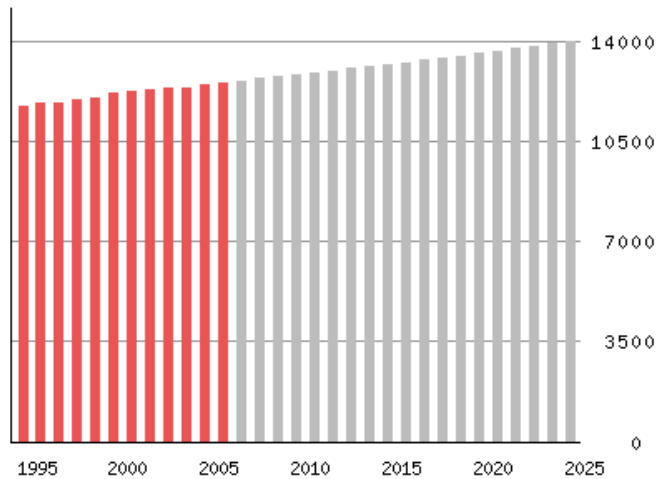
A historical development in Vennesla is presented based on socio-cultural studies of Vennesla community (Carlsson and Lippe 1997; Nilsen 2004; Stigen 1998; Sørensen 1982). The historical development is important in order to understand the context in which the

development project took place. As I have argued, the context is constituted by the historical development in a particular place, i.e. the crossover between time and space. This forms a distinct scene for the project, and actors that have entered the scene in the situation they find themselves in fill the roles in 'the play'. If this situation is summarised in relation to the actors involved, the local authorities strive to engage in local development activities. They, both the administration and the politicians, search for opportunities to organise and mobilise local economic development. They want to take on a new role in local development. The private sector, organised in the development agency has and would have a leading role in local development activities. The problem is that the agency only acted on behalf of small and medium-size enterprises. All larger firms have limited engagement in local development and are more focused on international owners and markets. Outside the municipality, other actors are interested and have the knowledge to contribute. This is the case both for the county council in their new role as 'development actor', consultants and the regional research institute engaging in regional innovation and development.

The VC 2010 project was established on the basis of a perceived critical situation in the municipality. The main manufacturing company had downsized for many years and the future of the factory was in jeopardy. Before I continue to discuss the notion of a crisis, I will present some facts and figures, mainly from the value creation analysis performed initially in the VC 2010 project at Agder.

There has been an increase in population in Vennessla in the last 10 years, and extrapolations from Statistics Norway suggest there will be a slow but steady growth the next 20 years (Fig. 5–2).

Figure 5-2 *Inhabitants of Vennesla 1995–2006 and extrapolation 2007–2025*



(Source: Statistics Norway, <http://www.ssb.no/kommuner>)

The facts and figures presented are positive regarding both the relative geographical location of the municipality and the demographic development. To be located near a larger city such as Kristiansand and be a highly integrated area in a prosperous city region lacks the more problematic symptoms of a unilateral industrial place. However, the location of the municipality brings the important question of strategy to the table. Should the municipality become a residential area for the larger city and provide affordable housing and good living conditions for the commuting population, or should the municipality have a more proactive industrial policy on its own together with a focus on living conditions? The proud industrial history and the strong local identity support the choice of the latter strategy. I now turn to this history and local identity.

5.3.2 *Industrial History*

It is not possible to give a comprehensive history of the industrial municipality in a short introduction. I will, however, point to some important events that occurred throughout the last 100 years. I emphasise the industrial history and its relation to the municipal development

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because of its direct relevance for the project discussed here. It constitutes a cultural context (Sørensen 1982) and the location of the case development project in space and time. I argue that this particular crossover or meeting of place, time and a distinct approach to planning and development needs to be emphasised in the analysis of the case.

In the private sector, six enterprises have more than 50 employees:

- Hunsfos Factories
- Norsk Wallboard
- Vigeland Metal Refinery
- ABB Service
- Scan Trade
- Reber Schindler

Compared to Vest-Agder County, there are a relatively high number of small enterprises in Vennesla Municipality: 9 out of 10 enterprises have fewer than 20 employees (see Table 5–2).

Table 5-2 Employees in enterprises according to size, public sector included.

Number of employees	Vennesla Municipality	In per cent	Vest-Agder County	In per cent	Norway	In per cent
1 to 9	247	76.2	4101	74.8	123,166	75.6
10 to 19	44	13.6	706	12.8	19,985	12.3
20 to 49	22	6.8	451	8.2	12,973	8.0
50 to 99	6	1.9	139	2.5	4123	2.5
100 to 249	4	1.2	73	1.3	1969	1.2
250 or more	1	0.3	22	0.4	721	0.4
Total	324	100	5492	100	16,2937	100

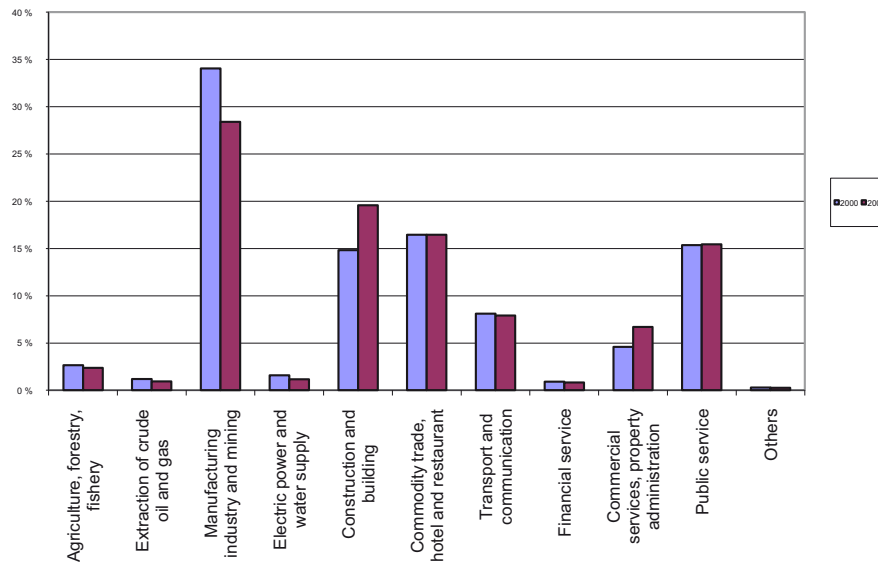
(Halvorsen, Jentoft, and Vangstad 2002)

In Table 5–2 it is striking to see the similarities between the three levels, the municipality, the county and the nation. The differentiation in the size of the enterprises suggests that there are no obvious dependencies on one or a few enterprises regarding employment.

The Vigeland Metal Refinery is an important industry that was established in 1907 under the name Vigeland Brug. Based on hydroelectric power from the River Otra, the industry grew and contributed, together with Hunsfos, to a strong population growth in the years after World War I.

In recent years, the manufacturing industry has, however, lost some of its relative importance. From 2000 to 2005 the decrease in number of employees in manufacturing industry was *c.*5% for men and *c.*3% for women (Figs. 5–3 and 5–4). Construction and building and also commercial services have had an increase in the numbers of male employees, while public services have had an increase of female employees. Approximately 55% of female employees worked in public services in 2005.

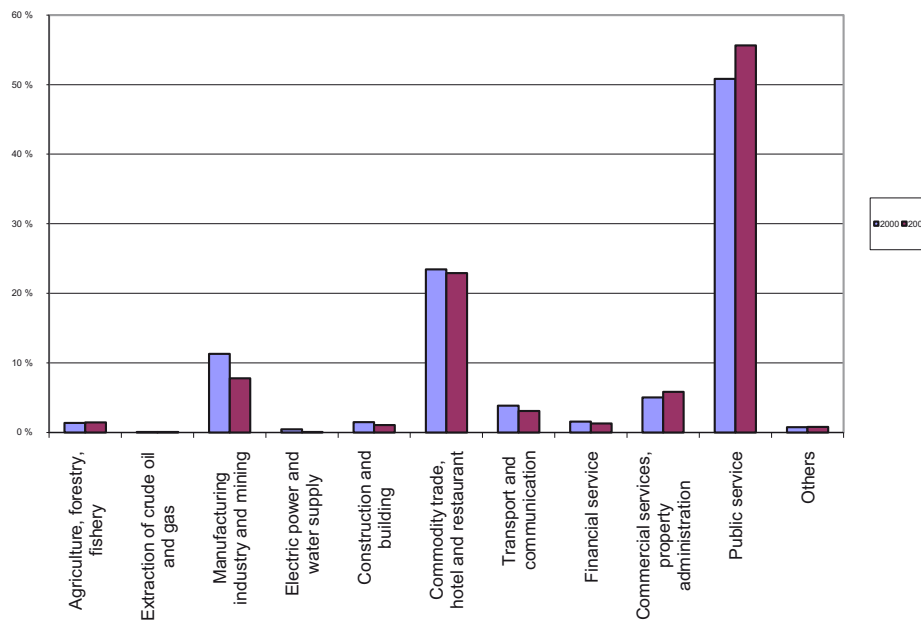
Figure 5-3 Male employment in Vennessla Municipality, 2000 and 2005



(Source: Statistics Norway, “Statistikkbanken”)⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Statistics Norway, StatBank Norway, Labour market/Wages:
http://statbank.ssb.no/statistikkbanken/default_fr.asp?PLanguage=1

Figure 5-4 Women employment in Vennessla Municipality, 2000 and 2005



(Source: Statistics Norway, “Statistikkbanken”)

The general development in employment provides a backcloth to the challenges identified in the municipality. It is, however, important to recognise how integrated the municipality is in the city region of Kristiansand. In the year 2000, 42% of the workforce living in Vennessla worked in Kristiansand Municipality and less than 50% of the workforce in Vennessla both worked and lived in the municipality (see Table 5–3).⁵¹ It is, of course, not only the economic development in Vennessla Municipality that matters for the local workforce. Vennessla is

⁵¹ Regarding regional integration, earlier statistics may have proved interesting. I have no available statistics from before year 2000 but found that the numbers of persons living in Vennessla but working in other municipalities in the region increased from 2000 to 2008 by approximately 800 persons, i.e. almost equivalent to the whole increase in the total number of employees living in Vennessla from 2000 to 2008 (Statistics Norway).

advantageously located geographically regarding the labour market and relies as much on the general regional development as on its own development.

Table 5-3 Commuting in Vest-Agder County 2000⁵²

	I alt	0926 Lillesand	0928 Birkenes	0935 Iveland	0937 Evje og Hornnes	0938 Bygland	1001 Kristiansand	1014 Vennesla	1017 Songdalen	1018 Søgne	Andre
I alt	352858	2916	1265	229	1091	528	35920	3330	1236	2196	
0926 Lillesand	3757	51 %	4 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	25 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	19 %
0928 Birkenes	1734	10 %	51 %	1 %	0 %	1 %	21 %	3 %	0 %	0 %	13 %
0935 Iveland	427	0 %	1 %	33 %	6 %	1 %	26 %	25 %	1 %	1 %	7 %
0937 Evje og Hornnes	1344	0 %	1 %	1 %	67 %	9 %	7 %	2 %	0 %	0 %	12 %
0938 Bygland	484	1 %	0 %	0 %	13 %	63 %	7 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	16 %
1001 Kristiansand	30695	1 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	85 %	2 %	1 %	1 %	10 %
1014 Vennesla	4898	1 %	1 %	1 %	1 %	0 %	42 %	48 %	1 %	1 %	5 %
1017 Songdalen	2278	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	53 %	3 %	27 %	7 %	10 %
1018 Søgne	3810	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	45 %	1 %	4 %	38 %	11 %
Andre	303431	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

Source: Statistics Norway/Agder Research⁵³

5.3.3 A Crisis that Never Happened

It is hard to identify tendencies for an economic crisis in the statistics presented in the above discussion. The population is growing, and will continue to grow into the future. In the period 2000–2005 some industries had an increase in employment, while others had a decrease. The employment figures (Table 5–4) confirm the picture of a positive economic development in the municipality. In addition, Vennesla Municipality has become even more integrated in the

⁵² Employees aged 16–74 years, work place and home municipality.

⁵³ Working paper presented at a conference at Vennesla 9th of January 2002

city region of Kristiansand, a prosperous region in the Norwegian context and one of the fastest growing city regions.

Table 5-4 Unemployed persons in Vennesla, Kristiansand, and West-Agder in 1996–2006, in per cent

Year	Vennesla Municipality	Kristiansand City	Vest-Agder County
1996	3.6	4.9	3.8
1997	2.6	3.0	2.6
1998	2.5	2.7	2.3
1999	2.5	2.9	2.7
2000	2.7	3.5	3.1
2001	2.9	4.1	3.2
2002	3.3	5.6	3.9
2003	3.2	5.0	4.4
2004	3.2	4.4	3.5
2005	3.1	3.7	3.0
2006 ⁵⁴	3.0	3.5	3.1

⁵⁴ January to March 2006

Source: Statistics Norway, Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation, Fædrelandsvennen 3th of April 2006

Table 5–4 shows quite clearly that the concern among politicians in the municipality about an emerging crisis related to the loss of workplaces did not become a reality. Looking back on the notions of a crisis in the municipality in late 1999 and early 2000, the situation today seems like a contrast, and this has been confirmed by central local politicians. In April 2006 the regional newspaper contained an article with the headline ‘The crisis that never came’, reporting on the situation in Vennesla Municipality. It was reported that local politicians admitted that they were both anxious and negative on behalf of the municipality. The mayor pointed to the dilemma they experienced, gaining support from the government in a difficult situation on the one hand and having to inform inhabitants about the possibilities and positive future of the municipality on the other hand:

The black painting that has taken place seems to have no origin in reality. (local politician in Vennesla Municipality to Fædrelandsvennen 3th of April 2006)

The mayor also pointed to the mobilisation of local resources in difficult times:

It has been showed that when workplaces have been closed, there is creativity in the community to start something new. (Fædrelandsvennen 3th of April 2006)

In retrospect, the reflections suggest that the notion of an emerging crisis, vital in the mobilisation and establishment of a project to address problems of industrial restructuring, was based on something other than an identified crisis in the economy. Despite this, a scenario relating to a possible closing down of the symbolic Hunsfos factory was constructed. This was also the basis of the application to national authorities for a special restructuring status. Spin-off effects of such a closing down were estimated (Bedriftskompetanse 2001) and these figures became the foundation of a dominating reality among key stakeholders.

In the value creation analysis performed in the VC 2010 project, Vennesla Municipality appears as a traditional single industrial town, but without the dependency of one particular firm as in many other Norwegian industrial communities. Diversity and numerous small and

medium-sized enterprises dominate. Despite this knowledge among participants in the project, including the research team, the notion of a crisis was allowed to escalate. An interesting question is why this was happening. The potential crisis was a strong argument for the mobilisation of local, regional and national resources. In that perspective, a notion of a crisis was important. However, I do not suggest that this was an intentional strategy in the project. It was a strong belief among stakeholders that it was a question of when, not whether, the crisis would occur, in relation to the closing down of industries in the municipality. My point is, however, that this perceived situation and the notion of an economic crisis related to the important reflexive process addressing the future development of the municipality. In this perspective, a crisis was perhaps more related to an 'identity crisis' than to economic crisis. The editorial in the regional newspaper translated below indicates the scope of this crisis:

*Venndøler*⁵⁵ and other people: *Venndølene* are these days subject to a very close and almost brutal analysis. Their attitudes, behaviour and their lives are dissected and assessed from different angles. It might almost look like a walk through purgatory. All this is a part of the endeavour towards a change in the behaviour and attitudes of those living in the community. There is no disagreement about the existence of such a need, because over the decades life and work have been centred on a single cornerstone enterprise. Gradually, Hunsfos Factory met the counter-economic cycles and has adapted to the market, with the consequence of cuts in several hundred workplaces. The negative effects came as expected. These have had different kinds of impacts, such as drug and alcohol addiction, depression, and psychiatric problems. It is probably not difficult to come up with several examples of how 'Venndøler' are deviant from 'the norm' compared to people in many other communities. The process that started in Vennesla, trying to orient towards a new situation, has not been straightforward. There is no cookery book with recipes for how such restructuring should be done in order to succeed. Therefore, space for trial and errors needs to be established. Analyses must also include what is problematic and challenging. Maybe, exactly that is the most important. The conclusion should, however, not be in terms of 'Venndølen' as the 'odd character'. The challenges that the Vennesla community faces are, among other things, to create diverse workplaces and a comprehensive industry, and in addition, motivating young people to take education that is not necessarily linked to the traditional manufacturing industry. Diversity in choice of education and work will become important factors in the future. This does not necessarily mean throwing away the history and the past of the 'Venndølen', those attitudes and the behaviour constituting the reality of today. The impression that traditional industry is something rotten that we need to get rid of as soon as possible, both the industry and the attitudes related to it, are articulated on some occasions. It is not that simple. There are values and attitudes in what has been called the 'Vennesla culture' that certainly have the right to exist also in the future. These values should also be identified and quantified in the work that is now taking place. To find

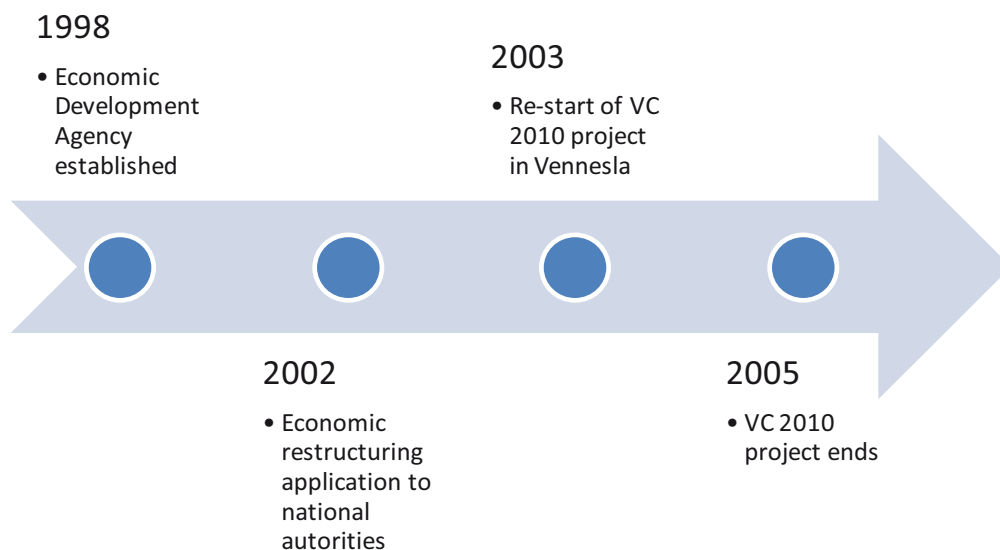
⁵⁵ People from Vennesla

those points of reference that the navigation of the restructuring process will have to balance against is a great challenge. Focusing on the odd and peculiar should not be avoided. One should go deep into it. (Fædrelandsvennen 3th of May 2007, Editorial; my translation).

5.4 Situating the Research

The more recent history of the local economic restructuring process has been presented above. The main events are illustrated in a timeline in Figure 5–5.

Figure 5-5 Main events in the local economic restructuring process



To summarise, Vennesla share many features of a typical old industrial town facing the challenges of industrial restructuring. As in many other places, the industrial and economic history is deeply interwoven with the social and cultural history, and forms a distinct local context. However, a striking feature divides constructed Vennesla from other industrialised

municipalities facing restructuring problems in the Norwegian context. Vennesla is located close to a larger city that is growing and thus Vennesla is a part of a prosperous city region.

It is also striking that throughout history, the industrial policy in Vennesla has been rescaled from an enterprise level, via the municipal level, and recently to a regional level. I find it important to highlight that this rescaling has been both an opportunity and a threat in the local restructuring process: an opportunity because the regional level represented a labour market that in many cases became a buffer in times when workplaces were disappearing, but at the same time a threat to a local identity based on the industrial history, the labour movement closely related to the religious communities, and the distinct Vennesla dialect.

The action research project that started in 2002 (and restarted in early 2003) became a part of an ongoing local discourse on an approaching radical economic shift. This discourse also focused on the problematic sides of an old industrial community relating to levels of education, an unfavourable local image, and a lack of attention to industrial innovation and development. In many ways, it was a prepossessing environment in which to present a concrete proposal for local development. It supported the reorganisation of planning processes and the organisation of a development coalition. It also supported the intervention of, and close collaboration, with researchers, and hence opening up the municipality to outsiders. In addition, the domination of a 'restructuring discourse' made it easy to mobilise broadly and involve both private and public actors. It also mobilised local politicians directly in the process, resulting in a direct link between the action research project and the representative democratic system.

Although the environment was favourable to the action research project, the scope of the change process, including values and meaning systems immanent in the social and cultural context, added to the complexity of the project. Together with few related experiences from collaborative processes, this complexity characterises the process and the results from the project.

5.5 *Vennesla Development Coalition*

The empirical case discussed in this thesis is based on the conceptualisation of a dialogical development model. The research team applied dialogue conferences and development coalitions as organisational tools in the facilitation of the learning process, building on the principle of democratic dialogue.

The Vennesla development coalition consisted of local political representatives from the, local public administrative leaders, county representatives, local business leaders and researchers from regional research institute.

In order to analyse the reflective learning circles in the case study I will make a division between the reflective learning related to a) the reflections on the *process* and organisational issues, and b) the results (based on the substantive content) from the project. The first relates to the experiences from the whole project, while the latter relates to the results from the implementation of the strategy and the action plans.

I will make a division between two forms of reflections. First, I will discuss *reflections on action*, to discuss the organisation of the project and the phases of the process. This relates to item a) above. Second, I will discuss *reflection in action*, the learning that is based on the process from ideas to action and results. This was a continuing learning process throughout the project, shaping the process along the way, and relates to item b) above.

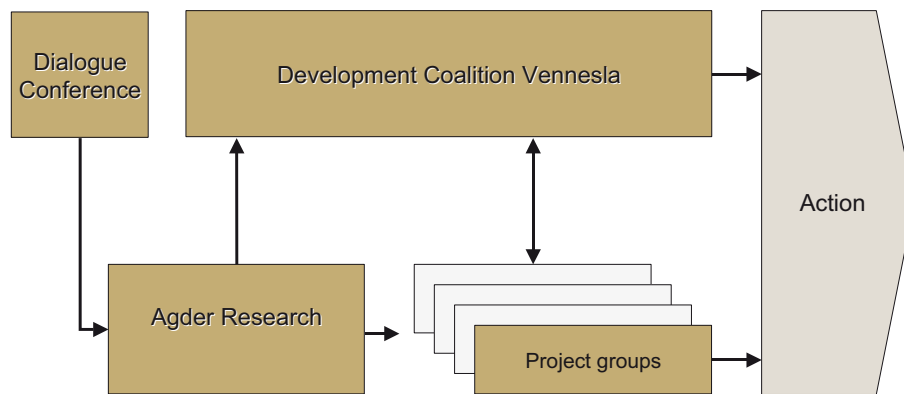
5.5.1 *The Model*

The dialogical development concept was a basic idea in our normative foundation and methodological approach to municipal development and planning, based on the VC 2010 perspectives. At an early stage in the process (in the second dialogue conference) the researchers introduced a suggestion for the organisation of the development project (Fig. 5–6). The model represents an operationalisation of the regional development concept in VC 2010 Agder, emphasising three main activities. The first activity in the model is the *dialogue conferences* in an initial phase to involve stakeholders and facilitate dialogical processes. The

main objective of the dialogue conference was to prepare the ground and initiate the organisation of a *development coalition*. The coalition could then be established on the basis of the relations developed in the conferences. To support the process, the action research team (from Agder Research) would document and prepare the organisational model of the coalition in collaboration with key stakeholders. In addition, and to support the work of the development coalition, dedicated project groups with broad participation on selected issues could be established. The final activity was to be the concrete *action* taken based on the strategic plans developed in the coalition.

The model presented in Fig. 5-6 is a concrete attempt to adapt an organisational development concept to a regional or ‘sub-regional’ (municipal) context. It is also an attempt to emphasise process more than results, and organisation more than local context. It is, however, important to realise that an adoption of this approach in a regional context would actualise theories of a broader scope.

Figure 5-6 The organising model of the Vennesla project



The institutional structure in Vennesla changed in relation to the project. A collaborative arena was established in the project and different institutions were brought closer together. The most striking change in the new model is the relations between the private and public

sectors, represented by the private development agency and the public administration. The collaborative arena was, however, not cut off from the representative democratic institutions. Instead, the coalition was closely integrated in the political decision-making system of the municipality. Figure 5–7 illustrates the organisational landscape.

Figure 5–7 Institutional relations to development coalition in Vennesla

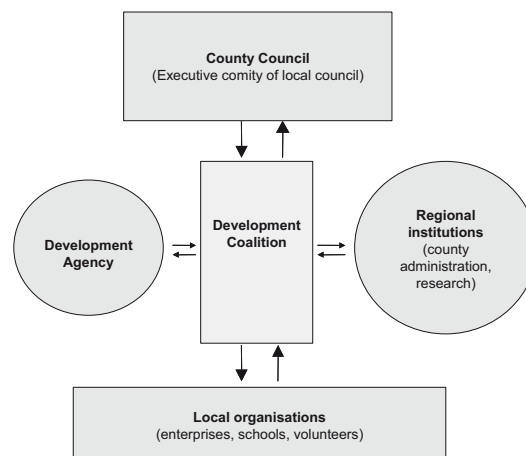


Figure 5–7 shows how the development coalition was a collaborative arena linking local and regional institutions as well as public and private sectors to the project.

5.5.2 Phases in the Project

As indicated in the discussion about methods and research design, I identify different phases in the project. In the following sections I will give a more comprehensive presentation of the research process.

The Start-up

Although the characteristics presented above did not develop overnight, this understanding of the situation developed into a crisis among politicians, in the regional newspaper, and among the inhabitants. With this background, the administrative and political leaders in the municipality developed an urgent sense of need to address these problems.

At the end of 2001, the first meetings were arranged between the administrative leaders of the planning department, the local economic development agency (owned by local enterprises and the local authorities), and researchers in the VC 2010 programme from Agder Research. The representatives from the local authorities were interested in the possible solutions which Agder Research and the VC 2010 project could offer them in their situation. This resulted in the organisation of the first dialogue conference held in Vennesla in January 2002. It also resulted in an analysis of the potential for value creation based on indicators including demography, level of education, average income, commuting, employment, and number of people in the workforce (Andresen, Cruickshank, Jamt, Jentoft, and Vengstad 2002).

First Phase – the First Contact

The first dialogue conference, held in January 2002, gathered politicians and bureaucrats from the local authorities, representatives from many local enterprises,⁵⁶ representatives from the county administration, and researchers from Agder Research. This was the starting point for a dialogue between the different stakeholders in the local community, the region, and the researchers on a common effort to further economic development and to focus on the attractiveness of the municipality. The conference report summarises the issues for improvements that were addressed in the dialogue in five categories: physical development, economic development, infrastructure, local mobilisation and place marketing, and competence development. After the conference, the process was stopped due to the time taken, and efforts in the municipality were put into the development of an application to the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development for the municipality to

⁵⁶ 25 small, medium and large enterprises participated, representing different sectors

have a special development status,⁵⁷ due to the decline in number of workplaces in local industry. This status would give Vennesla substantial economic support from the state to help the regeneration of the local economy. This did not succeed, but the local authorities did receive one million Norwegian kroner for further work on economic development. The focus on change and development was sharpened by this process, but postponed the action research project by about one year.

5.5.3 *Second Phase – Breaking the Limits of Municipality Planning Practice*

After the rejection from the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the local authorities again contacted the research group in Agder Research. It was decided to re-mobilise the process in the municipality, and a second dialogue conference was held, focusing on possibilities and strong sides to be used in constructing a more attractive image. The results from this conference were twofold. First, a large amount of empirical material from the group work that had been taking place throughout the one-day conference was generated. This material was collected, categorised, and recorded in two reports (Fosse 2003; Johnsen and Lysgård 2002), one for each dialogue conference. These reports were used in further work. Second, in the last dialogue conference, an organisational model for further development work in the municipality was chosen. A development coalition was established with representatives from politicians and administrative leaders in the local authorities, from local enterprises, from county administration, and researchers from the VC 2010 programme. Stakeholders were identified by the representatives from the local authorities, and invited to join the coalition. I use the term ‘development coalition’ in line with Ennals and Gustavsen (1999), understood as an arena for democratic dialogue. They

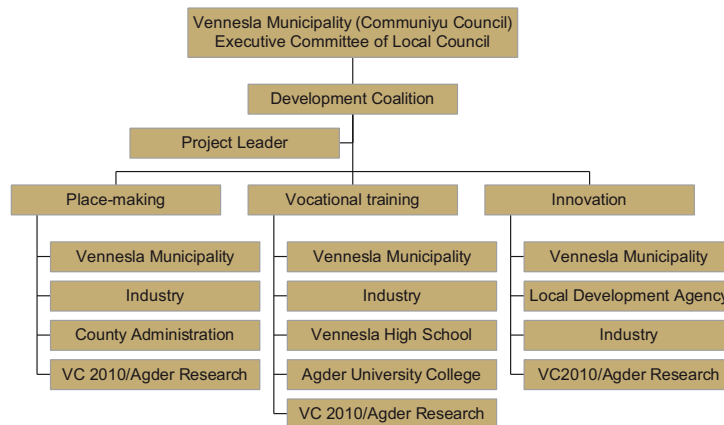
⁵⁷ This status drew attention from the national government and investment to municipalities, with a broad range of industrial restructuring challenges. The Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development gave special support to municipalities and regions with a one-sided industrial foundation. Normally, there has to be a decline in direct employment n at least 10% of total employment in the area (Stortingsmelding. nr. 34 (2000-2001). "Om distrikts- og regionalpolitikken." Statens forvaltningstjeneste - informasjonsforvaltning, Oslo.) Later, in 2005 the Ministry stated that the decline in employment needed to be approximately 15%, or at least 150 persons. There was also to be an assessment of the indirect decline in employment in the area (Stortingsmelding —. nr 21 (2005-2006). "Hjarte for heile landet. Om distrikts og regionalpolitikken." Kommunal og regionaldepartementet.)

argue that dialogue constitutes a key feature for understanding processes of change, learning, and knowledge transfer. Dialogue is defined as conversations or discussions between equal partners, characterised by openness, a willingness to listen to each other, to accept good arguments, and generally to learn from each other.

Third Phase – Groups Working on Action Plans

The established coalition took the process further, and a strategy document for the project was written based on the former process. Budgets were prepared for each part of the project. The coalition also organised work groups and/or partnerships focused on three main issues: facilitating economic development, local mobilisation and place marketing, and competence development. Each group was organised as an individual development coalition focused on their particular issues. The organisational structure of the project is illustrated in Figure 5–8.

Figure 5-8 *Vennesla Development Coalition: work groups included*



The third phase ended in June 2004 with the approval of action plans from each work group in the development coalition and from the executive committee of local council.

Fourth Phase –Implementation of Action Plans

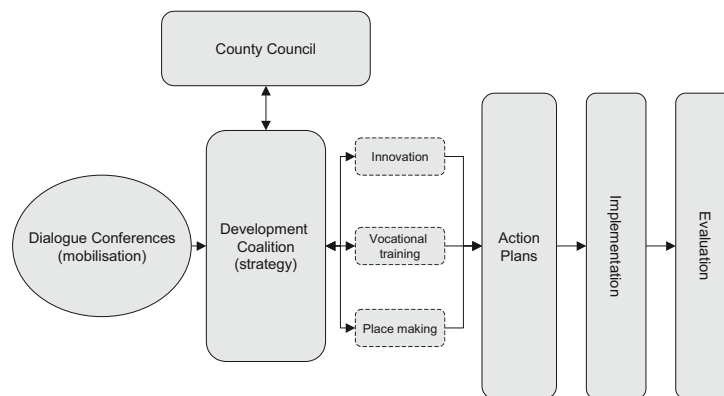
By June 2004 the work had started to realise the action plans and the overall strategy. A detailed presentation and discussion of this process will be given in chapter 6.

Final Phase – Re-evaluation and Re-mobilisation

The final phase related to the organisation of a conference in November 2005, focusing on evaluation and learning in the development project. The idea behind this final conference was to create a ‘feedback loop’ of information and data to those persons involved in different phases of the project. Most of the time in the conference, which was organised along the lines of a dialogue conference, was spent on group work, discussing experiences and further actions to be taken in the project.

The model presented in Fig. 5–9 summarises the phases in the project. It also represents a local adoption of the reflective learning model presented in Chapter 3 (Kolb 1984), and an advanced organisational model compared to the initial model developed by the research team.

Figure 5-9 The Vennesla project – phases in the process



The model also indicates the learning circles in the project. The importance of the experience that local participants gained from the reorganisation of the planning process should be

emphasised. Key stakeholders argued that this experience caused the local authorities to rethink the way development and planning processes were organised.

5.6 Dialogue Conferences

By actions for development and change, I refer to the main activities in the Vennesla project that were initiated by the researchers: development conferences, the development coalition, and an evaluation conference. These activities were based on the development concepts as presented above.

In order to present the evolving process in the municipal development project, data from the dialogue conferences will be presented. The material is presented both directly in tables (see Appendix 1) and structured in reports from the conferences made by the research team. The tables and reports formed the basis for the work in the coalition, in addition to the direct participation in the conference by all members of the coalition.

In the following, a chronological presentation of the activities and their content will be presented. I focus on two main elements in the activities: the questions addressed in the group work in the conferences and the outcome of this group work as it is presented in the conference reports. From the development coalition, the strategy and action plan are presented.

The First Dialogue Conference – January 2002

The first dialogue conference was the initial meeting between the local and regional stakeholders and the research team. A total of 50 persons were invited and most of them participated in the conference. Most of the conference was organised as two group work sessions (Gustavsen 1992; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999). The group work addressed the following questions:

Group work, first session:

- What are the visions of the future for the industries in Vennesla?

- What are the desired situations for the industries in Vennesla in five years?
- What are the desired situations for the industries in Vennesla in ten years?

Group work, second session:

- What do we have to do to realise these visions of the future for the industries in Vennesla?
- What is the most important and superior action that could realise the desired situation for the industries in Vennesla?
- Which actions need to be realised to fulfil the desired situation for the industries in Vennesla?

5.6.1 Conference Report 2002: Suggestions for the Development Process in Vennesla

The Conference Report 2002 gives a systematised presentation of the thoughts and themes from the dialogue conference.⁵⁸ Some analysis is done and put into a more holistic perspective, emphasising the further development work in Vennesla. The categorisation of the data from the conference is systematised along two lines: the first relating to how general the ideas are, what time respective they have, and how challenging they are; and the second relating to a thematic categorisation:

- Town centre regeneration: This category contains two aspects, the physical infrastructure including the facilitation of localities for business in retail and service, and the supplementation and development of existing commodity trade and services.
- Economic development: Two aspects are identified, development of scope and variety, as well as a centralisation of service and commodity trade in the town centre (parallel to the

⁵⁸ The complete list of suggestions from the group work is presented in Appendix 1. The conference report summarises the responses to the questions raised.

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first theme), and the facilitation of industrial estates and economic framework conditions in order to attract or develop new manufacturing industry.

- **Infrastructure:** This theme includes actions that belong to the two themes listed above, such as the facilitation of industrial estates and development of town centre functions. In addition (and the justification for why this is a separate theme), housing facilities and the residential environment in Vennesla Municipality are included. Facilitation of housing sites, public transport and communication, both physical and non-physical (information and communication technology infrastructure (ICT)), and welfare arrangement related to culture, kindergartens, etc.
- **Local mobilisation and place marketing:** Three related aspects are identified. First, there is the development of local pride, and a sense of belonging and place identity among the inhabitants. Second, there is the development of an image that can be presented externally and contribute to the marketing of the municipality. This image should communicate that Vennesla has secure and good living conditions, as well as being an innovative and dynamic community attractive for both living and business. This aspect includes the mobilisation of local knowledge and a business friendly environment. Third, the location of the municipality in the Agder region is emphasised. Vennesla could take advantage of the central geographical position in the region and in relation to Kristiansand city and other municipalities.
- **Education and vocational training:** This theme has been central in the local debate for a long period of time. It relates to the relatively low level of formal education in the municipality compared to the region and to the national average. The dominating understanding is that this is a problem for further economic development in the municipality. It seems, however, that local enterprises do not have problems finding the competence they need. The important question is therefore to what extent is this a problem, how this is a problem, and for whom this is a problem. The distinctive character of Vennesla is the dominating manufacturing industry with a skilled and stable workforce. Perhaps this could be seen as a comparative advantage. The focus may then be on the right competence instead of a high level of education.

The themes listed above are closely related. The conference report does not give priority to any particular theme, but identifies two main perspectives and three scenarios based on these perspectives. The first perspective is the development of Vennesla as an attractive place in which to live. The second perspective is the development of Vennesla as an attractive place for industrial development and localisation of enterprises. The following scenarios are presented in the report:

- Vennesla 2010 – The regional alternative for ‘rurbane’ inhabitants: This implies a strategy emphasising the quality of life and living conditions. Focus is directed to the development of private and public services located in close proximity to the residential areas.
- Vennesla 2010 – The most integrated living and labour market in the region: This implies a strategy for the development of diverse job opportunities close to residential areas. Accordingly, the industrial structure should be broad in scope.
- Vennesla 2010 – The innovative industrial centre: This implies a specialised strategy for manufacturing industry based on a skilled and stable workforce. This includes a localisation strategy for attracting new enterprises and competence training adapted to the industry.

Following the completion of the report, the preparation and writing of an application to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development was started. This application was, however, closely related to the ideas and work done in the conference. The objectives listed in the application can all be related to the conference. I will now turn to the second conference, which represents a restart and remobilisation of the Vennesla project. The preparations for the conference started when the application to the Ministry was refused. In the response from the Ministry there was, however, an opening for some financial support:

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The prospects for Hunsfos seem to be more insecure based on the real and expected reduction of employees. The actual unemployment in the municipality is, however, not higher than the national average and the proximity to the city of Kristiansand gives possibilities for employment. Based on the insecurity in the situation at Hunsfos the Ministry is still prepared for a further dialogue with the local authorities and the county in order to establish a defined project aimed at keeping in the municipality the industrial competence and trained population developed over many years and at the same time contribute to the local proactive development work led by the local authorities. (Letter from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to Vest-Agder County 19 June 2002; my translation)

I now turn to the restart of the project, starting with the second dialogue conference held in January 2003.

The Second Dialogue Conference – January 2003

Approximately 40 persons participated in the second conference, most of whom had participated in the first conference. The conference was organised in the same way as the first one:

Group work, first session:

- What associations should Vennesla give to people in 2010?
- Which resources and qualities in the municipality can support these associations?

Group work, second session:

- Which resources/qualities should be supported and developed further?
- Which resources/qualities should be realised as soon as possible?

The following report indicates the ideas coming from the group work.

Conference Report 2003: Development Process for Vennesla – Status and Progress

This conference represents the restart of the VC 2010 project in Vennesla, one year after the first conference. The report from the conference presents recommendations and the input from the group work.

The following recommendations were given in the report:

- Follow-up the ideas and actions that have been suggested. These are now well-anchored in the public administration, among politicians, in the private sector, and in the county administration.
- Establish a mandate for the 'regional development coalition'
- Develop and concretise long-term strategies for guiding the work.
- Establish some priorities among the suggested actions.

The report also raises the question of whether there should be further discussions about a vision for the future, an overall strategy for the development of the municipality, or whether action should be taken based on the ideas and suggestions that had been launched. The report emphasises that the discussions in the conference centred on the same perspectives that had been central in the first conference. The keyword seems to be 'attractiveness'.

The report continues with the presentation of the most important aspects from the group work. The first is the theme addressed under the question about associations related to Vennesla:

- Physical landscape (nature)
- Social and cultural milieu
- Public and private services
- Transport/communications, advantageous geographical location
- Manufacturing industry.

It is a problem to distinguish between the inputs from the group work about the associations they wanted to develop and the qualities that support these associations. One reason could be that the focus was on the need to promote the existing qualities in a more attractive way. There seems to be a desire to show to others outside the municipality what the participants themselves found to be important qualities relating to the place. The report summarises the associations to Vennessla in a more general way: quality, potential, outdoor life/recreation, industrial history, services, and care.

The group work also identified resources that support the development of the associations listed above. Two themes can be identified: the unique place with its physical, social, and cultural distinctiveness, and the long and proud industrial history including the skills and stability of the workforce, and the cultural distinctiveness related to this place and history.

When it comes to the question of what actions should be taken immediately, the material becomes less voluminous and more concrete. The following aspects seem to have been given priority:

- Business park (suggested by many to be localised at the Hunsfos industrial estate)
- Place-marketing
- A new cultural centre, including a new public library
- An education and vocational training centre (cooperation between existing public offices in the municipalities)
- Supporting youth businesses (*elev/ungdomsbedrifter*) at the local high school
- Arrange areas for outdoor activity/recreation along the River Otra

The report summarises the results from the conference, emphasising the strong anchoring of the process and including plans for further measures. In addition, a decision was taken about the organisation of a regional development coalition. It is emphasised that this coalition needs

a defined role in the further process. Finally, there is a suggestion for further prioritisation among ideas and possible actions.

Analysis

First, the second conference displays a concretisation of the broad thematic categories of the first conference. This indicates that the output from the first conference was rethought throughout the year, and in the application writing process⁵⁹ in particular. The second conference took the thematic categories further and discussed action opportunities. This was an important transformation and suggests that both ends and means in the local development project had become clearer for the participants. New opportunities and action possibilities in the local context grew out of the first conference. This became the starting point of the local learning process. My interpretation of the learning process is based on the shift identified from the first to the second conference. Although no reference or presentation of the output from the first conference was given in the second conference, a continuity of the discussions between the conferences is apparent.

My second observation relates to the shift in focus from problems to opportunities. This is important as a general observation. Although the problem definition was only partly concluded in the first conference, the second conference brought up concrete actions addressing the problems.

The conferences also became an arena for social interaction and new relationships (Shotter and Gustavsen 1999). These relationships developed on the basis of ideas and suggestions for further action. Further, these relationships, between representatives from local industry, politicians, local development agency, researchers and representatives from county, and municipal public administration, became the starting point of the local development coalition and the reorganisation of the project.

⁵⁹ The application from the municipality for a special economic restructuring status and economic support sent to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

I will also emphasise the mobilising effects of the conferences. This is in line with the aim of this kind of arena in contrast to a more operational arena such as the development coalition. The dialogue conferences became an explicit arena for mapping and social constructions of realities with a direct mobilising effect. This effect was brought forward with the more operational organisation of a development coalition, as will be shown in the following section.

5.7 A Strategy for Economic Development

5.7.1 A Strategy Plan for the Project – Work in the Development Coalition

In this section, a presentation of the plans will be given. In the document approved by the municipal executive committee in May 2003, the aim of the project is said to be: ‘to facilitate economic and community development in Vennesla Municipality’ (Plan og økonomiutvalget 10. June 2003, saksnr. 35/03). In the introduction to the strategy plan it is argued that the municipality faces some major challenges due to changes in the industry. The support from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is also mentioned:

Based on the situation at Hunsfos, the ministry is still willing to have a further dialogue with the local authorities and the county to define a restricted project in order to keep in the municipality the competence developed throughout many years and at the same time support the proactive development work driven by the local authorities itself. (Letter from the Ministry dated 19.06.02, cited in the strategy plan, Plan og økonomiutvalget 10 June 2003, saksnr. 35/03)

The strategy plan suggests a project that builds on and develops further the industry and competence present in the municipality. This implies both facilitating the establishment of new businesses within areas the municipality today have strong industries, and developing new more knowledge-intensive industries. The idea was to build both on the existing competence base and to develop new competence.

Three main strategies are identified in the economic development project:

- Innovation strategy

- Vocational training and education strategy
- Place-making strategy.

Innovation Strategy

Two main issues are prioritised. First, and perhaps most important, is the establishment of Vennesla Business Park. It is argued that a business park should be an arena where new networks could develop within both old and new industries. Second, the innovation strategy includes a general focus on infrastructure, particularly relating to broadband and fibre optics. This is seen as a problem especially in the more rural parts of the municipality with a low population density, where the market fails to deliver this infrastructure.

Vocational Training and Education Strategy

The strategy has a broad approach. The overall aim is to strengthen the education and training programmes offered to the population. Under the strategy, three areas are prioritised: training programmes for adults, including particular attention to women's needs; young entrepreneurs and student-enterprises; and new workplaces for apprentices.

Place-making Strategy

A broad approach is also taken to place making. Place making is understood as the total efforts in physical and esthetical regeneration, community development, spatial planning, and place marketing. Three areas are prioritised under the strategy: place marketing and the promotion of the municipality; physical regeneration in the town centre according to the plans made for the pedestrian area and shopping street; and tourism, including further development of the historical railway (Setesdalsbanen) and particular attention to tourism in rural areas. When it comes to the action plans, the physical regeneration work in town centre is not mentioned. The argument is that another group outside the development coalition handles this and it was therefore not possible to suggest any change in these plans.

Each of the strategies formulated by the development coalition led to the establishment of work groups, which worked on action plans in their respective themes.

5.8 Evaluation – Third Dialogue Conference

In order to create an arena for reflection and learning, a third conference was arranged in November 2005. The re-mobilisation of the local development work was a second objective for the conference. Invitations were sent to all active participants in the project and to others involved in the previous conferences, approximately 50 persons altogether. Before presenting further analysis of the results from the project, I will present the conference's group work questions, which were formulated by the research team.

Group work first session – the way further in the restructuring work:

- How should the local authorities continue the development work?
- Which particular challenges does the municipality experience today?
- Which particular challenges does the industry in Vennesla experience today?

Group work second session – evaluation:

- Which concrete experiences from the project do you want to tell about and discuss?
- How do you see the results from this project in relation to other development projects in the municipality?
- How do you evaluate the organisation of this project in relation to other public planning and development activities in the municipality?
- What are the challenges in the way we have organised the work in this project?

5.8.1 Conference Report 2005: The Restructuring Project – 'Further Action'

The conference report summarises the data from the group work and suggests some general analysis of the material. As seen from the data, the focus was mainly on further work. The

engagement and creativity of the participants were more oriented towards the future than to past experiences.

5.8.2 The way further

From the material, there seems to be strong support for the broad focus on place-making, including the economic development of the project. The impotence of engagement by many is emphasised. At the same time, new ideas and initiatives are launched. The most striking change is the claim for long-term planning and strategies in the municipality, including a vision for the future. There are also examples of participants questioning the need for change and focus on development. In their view, the enterprises and people in the municipality are doing very well. Another theme is the role of the local authorities as development agent.

The groups working in the conference identified the following challenges to the project in Vennesla:

- The lack of a long-term strategy and overall objectives for the development of the municipality.
- Regarding attitudes to change and development, these questions were raised: Is there a need for change? Do we want change? In addition, the participation in the development project was discussed. Problems were identified relating to the lack of women and young people participating in the project
- The final challenge related to the external relations and the role and position Vennesla Municipality can and will take in the region. The potential significance of physical proximity to the city of Kristiansand was emphasised.

5.8.2.1.1.1 Evaluation and reflections

The evaluation of the project was organised as input from external stakeholders who have been related but not directly involved in the project, giving an outsider view on the process and group work with plenary presentations. The following aspects were discussed:

LEARNING IN PLANNING

- The representative from the county administration emphasised the importance of meeting places and arenas for cooperation. He saw the potential in the development coalition and the possibilities for close relation between the county and the municipality.
- A former chairman of the local development agency emphasised that the project is far from the whole picture; a lot of activities were (are) going on outside the project. He also questioned the scope of participation, especially the lack of participation by young people. He also missed private local investors in the project and called for closer relations with potential investors.
- It is also clear from the work group material that the focus was on further work. The shift in focus in the conference, from further work to evaluation of the whole project, was problematic. However, some aspects were emphasised. First, the broad participation approach has been important in order to involve more than just the local authorities' administration. Second, time pressure has been low and this seems to be a positive thing. Third, there is the importance of visionary politicians, taking another perspective than a traditional managerial approach to public administration.

The conference report summarises the discussion and evaluation of the project: First, there seems to be a problem in the accomplishment of the planned actions. These problems are probably related to diffuse responsibility, which in turn relates to the reorganisation of the development work.⁶⁰ Second, many stakeholders emphasised the importance of long-term strategies in order to guide the development processes. The problem seems to be that there is too much ad hoc action. Long-term planning perspectives and scenarios are needed in order to navigate the action. Third, there seems to be strong support for the broad approach to local economic regeneration. Although the project was established to create new jobs, the focus on attractiveness, both as living area and as location for industrial production and service, is strongly supported.

⁶⁰ I will return to the question of accomplishment of action plans in the next chapter.

5.9 Summary

A presentation of diverse and comprehensive empirical material is a process of selection and prioritising. I have concentrated on the local industrial history and structure, the local cultural and social context, and on the outcome of the project as it was implemented on the basis of our development model (see Fig. 5–6).

It is important to understand these conditions as an important context in which the action research project was organised. It is, however, the presentation of the reports from the dialogue conferences as inputs to a new economic development strategy that should be emphasised. In the next chapter, the development model is the basis for a discussion of this action research approach to learning processes in municipal development and planning. In addition, the social and cultural context of the particular municipality in question plays a central role in the learning process, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

The most important point so far is that dialogue conferences is a method for mapping and social mobilisation. It is not a method for action taking and implementation. Other methods and organisational settings are needed to bring the process forward. It is the open dialogue in the conferences that suggestions are brought to the table, linked to both individual preferences and collective ideas that evolve through the social interaction.

6 *LEARNING IN THE VENNESLA DEVELOPMENT COALITION*

6.1 *Introduction*

The action research project presented in the previous chapter represents an attempt to enhance collective learning as well as learning among all participants taking part in the municipal development process. As seen from the presentation, this process, as it was planned and implemented, was very much in accordance with the conceptual development model central in the VC 2010 Agder project (Fig. 5–6). The question is then not *whether* the theoretical conceptualisation fits with the data presented, but rather *how* the practical application of this conceptualisation unfolds in the empirical setting and *which* results it produced. The issue at stake in this thesis is thus the ability of our development model to enhance learning in a local planning and development project. Initially, this challenge was expressed in the first subsidiary research question:

First subsidiary research question: How can municipal economic planning and development processes become learning processes?

This chapter analyses the empirical findings in the Vennesla project in relation to the theoretical conceptualisation presented in Chapter 2. It starts with an analysis of the facilitation of a learning process in the project based on the VC 2010 Agder development model. This is followed by an analysis of the learning process implemented, based on learning theory.

6.2 Facilitating Learning in Vennesla Municipality

In order to discuss the Vennesla development process in relation to the theoretical introduction, some main elements should be addressed. I choose here to address the *organisational aspects* of the planning process, the *phases* of the planning process, and finally, and in relation to the former, the *learning aspect*. The latter will thus be a preparation for the following analysis of learning in municipal planning (Chapter 7).

6.2.1 Implementation of an Organisational Model

The main actions taken by the researchers in the project were to organise a planning process in different phases using the concept of dialogue conference and development coalitions. In addition, a third phase consisting of an evaluation conference was organised.

The process as it is outlined above indicates a complete project, from the initial mobilisation and organisation of the project to the evaluation of the project including both process and results. My argument is that all these phases in the process and the collaborative organisational design illustrate important elements in the facilitation of learning processes.

The dialogical processes are vital in the project. Both the dialogue conference and development coalition build on the understanding of dialogical processes as central in the development of shared language, understandings and identities, and hence the social change processes (Gustavsen 1992; Pålshaugen 1998). The Vennesla project is thus closely related to this perspective on development (Fosse 2005).

The action taken, based on the action plans developed, takes the project beyond the dialogical processes. The project seeks to address and solve identified local problems, based on the shared understanding of these local problems. This adds an action approach to the project that goes beyond the communicative action approach.

The strength of the process lies, however, in the relations of, and dialogical and action orientation throughout, the process and the facilitation of a reflection loop based on both the experience from discursive processes and action-based results.

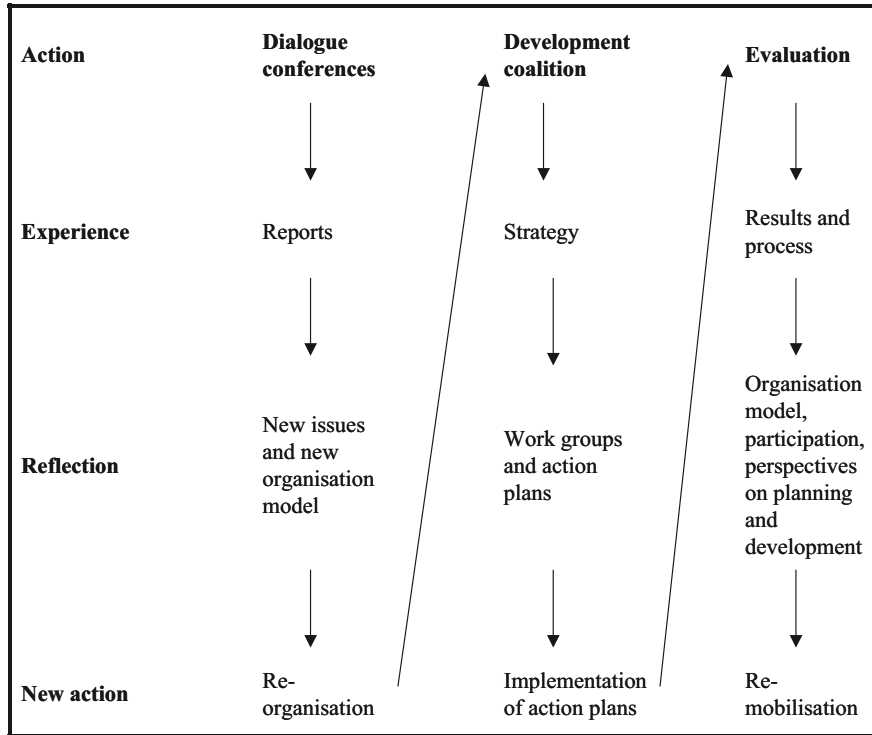
The role of the researcher is also central in the facilitation of learning in all phases of the project. In order to address the changing role of research throughout the process, I will emphasise the importance of timing in the action research approach. The high level of activity in the early phases, facilitating local mobilisation through dialogue conferences and establishing a development coalition, involved the research team significantly. Later, when the organisational structure was established, local stakeholders took central positions in the project. My role as the researcher participating in all parts of the project changed, thereafter contributing with theoretical knowledge and experience from other projects outside the municipal context. My role was not to conclude their discussions, but rather to add to the reflexive process prior to decision-making by asking questions and inviting stakeholders to discuss important issues. In the final phase of the project, I initiated an explicit attention to evaluation, which led to a new change in role. Again, the role of the researcher became more proactive in terms of facilitation and organisation of an evaluation conference.

6.2.2 The Learning Circle

The process as it is presented above indicates an increased concretisation and operationalisation in action plans and implementation of activities. The process also reflects learning based on the phases of this concretisation. I argue that shifting forms of learning, both among the participants individually and in the group of participants as a collective, take place related to the evolvement of the project. It is to a more in-depth analysis of this learning process that I will turn in order to identify forms of learning that took place in the project.

On the basis of activities implemented by the research team and the process that followed these activities, an analysis could be made building on the elements in the reflective learning circle: action, experience, reflection, and new action (Kolb 1984). In Figure 6–1 the learning circle of the Vennessla project is presented building on the output of the implemented activities.

Figure 6-1 Interpretation of learning circles in the Vennesla project



Three interdependent actions are identified, namely dialogue conferences, development coalitions and evaluation:

Dialogue conferences: The main *experiences* from the conferences were collected and presented in the conference reports. These reports became important as a basis for individual *reflections*. This resulted in the introduction of new issues in the local development project and the rethinking of the organisation of the project. As a direct consequence, a new organisational model (the development coalition) was introduced.

Development coalition: The work of the development coalition led to the formulation of a strategy plan. This plan summarises the suggestions taken further from the dialogue conferences and the discussions in the coalition. The strategy plan and budgets were presented and approved by the executive committee of local council. Based on the strategy plan, work groups on three selected strategic themes (innovation, vocational training, and place making) formulated action plans within the economic frame decided

by the coalition. The action plans were discussed and approved by the development coalition and the executive committee of local council. On the basis of these plans, new actions were implemented.

Evaluation: On the basis of experiences from both process (the organisational model) and results, an evaluation of the project was done. Reflections on many issues were discussed relating to organisation, participation, and more general perspectives on planning and development in the municipality. The evaluation included both reflections on past experiences and a re-mobilisation of the project based on the learning in the project. This led in turn to the generation of new ideas for further activities.

6.2.3 Action Research and Co-generation of Knowledge

Research may have a role in the facilitation of the aforementioned learning processes. In the development coalition model, the role of research and researchers are seen as partners in the coalition. This active engagement is in line with the action research approach. As seen in the co-generative action research model above (Greenwood and Levin 1998), a particular approach to such collaborative and participatory design was discussed emphasising the role of insiders and outsiders. Again, both in the co-generative model and in the development coalition concept, the pooling of resources from actors representing different backgrounds and experiences that are not too alike, are emphasised.

In the Vennesla case, I developed the role of the researcher as both a facilitator of collective reflective processes and a participant in these processes. The role shifted during the course of the project, with focus on the facilitator role initially in the dialogue conference and the development coalition, and subsequently as participator in the conferences and in the coalition. The guiding epistemological assumption of this approach was to generate new local insight among the participants and shared understandings through social learning and meaning construction (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

The facilitation of the collective reflective learning processes in Vennesla was based on the normative ideal model from enterprise and work life research. Although the model

had been applied and analysed over several years within the organisational development context, naive assumptions about the nature of learning processes in a municipal context were present in the research team, particularly in the initial phase of the project. In addition, there was a lack of experience from action research projects among the researchers. The naivety was particularly related to the importance of reflective learning processes, based on shared experiences and the construction of meaning related to those experiences, as a prerequisite for the realisation of radical learning. My approach was that learning and change could occur based on social interaction and dialogues in arenas (Fosse 2005). This relates to naivety about the importance of learning in planning and development processes in general. As researchers, our experience from the project has thus been a reflective learning process, enabling us to reconstruct our assumptions about collaborative planning and development in terms of learning processes.

The role of research in community development projects in a municipal context has also been addressed earlier in evaluations of action research in local community development in Norway (Almås 1985; Hansen and Selstad 1999). The problem identified in these evaluation is the lasting effects of the development process after the action researchers have left the community. It seems as though the learning effects mainly have been among the researchers not among local participants. The evaluation reveals a concern for leaving the community in ruins after the mobilisation of local stakeholders in local community development. In relation to the Vennesla case, this concern is relevant but should not be exaggerated. First, the Vennesla project lasted for approximately four years. The scope and time-perspective of the project gave the possibility for a local learning process. Second, reflective learning processes based on concrete action create opportunities for social meaning construction, establishing relations between reasoning and the local cultural context. This is crucial for the learning effects in the project and the potential for sustainable social change. The links between action and change processes to the local cultural context became explicit in the project. Of course, also the researchers learned a lot from their experiences in the project and reflections on action, reflections that are the foundation of this thesis, but based on reflections in action as an implicit part of the project.

Facilitation of learning processes, meaning the organisation of a development process based on a model for learning and change, should be related to the importance of planning processes. The conceptual model derived from the industrial democracy tradition provided a useful framework in terms of turning planning processes into learning processes. However, an organisational model such as the VC 2010 Agder model (see Fig. 5–5) is not sufficient or unproblematic when used in municipal planning projects. In order to understand how learning processes evolved in the project, I now turn to an analysis of the learning process and forms of learning in the Vennessla project.

6.3 Forms of Learning in the Vennessla Development Coalition

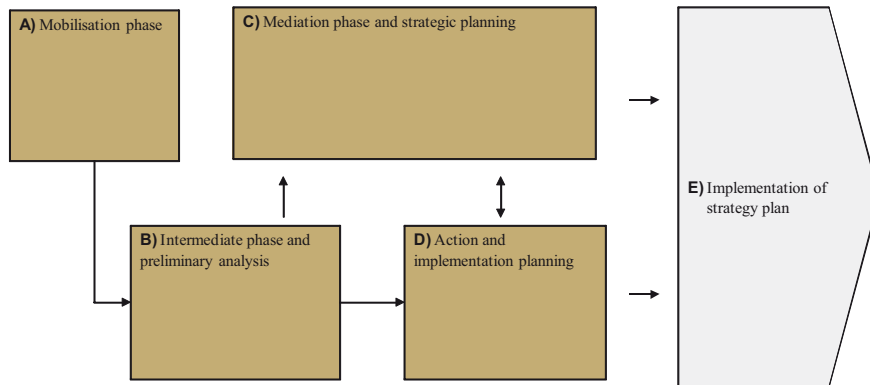
6.3.1 The Construction of Language – a Dialogical Approach

In order to understand the learning process in Vennessla, a reconstruction of the initial VS 2010 Agder model (Fig. 5–5) could be made. I use the original model as a process scheme in order to analyse some examples and identify forms of learning in the project. In order to define the content of different phases in the process, I have named five phases based on the activities related to them (see Figure 6-1).

Five interlinked phases (A–E) in the learning process are identified:

- A. Mobilisation phase
- B. Intermediate phase and preliminary analysis
- C. Mediation phase and strategic planning
- D. Action and implementation planning
- E. Implementation of strategy plan.

Figure 6-1 Process scheme adopted from the development model



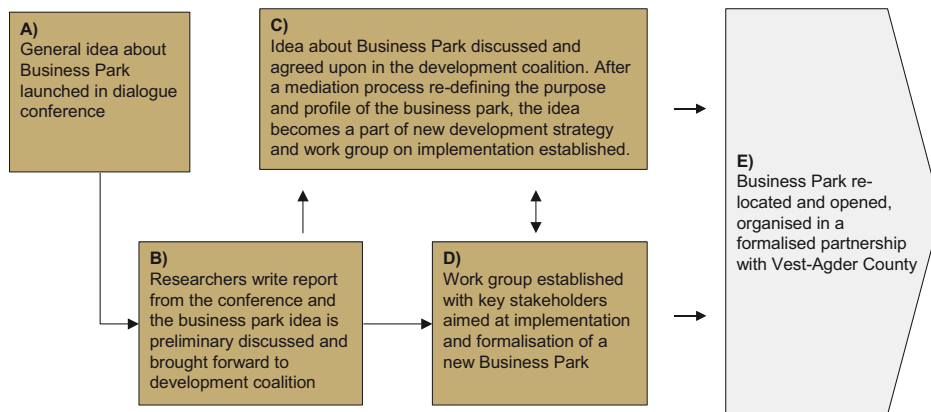
I have selected two activities from the action plan for in dept analysis of learning processes. I select these two because they were important in the project and got attention from both participants in the projects and from the outside (media). They also represent processes that mobilised actors locally and thereby included reflections of a wider scope than the successful realisation of the activity. They also represents a contrast because one activity was successfully implemented, the other was cancelled late in the process. First, I will discuss the realisation of Vennessla Business Park, second I discuss the Otra River Festival.

6.3.2 Vennessla Business Park

The establishment of Vennessla Business Park on Hunsfos Island is probably the most important result of the project. The idea to have a business park in the municipality was first put forward in the dialogue conference January 2002, and the question of localisation of the park became early an implicit part of the discussion. The establishment of the park was also an important element in the financial support to the municipality from the national government after the rejection of the special economic restructuring status they applied. The idea was further anchored in the municipality in the second dialogue conference in January 2003. It was now lifted up to be the major project in the economic development work in the municipality. A dedicated work group was organised by the coalition (see Figure 6-2). The park established on Hunsfos Island in August 2004 in the same estate as the major industrial plant (Hunsfos paper mill).

The old office building was not in use by the paper company anymore. In late 2005, the status for the park was 20 new companies, with the total of approximately 58 man-labour years.

Figure 6-2 Process-mapping: Vennesla Business Park



A) Mobilisation phase

The idea of a business park evolved from the more general need for new industrial estates in the municipality put forward by the private sector representatives in the first dialogue conference (2002). These needs were taken further by the researchers in the group and a proposal for a business park was launched. The idea was strongly supported by all participants. The further discussions were therefore not for or against a business park, but rather about the location and profile of the park. The driving force in the realisation of the park was the director of the local development agency and the process was enhanced through strong support in the local authorities and the limited but important financial support from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

Through the process of preparing the application to the Ministry in 2002 the idea was further established and put forward as a main objective in the development project. The ‘restart’ of the project with the conference in January 2003 therefore functioned as

further anchoring of the idea among the participants in general and among the politicians in particular. At the time of the establishment of the regional development coalition (after the conference in 2003), the idea of a business park was a strong and developed objective in the economic restructuring work in the municipality among local and regional stakeholders.

However, the idea was still a product of some key stakeholders in the municipality, such as the development agency and some representatives from the local authorities. These stakeholders developed the idea further, including a profile for the business park. In the application to the national government for financial support to a defined development project (cf. the response from the Ministry on 19 June 2002 above) the following proposal was announced:

Vennesla Business Park will contribute to the development of new networks and relationships in order to support innovation. It is natural to develop the profile 'Craft City' (cf. Telecom City in Karlskrona, Sweden), based on the competence and type of industry present in the municipality. We take the starting point in the long and solid craft industry in Vennesla. We argue that this tradition should be further developed. ... The business park will be localised firstly in 'Håndverkernes Hus'. (Letter to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development from Vennesla Municipality dated 15 November 2002, signed by the mayor in the municipality and the mayor in Vest-Agder County; my translation)

As is evident from the letter, both a profile and a location are proposed. The profile is based on what the writers of the letter understand to be an important competitive advantage for the municipality and the arguments are related both to the success in other business parks with a distinct image and sharp slogan, and a characteristic of the craft industry in the municipality.

It is also important to note that the suggested profile for the business park relates explicitly to an industrial sector that is not directly affected by the decrease of employees in the manufacturing industry, such as the Hunsfos paper mill. The profile relates to another regional image of the municipality, in addition to the skilled and

stable workforce in the manufacturing industry, namely the skilled and service-minded workforce in the craft industries.

B) Intermediate phase and preliminary analysis

The reports from the dialogue conference highlighted the business park as conventional and recommended initiatives in the economic restructuring process. This gave legitimacy to the idea in the further process, although the idea was not discussed in detail in this phase.

C) Mediation phase and strategy planning

The idea of a business park was clearly central from an early phase and the first element in the strategy presented to the Ministry. However, there were two elements that turned out to be different to how they were in the application. First, the emphasis on the 'Craft City' idea was negotiated and the profile of the park changed during the strategy process. Second, the location of the park was changed through the dialogue in the coalition. In the following, I will discuss the mediation process and meaning construction that developed as an implicit part of the dialogues in the coalition. I see the interpretation and operationalisation of the ideas in the coalition that came from the initial phase, including the two dialogue conferences, as an implicit part of the strategy process that evolved in the coalition.

The 'Craft City' idea was directly linked to the profile of a new business park. It was suggested that this profile should steer the selection of enterprises allowed to localise in the park. Although this profile was strongly emphasised in the application to the Ministry in November 2002 (see above), and further discussed in the conference in January 2003, it was radically changed in the first meetings in the coalition. What, then, happened in the coalition?

The first sign of diverse opinions is in the material from the dialogue conference in January 2003, where there is a directly stated wish not to become 'Craft City' and instead to have a strong gender perspective in the further process. The argument was that the Craft City profile could contribute to the conservation of traditional gender roles

and take the development of the municipality in the wrong direction. Some saw the gender and diversity perspective as part of the problem and a major challenge in the municipality. It was because of these critical voices that new perspectives emerged with more emphasis on the importance of diversity in general and gender in particular. I argue that these voices could have been disregarded by some key stakeholders or neglected if the mediation of the ideas was not brought into an arena such as the coalition characterised by broad participation and collective meaning construction.

The discussion continued to focus on the action proposed (in the conference). Several people emphasised that the economic development work should not be too narrow, that it should be stimulated into a broad collection of innovative enterprises that could provide work for different occupational groups. Some were explicitly worried about the focus on the ‘“*Craft City*” profile and a conservation of gender roles and a decline in workplaces for women’ (Minute from first meeting in the development coalition 19 February 2003; my translation).

The effect of the shift in focus could later be seen in the presentation of the business park in the newspapers. New perspectives on diversity were emphasised. The first presentation of the park in the regional newspaper was turned into a main argument for establishing the park:

We really want jobs for women. We know we lack jobs for them, says the director of the development agency. We want to have diversity. Women have traditionally worked in health care or stayed at home. This has been part-time work combined with care obligations in the family homes. There is nothing wrong in that, but society is changing. We need more diversity, says the mayor. (Fædrelandsvennen 5 May 2004; my translation)

The following month gender was once again in focus in a newspaper report:

The director of the development agency emphasises that the development strategy for the business park includes a particular focus on workplaces for women and young people. This is an issue we will be very aware of. (Fædrelandsvennen 19 June 2004; my translation)

The next shift related to the localisation of the park. As seen in the application letter to the Ministry, the idea was to localise the park together with the agency in a building (Håndverkernes Hus) in the town centre. At this point an alternative location was being discussed among the key stakeholders in the process. However, there was a change, and in the second dialogue conference (January 2003), a discussion about new activity on Hunsfos Island was started, and linked to the idea of a business park. As seen in the conference report, it was suggested that a business park should be established at the Hunsfos industrial estate. Infrastructure was already in place on this estate, and the idea of reusing the buildings formerly used for the administration of paper production appealed to all stakeholders. It was both very cost effective and had a strong symbolic message because of the new activity in the closed down part of the estate.

D) Action plans and strategic objectives

A dedicated work group was organised working explicitly on the realisation of the idea. They concentrated on location, an ownership model, and economy in particular. In this phase, few reflective processes were taking place. It was rather a process where experience from similar business park projects was discussed and turned into an organisational model and preliminary budgets for Vennessla Business Park.

E) Implementation of strategic actions

It is my argument that the development coalition contributed to the realisation of the business park. Through the collaboration between the local authorities, the local development agency, and the county, both financial resources and competence were coordinated. The limited enterprise Vennessla Næringspark AS was established through a formal partnership agreement between the three parties, the local economic development agency, the local authorities and the county. The aim of this company was to provide the infrastructure needed to operate the business park. The director of the agency also became the director of the business park. By the end of 2007, nearly two years later, the park localises 20 enterprises with approximately 60 persons employed. There is a wide range of enterprises, such as accounting, IT-support, a call-centre, consultancies, an artist (painter), the administration of a garage and petrol station

company, a lawyer, a certification and training facilitator for manufacturing industry, and a temporary staff recruitment agency that has provided jobs for many of those who lost their job in the Hunsfos factory.

It is particularly the coordination of local and regional resources that contributed to the realisation of the business park idea. A formalised partnership agreement provided both substantial knowledge about the business park concept and the necessary financial basis.

I will now point to some other explanations for the successful realisation of the business park idea. First, the commitment to the idea in the development agency and particularly by the agency's director should be emphasised. The director took on the role as leader for the refurbishment of the building and provider of the infrastructure needed, he advertised the park to enterprises and entrepreneurs, and had administrative responsibility for the park. Today, it would be fair to say that he functions both as director and janitor.

Another element that I find important is the strong and lasting consensus in the coalition regarding the idea of a business park. Although some conflicts developed about the profile of the park, there were never any suggestions for abandoning the idea. This could be related to the broader shift linked to the economic restructuring process in the municipality. In many ways the business park became a symbol for this restructuring. I will give two arguments for this. First, the park would localise future oriented enterprises within sectors that have experienced growth. These enterprises would also provide jobs that could stimulate a more diverse work life and new opportunities for women in particular. The debate about the profile of the park indicates that the establishment is seen as something more than just infrastructure, it is also a new direction in the economic development in the municipality.

Second, the localisation of the park at the Hunsfos industrial estate brought new activity to a place that for many people expressed decline in manufacturing infrastructure. It was a strong symbol to attract new economic activity into the estate. The development of the idea in the coalition also contributed to new perspectives on Hunsfos Island as a whole and the potential for further development of areas on the island. An expression of this

new interest was seen in private investors. In 2005, most of the island was sold by the local authorities to a private investor that wanted to develop the area and build a shopping centre, office buildings, and cultural centre. Hunsfos Island has now become the same symbol of the new economy as is known from numerous European and American cities through the regeneration of docklands and industrial estates.

Third, I believe that the example above gives an indication that important lines of demarcation could be related not only to individual interests, but also to individual understanding and belief in the possibility for change, and also the fairness of this development. It is about important values such as diversity and the inclusion of alternatives.

Fourth, the successful realisation of the business park idea relates to individual perceptions of the collective local identity and history, and its strengths and weaknesses in terms of further development. This about the profile of the business park, which from my point of view is the core of the identification process ongoing in the municipality. It relates both to the history and to the future (Massey 1995). In this example it has been seen that new voices were brought into the discussion about future development and change, voices representing alternative suggestions and interpretations. Based on this, a break from determined development trajectories was possible. New sets of alternatives emerged, representing an alternative problem definition. It is in these processes that a local ability to see beyond the mental frames shaping the understandings and actions open to them can be found. It is in the ability to acknowledge that new challenges are hard to solve with the reproduction of history that important learning occurred.

It is my interpretation that the mediation of diverging place identities is an important and challenging ongoing dialogue in the regional development coalition. Regional development rooted in the decline of dominating industries, loss of workplaces, and general economic uncertainty implies difficult social change processes. It is uncertainties about what tomorrow will bring that are brought up. A general and often abstract dialogue about place identities becomes immanent in any kind of planning process. In other words, the dialogue turns to questions of 'why' instead of 'what' and 'how'. This turn to 'why' occurs despite the pressure towards concrete action, both from

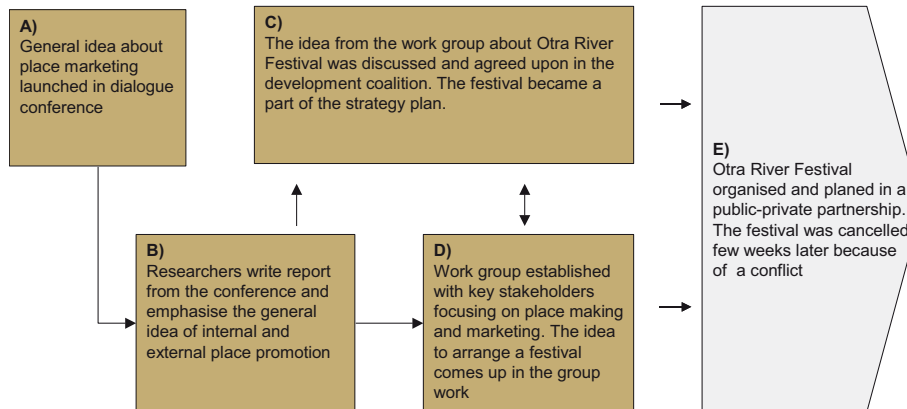
participants in the process and from external relations. By ‘concrete action’ I mean activities such as meetings, education and/or courses, physical regeneration, new buildings, etc. These are all visible and easy to refer to as evidence and symbols of the capacity to act. It is, however, the link between the (re-)production of place identities, or identification processes and actions that brought about the sustainability in the municipal development project and the social change process.

6.3.3 Otra River Festival

The Otra River Festival was an idea developed in the coalition. There is now reference to such an activity in the conference material. There are, however, many references to the natural qualities and cultural history of the municipality in the material. The idea may be related to the notion held by many concerning local qualities that have remained secret to others, both inside and outside the municipality. According to many participants in the second dialogue conference, the marketing of these qualities could support a positive image and the attractiveness of the municipality.

The Otra River Festival activities are categories of diverse ideas about the attractiveness and image of the municipality (Figure 6-3). These ideas reflect important features of both place identities and the general challenge of an attractive image. I will return to these issues below.

Figure 6-3 Process-mapping: Otra River Festival



A) Mobilisation phase

The mobilisation phase did not include any suggestions about a festival. There were, however, many suggestions made by inhabitants and externals about place marketing and initiatives to increase the attractiveness of the municipality.

B) Intermediate phase and preliminary analysis

In the reports, only a general emphasis on place marketing initiatives is found.

C) Mediation phase and strategy planning

The scope of the issues suggested in the conferences called for discussions and creativity in the coalition. It is in these discussions, both in the coalition and in the place making work group that the activities evolved as suggested answers to the image challenge. Again, the personal experience and knowledge held by the participants determined the final shape of the suggestions in the action plan.

Arranging a festival became the most important activity in the place making strategy. The idea was to think of the River Otra as a vein running through the whole

municipality. The river is also strongly connected to the industrial and cultural history of the municipality, and the festival was to be based on this history, with activities and events along the river. In addition, several other arrangements could be linked to the festival and together form a festival week around the Norwegian mid-summer celebration (St. Hans) in June. The festival would be based on the combination of local resources, such as volunteers, artists, organisations, national celebrities, and musicians.

In addition, the idea of place marketing was linked to the festival idea to a large extent. It was, however, less concrete and suggested a general focus on the profile of the municipality.

D) Action plans and strategic objectives

Key public and private stakeholders from both the services and culture sectors were selected to form a group working on place making and place marketing. There was consensus in the group about the importance of the festival, and several stakeholders took the initiative to take the ideas into action.

E) Implementation of strategic actions

At the time of writing this thesis, neither the festival nor the marketing have been started. The efforts made to realise the festival were hampered by conflicts and problems and the festival had to be cancelled late in the preparations for the first festival in June 2004. The festival received a lot of attention, both in the regional newspaper and in the municipality in general. A dedicated group worked hard to establish a programme for the week and booked several arrangements. There was strong and visible cooperation between volunteers, local businesses, the development agency, and the cultural sector in the municipality. However, problems occurred, and because of a conflict related to the permission to serve alcohol during the concerts that were planned, a private enterprise and key stakeholder withdrew and the festival was cancelled.

In the wake of the cancellation a debate started in the local and regional media. Several participants in the coalition and others outside the project protested against the local authorities' treatment of the problems with the alcohol licence. Some gave newspaper

interviews, saying that the local authorities were unfriendly to businesses, while others were worried about the way in which local economic initiatives were welcomed and supported. In this particular case, the lack of support was linked to the negative views of religious politicians and others on alcohol. It was also linked to the type of festival that was planned, involving rock concerts for instance.

The idea of place marketing was to a large extent linked to the festival idea. It was, however, less concrete and suggested a general focus on the profile of the municipality. It was formulated as the need to establish a committee working on a communication strategy for the municipality. In addition, the work group suggested a presentation film that could be developed in cooperation with the media students at the local high school.

6.3.4 Lesson Learned

First, there has been a lack of engagement in the place making issues, not in the general discussions that went on in the conferences and the coalition, but in the efforts made to realise the actions that were planned. I argue that this is related to the lack of knowledge about such a development strategy and the organisational structure of the local authorities. The latter point is important because the place making activities seem to fall between two chairs. There is no sector with such a defined responsibility and the development agency seemed to think in more narrow terms and failed to represent more than local industry. I recognise the division between regulating activities handled by the planning department in the municipality and place making activities with a broader scope involving several sectors (Healey 2001). Place making activities imply a strong emphasis on coordinating structures.

Second, the dependency on some key stakeholders in the realisation of activities seems to be very strong. In the case of the festival, this became decisive. It seemed to be difficult to arrange the festival without these stakeholders; no attempts have been made to organise a festival since 2004.

Third, I will argue that place making issues address questions of place identity and visions for the future. These questions open discussions that bring the essence of

individual desires and collective meaning construction to the table. It takes time to narrow this down to a cutting edge profile and a credible image.

Fourth, the place making strategy that was developed in the coalition called for both cross-sector cooperation and a territorial focus. I will argue that the problems of realising the place making activities evolved because of the collaborative nature of these strategies made by the coalition and the general lack of collaboration and coordinating structures in the organisations that were responsible for the realisation of the plans.

6.4 Simple and Radical Learning

The process discussed above, based on the results and transformation of ideas to actions, suggests that the core of the development project in Vennesla was oriented towards problem solutions. The project was focused on the generation of ideas in order to approach a problematic situation identified in the municipality. Yet the 'problem' addressed was perhaps not that straightforward and might have been difficult to define because of its complexity. I argue that the identification of the 'problem' might have been at the core of the learning that went on in the planning process. I build my argument on the analysis of the process towards results in the Vennesla project.

The ideas coming from the dialogue conferences represent diversity in many ways but most of all they represent a diversity of understandings of the problem. The problem was at best of a general kind and there are many answers to it. This might be both the strength and the weakness of the dialogue conference concept: a strength because it opens the dialogue for all participants and builds on the principles of democratic dialogue and communicative action (Gustavsen 1992; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999), a weakness because it makes it hard to reach an overlapping consensus about the problems the local authorities needs to address.

The development coalition takes these diverse ideas and suggestions further. However, also in the coalition, there were many ideas regarding the problem initially. There was therefore divergence regarding the problem to be addressed among the participants in the development coalition. This challenge was present in the case of Vennesla Business Park: the idea of a business park was welcomed in the coalition, but in the further

dialogue it became obvious that a business park was an answer to rather different problem definitions. On the one hand, it was seen as a way to develop traditional industries in the municipality, while on the other hand it was seen as a way to shift and facilitate the development of new industries. The interpretation of the ideas, based on the many understandings of the problem represented in the coalition, became thus both a process of problem definition and a selection of actions addressing the problem. In the development coalition, the process of problem identification and definition is a continuous process, not restricted to an initial phase as indicated in the co-generative learning model (Greenwood and Levin 1998). This suggests that the strategy plan only displays a snap shot picture of the consensus reached in the coalition after a mediation process on the reality constructed as a basis for the strategy.

The realisation of the strategy and action plans displays the sometimes weak connections between the action plans and the diversity of problem definitions existing in the municipality. *This, I believe, is an underlying challenge for the realisation of the action plans.* In addition, the responsibility for realisation is often undefined and many activities are not started or unfinished. On the other hand, the learning related to the formulation and reformulation of the problem goes beyond the more instrumental reflective learning process.

This brings me to my understanding regarding the reflective learning process in the Vennesla development project. Two aspects of reflective learning have been discussed. The first aspect was the reflection on action, based on the organisational model applied in the project. The main actions were the *dialogue conferences*, the *development coalitions*, and the *evaluation conference*. New understandings about the potential of a collaborative approach to local development, including the perspective of broad participation, emerged during the project. The second aspect was the reflection in action, based on the problem solving efforts, following the process from idea to action and result. The main actions in this process were the *strategy and planning activities*, *implementation of strategy and action plans*, and the *reformulation of problem definition*. A key finding is that the reflection in action, on the basis of the main actions, focused on the understanding of the problem to be addressed. That is, on the

formulation of the change needed in order to face economic restructuring related to the crises in the manufacturing industries predicted by local politicians.

In both reflections in and on action, learning was related to an underlying uncertainty among the participants about what were the 'right' activities and the 'right' organisational model to achieve the intended outcome of the project. I find the reflective learning in the Vennesla project to be compatible with *simple learning* (Argyris and Schön 1996), i.e. the type of instrumental learning that changes strategies of action and behaviour but proves to be incapable of questioning the behavioural strategies (or theory of action) that initially brought about the problematic situation. In other words, and in the context of a municipal development project, it is a learning process that fails to question the local context that constitutes the construction of the problem and the municipal challenges.

I argue, however, that the simple learning process in the Vennesla project created an opportunity to take the learning further. As I suggest throughout my discussion of the interpretation of ideas and suggestions produced in the dialogue conference and through the formulation of a strategy plan in the development coalition, constant reference was made to the underlying problem definition and context that constituted the understanding of the problem. In the following, I argue that the reflective learning circles enabled and were a prerequisite for the radical learning (Argyris and Schön 1996) or deuterolearning (Bateson 1972) taking place in Vennesla.

In the words of Dewey, experience plus reflection equals learning (Dewey 1938). I agree with this, but in addition and together with Bateson I have argued that reflections need to be of a particular kind to realise learning of a higher order. Our experiences need thus to be related to a broader context, enabling us to question the foundation of our actions. Then, new action opportunities could emerge and limitations in the perceived local culture could be widened. Characteristics of the 'learning organisation' immanent in the concept of development coalitions reflect this ability to transform and adapt to changing realities in the environment.

6.5 Learning in Municipal Development Coalitions

In the Vennesla case, a particular model for learning and development was applied. The model was based on inspiration from the Scandinavian industrial democracy tradition and action research in work life and organisational development, and in particular after the ‘communicative turn’ in this tradition, identified by Johnsen (2001). In addition, and in line with the challenges identified in the research tradition of enterprise development (Gustavsen et al. 1998; Levin 2002), the importance of inter-enterprise relations in innovation processes suggested that these processes were regional in scope. This launched new connections between regional development theory and organisational development theory, exemplified in the conceptualisation of regional development coalitions (Ennals and Gustavsen 1998) and learning regions as development coalitions (Asheim 2001). The normative foundation of this approach to regional development is found in the collaborative model, based on broad participation and democratic dialogue, in addition to an action research approach. I argue that in this tradition there is an underling focus on learning processes (Johnsen, Normann, and Fosse 2005).

In addition to the collaborative approach to development in the concept of development coalition, the dialogical approach is explicit, at least among some researchers (Gustavsen 1992; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999; Johnsen 2001) in the tradition. The use of dialogue conferences as an independent approach to organisational and regional development suggests an emphasis on the social construction of meaning and the importance of language in such processes.

In the Vennesla case, based on the VC 2010 Agder development model (Johnsen and Normann 2001b), both dialogue conferences and a development coalition were key elements in the planning and development project. In the following, I will discuss the contribution of dialogue conferences and the development coalition to the enhancement of learning in the project.

I have emphasised the potential of an action research approach to the exploration of this question. An action research approach takes its starting point in real problems, in challenges faced locally and solved locally, but in the collaboration between internal

and external actors. In the following, the main elements in this normative approach to development serve to organise the discussion of the first research question. I take the starting point in Figure 6–1, identifying the main actions in the project.

6.5.1 Dialogue Conferences

The dialogue conferences in Vennesla made an important contribution to the mobilisation of participants in the municipality and in the region. However, they mainly contributed to the learning process addressing the foundation of the local challenge and the potential based on local resources to act on these challenges. Two aspects are emphasised in relation to the use of dialogue conferences, first the mobilisation of local resources and second, the organisational aspects based on principles of broad participation and communicative action, including social interaction as the basis of a reorganisation of the planning process (Shotter and Gustavsen 1999).

The use of dialogue conferences in regional development has the potential for initiating new and productive social relations through face-to-face interaction. Such conferences can, through the dialogical structured activity in an arena, become a moment in the mobilisation of local actors in local development. The emphasis is on the constitution of dialogue conferences based on a minimum of shared experiences from practice as a starting point for the development of collective actions on collective problems (Shotter and Gustavsen 1999). My experience from the Vennesla project is that the dialogue conferences only partly fulfilled the objectives and anticipated outcome of such dialogical processes.

First, the dialogue conferences initiated new and productive social relations. This was the basis of the reorganisation of the planning process, establishing collaboration between the local authorities, the development agency, the research team, industry, and the county. I will return to this issue in the discussion of the development coalition but first I will emphasise the impotence of the conferences in the mobilisation of participants in the further project.

Second, based on the dialogical processes, particularly through the group work in the conferences, the process towards a shared understanding of the contextual conditions

was started. These shared understandings were transformed into a formulation of a problem or challenge to be addressed in the project. This became the starting point in the strategy process that followed in the project.

The analysis of the learning process in the project places the dialogue conference as one of the key actions in the project, initiated by the research team in order to establish a new arena for dialogue and facilitate a reflective learning process. The positive outcome, in addition to the social relations, was written and categorised in conference reports. In itself, however, the conference may be seen as a restricted reflective learning cycle (Kolb 1984). It represents reflective dialogues based on shared concrete experiences, turned into a more abstract conceptualisation. It ends with suggestions for, not implementation of, active experimentation. Shared experience among participants in the conference is thus also related to the social construction of knowledge about the reality faced in the planning and development project. This indicates that dialogue conferences support the realisation of radical learning (Argyris and Schön 1996; Bateson 1972) on both an individual and collective level. My experience is, however, that radical learning cannot be realised on the basis of restricted shared experiences, as in the dialogue conferences in the Vennesla case. Only some shared general experiences from the local context formed the basis for the reflective learning process. However, these were experiences of an abstract kind and not based on concrete cases. I relate the difference in abstract and concrete experience to whether actors have participated in local dialogue based planning processes. While abstract and general experiences about local contexts are important, they are not sufficient in the realisation of radical learning. The theories presented above (Cars et al. 2002; Ennals and Gustavsen 1999; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999) suggest that such shared experiences among participants should in particular relate to language, problem identification, action, and the meaning of place and local identities.

This suggests a critique of the adaptation of organisational development concepts such as dialogue conferences to local and regional planning and development. My critique is based on the differences in the participants' experiences relating to an enterprise context and a municipal context. According to Shotter and Gustavsen (1999), work experience

is the basis for dialogue and a prerequisite for participation in a conference, and the use of concrete examples is emphasised. This is a prerequisite that is hard to achieve in the dialogue a priori. This is a condition we only can achieve through the process itself, if the focus is on concrete problem solving activities and reflective learning based on the shared experiences from these activities. I will return to this argument in the discussion on the development coalition.

To summarise the first argument about learning, in order to experience change and transformation, learning processes should be based on shared concrete experience enabling reflective learning processes. That is to gain experience from a problem solving process in collaboration with others. This opens up possibilities for radical learning on a collective level through the contextualisation of reflective learning cycles. Through the process of contextualisation, fundamental questions about the cultural and social frames of our actions are possible and could thus contribute to the reformulation of the initial problem definition.

6.5.2 Development Coalition

As I have argued above, the development coalition concept is firmly linked to enterprise and organisational development theory. In particular, the idea of learning organisation, i.e. one that promotes learning among all of its members and transforms rapidly, adapting to a changing environment (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 114), is emphasised as the foundation of regional development coalitions. In the following, I will discuss learning in development coalitions in a municipal context. In addition, I will point to important challenges in the application of development coalitions in the local and regional context.

One obvious challenge with the development coalition concept is how it promotes learning among all of its members. I find a possible answer to this in the elements I have identified constituting the concept, and I will discuss these elements in relation to the Vennesla case.

The merging of theory and practice, or the relation between knowledge and action, is an important feature of the development coalition concept. This approach is closely related

to the collaborative organisational design and the action research approach. In the Vennesla case, this was an important principle in the organisational model applied. The idea was to merge local participants representing local knowledge with researchers from outside representing mainly theoretical knowledge. Through the process of collaboration in the coalition, and in particular when the dialogue moved towards concrete examples and problem definitions, the merging of theory and practice was seen as promising regarding the effect on the learning process. Typically, this became articulated in the reflective discussions about formulation of concrete activities in the strategy and action plan. Again, experience from the coalition indicates that learning is related to concrete problem solving activities. It is in these activities that diversity in competence and experience among the participants could be turned into an essential strength. In Vennesla, this process, towards concretisation of activities and action alternatives, developed over time. Through the continued reformulation of activities based on suggestions that became concretised, changed and reinterpreted in the coalition, a reflective learning cycle was established.

The argument presented is similar to the emphasis on *the relevance of field experiments* for learning in development coalitions (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999). This is an approach to knowledge generation linked to pragmatism. The importance of shared experience from practical action, or problem solving activities, is at the core of the approach to learning in pragmatism. This inspiration is immanent in the conceptualisation of development coalitions and should not be overlooked in the application of the development coalition model outside the enterprise or intra-organisational context.

A final argument concerning learning in development coalitions relates to the potential for realising radical learning. I have argued above that this is learning of a fundamental character, linked to the reformulation of governing principles for action. I have also argued, based on the reflective learning cycles, that an example of such a reformulation of governing principle for action is found in the coalition. It is my view that such learning processes occurred in the reformulation of local resources and strategies beyond local social restrictions. I therefore suggest that radical learning is closely linked

to the interpretation of a constructed local context and the ability to reconstruct this context, and thus the problem definition, based on the reflective learning process.

This argument may be linked to the view of *action as a constructivist activity* (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999: 31). Ennals and Gustavsen argue that through the decline of universal theories and reasons, discussions (and hence the medium of language) have moved to the foreground in the identification of emerging problems and the solution to these problems in organisational theory. I emphasise this because of the relevance for learning also in a planning processes. I have suggested above that reflective learning processes are closely linked to the collective experience from problem identification and problem-solving activities. The experience that is gained through concrete action and reflective processes is, however, not about an objective 'outside' reality to which we correct errors in the perception of the world. Rather, the shift to a social constructivist position should be emphasised (Friedmann 1987). Instead of being caught up in an individual and objective conception of the external world, my approach is founded on the social character and co-generation of knowledge (Greenwood and Levin 1998). Dialogical processes are the basis of such social knowledge generation, but (to repeat) on the basis of some shared experiences and reflections from problem solving. Dialogues alone could at worst become an abstract activity struggling to realise concrete action, losing legitimacy and relevance. Dialogues based on shared experience from problem solving activities could at best become a means to realise radical learning.

To summarise the second argument, I find the complimentary aspects of learning by doing things together, and dialogical process interpreting the conditions for our actions in a broader perspective, important in the realisation of radical learning. Such a process is potentially realised in regional development coalitions if attention is given to both the development of shared experiences based on problem solving activities and the dialogical processes constructing the realities to be addressed.

6.5.3 Evaluation Conference

The evaluation conference focused on the implementation of the action plan, results, and process. In addition, there was an explicit focus on remobilisation and further work

in the project. Using the dialogue conference design (Gustavsen 1992; Shotter and Gustavsen 1999), the evaluation process was based on the experiences of the participants gathering data from group work and discussions in plenary sessions. Central in both the group work and plenary discussions was the continuous attempt to reformulate the problems of the municipality important to address in further work.

In the evaluation conference, both results from the project and the process were discussed, involving all participants from all phases of the project. Based on experience from action taken in the project, reflection on governing principles such as problem definition and organisational structures were placed at the top of the agenda.

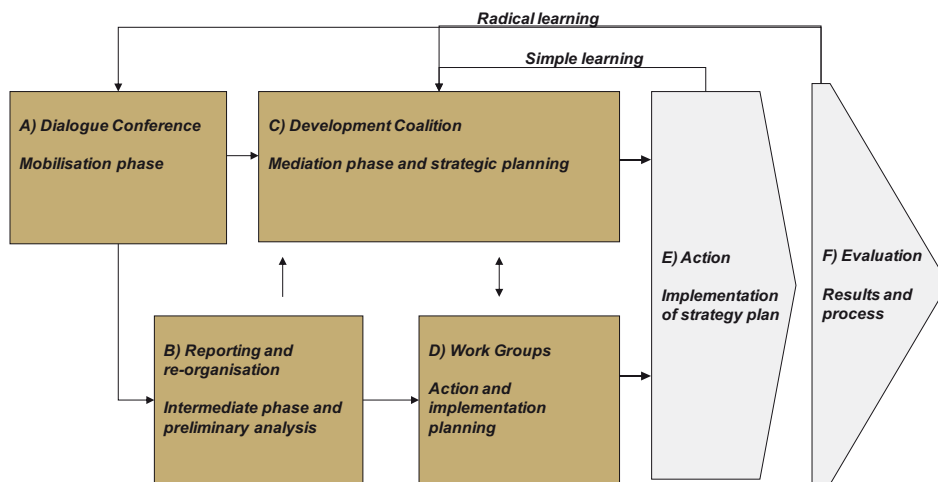
In the evaluation conference, an arena for reflection was established. In accordance with the idea of sharing data with all participants in a collective reflective process, experience, critiques and suggestions were shared and brought into the planning process. At this final stage in the project, participants as well as researchers were able to 'step outside' the project (or in other words, go 'back stage') and reflect upon it with some distance (Eikeland and Berg 1997). This stage seemed to realise the potential for radical learning in the process. I therefore argue that it is hard to realise reflective processes that go beyond the simple learning process without this evaluation phase.

The explicit initiative I took as an action researcher in the process to organise an evaluation conference came as a result of what I saw as fragmented learning in the project. I emphasised the need to share experiences from the project and discuss both the results and the process together with all participants. The initiative was also linked to the problems in the coalition regarding addressing questions about the participants' own role and the objectives of the project. This was explicitly linked to the action focus in the discussions. Action plans were the most important issue, as discussed above. My interpretation is that reflection on practice, and thus the ability to change and adapt to changing environments as presupposed in the learning organisation approach (Ennals and Gustavsen 1999), does not come easily or automatically. As seen in the Vennesla case, the action focus became dominant. This focus gave prominence to simple learning in the project, not radical learning. Although a self-reflective and evaluating perspective

could have become an immanent part of the development coalition, a designated arena (e.g. a conference) for evaluation proved to be more applicable in the Vennesla case.

Figure 6-4 is a more advanced model than the initial development model in VC 2010 Agder. The revised model highlights the functions of different phases related to the simple and radical learning processes. In particular, the evaluation phase became important for the realisation of radical learning. Throughout the project it proved to be difficult to gain attention to the reflective and evaluating dialogues based on both the experience from actions taken in the implementation of the strategy and the organisational aspects of the project. Attention was directed mainly toward the strategy and implementation phase (C, D and E in Fig. 6-4).

Figure 6-4 Learning Process in the Vennesla project



To summarise the third argument, I find it important to emphasise the evaluation phase in order to enhance learning. Finding space in the project to explicitly address questions about both the results and the process, including the organisational model and the collaboration between the participants, was most effectively realised in an evaluation conference. I thus argue that evaluation needs to be an explicit part of the action research approach to municipal development in order to support and enhance learning for all participants and hence to realise organisational learning (Argyris and

Schön 1996). As action researchers, we did not have an explicit focus on the importance of evaluation in the project initially, but added this in agreement with all participants during the process. This could have turned out to be a problem for the learning processes, and may stand as an example of our lack of experience from similar action research processes.

The evaluation of the project was undertaken at the end of the project. An alternative could have been a continuous evaluation focus throughout the process. This could have increased the learning effects in all phases of the project, at least in terms of radical learning because the evaluation process seems to be important for the learning output. There seems to be a positive relation between the number of arenas organised for dialogue in order to take an outside perspective on the project and the learning effect. In a revision of the project and the development model applied, evaluation should thus be included as a continuous focus throughout the project phases.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, a question about what learning is in municipal development projects, and in a municipal development coalition in particular, has been discussed. I have argued that learning is closely linked to the problem solving activities in collaborative arenas. I have also identified similarities with a reflective learning circle based on experiences from this problem solving activity. I emphasise, however, that this reflective learning process seems to be a prerequisite for learning of a higher order. Through the collective experience gained from the problem solving approach, an opportunity for further reflections on the foundation of the problems to address in municipal planning and development was created. The learning process was thus characterised by the social construction of new realities and meaning based on new collective experience. This suggests that a concrete collective problem solving approach in development coalitions is important in order to develop joint experience. *These joint experiences are the starting point of the learning process.* I have emphasised the importance of a reflective arena, such as an evaluation conference, as a means in the social learning process. The focus on evaluation systematises experiences and

distributes them between all participants. In addition, evaluation is an opportunity to step ‘outside’ the project and reflect on both the process and the results.

I have also argued that learning processes could be facilitated through an action research approach and by the use of a dialogical process in dialogue conferences and development coalitions. The dialogical approach should, however, be oriented towards problem solving processes and concrete action in order to establish shared experiences, on which social learning could evolve.

The analysis of learning in the Vennesla development coalition provides an important insight into how a social collaborative process represents an opportunity for learning on both an individual and collective level. The analysis is based on the conceptual model presented in the first theoretical chapter in this dissertation (Chapter 2).

Summary of the arguments:

- In order to facilitate social learning, learning processes should be based on shared concrete experience enabling reflective learning processes. Shared experiences are thus the starting point of the learning process.
- I find the complimentary aspects of learning by doing things together and dialogical process interpreting the conditions for our actions in a broader perspective important in the realisation of radical learning.
- I find it important to emphasise an explicit focus on evaluation in order to enhance social learning.

These findings from the analysis of the data represent important elements in social learning processes. In the next chapter, these findings will be analysed in relation to the context in which such social learning processes take place. Above I have argued above that the relevant context of municipal planning relates to the territorial and temporal setting, the governance of place, and the planning practice. My aim is to explore mutual relations between the social learning process and the context. To repeat my initial thesis,

I argue that to apply a development model aimed at facilitating learning and organisational change, based on the idea of industrial democracy in work life in a regional or municipal development project, faces the challenges of qualitatively different contexts. In the next chapter, I explore these challenges.

7 CONTEXT AND LEARNING IN MUNICIPAL PLANNING

7.1 Introduction

Facilitation of learning processes based on the introduction of the industrial democracy tradition in regional development (Fricke and Totterdill 2004) is a characteristic of the VS 2010 programme. I have argued that this adoption of industrial democracy in regional development is confronted with new challenges. I have identified these challenges as linked to the change in context (see Chapter 3). In this particular case, context has been identified as models of governance in the regional political economy, the regional planning practice, and the territorial and temporal regional setting in which actions are launched. In this chapter, these contextual issues are discussed in relation to the learning process in Vennessla. I argue that this context had a significant impact on the ability to facilitate and enhance learning processes. Accordingly, findings from the analysis in the previous chapter are interpreted in relation to this particular context. In this chapter I thus readdress the contextual elements of new models of governance, planning practice, and the territorial and temporal regional setting in which the project was launched.

7.2 Readdressing Local Governance

In the theoretical review presented in Chapter 3, I emphasised relations between a rescaling of politics to a regional or local level in order to engage in the process of interregional competition and the growth of new models of governance. I defined geographical scales as produced and parts of changing social relations and practice. The implication of this perspective is that with change in practice, e.g. in the governance of place, new spatial scales are potentially produced.

In the Vennesla project we find an example of how rescaling processes seem to be part of the historical development. The development of the industrial community was closely linked to the development of one or two enterprises. These enterprises were central in the economic, social and cultural development in the first half of the 20th century. Community development was thus closely related to these enterprises. Later, a process of post-war ‘municipal construction’, closely related to the development of the Norwegian welfare state, became a dominating spatial scale in the formation of local identity. Today, and as has been shown, there is growing attention to the regional level. A strong and comprehensive inter-municipal collaboration has been established in the Kristiansand city region.⁶¹ The region has thus experienced a rescaling process, moving from an enterprise to a regional level. Economic planning is now organised in a regional economic development strategy, emphasising the interdependency between the municipalities in the city region.⁶²

Thus, both on a municipal and a regional level, new governance networks have been established and exemplify how the local state adapts to external environments, and

⁶¹ Knutepunkt Sørlandet (the inter-municipal collaboration in the Kristiansand city region). See footnote 2.

⁶² Strategic economic development plan in Knutepunkt Sørlandet (web reference 9th of August 2007: <http://www.knutepunktsorlandet.no/Artikkel.asp?AId=57&back=1&MId1=69&MId2=46>)

focuses on the coordination of social systems. The reorganisation of local and regional governance is an expression of the efforts made to increase their capacity to steer the development of the municipality. In addition, it seems to be a concrete expression of the turn from ‘managerialism to entrepreneurialism’ (Harvey 1989a). This shift is exemplified in the privatisation of industrial policy with the establishment of an economic development agency in the municipality. The Vennesla context thus seems to be in line with the more general observation on shifts in European regional political economy, expressed in governance theory.

The reorganisation of municipal development policy may first and foremost be seen as a way to increase the mobilisation capacity of the public administration and to find new ways to practise active agency. It is within this context that the VC 2010 project was launched in the municipality. The practical and problem solving orientation in the project was implemented in correlation with local concerns and efforts. Local stakeholders readily accepted the normative approach of the project emphasising broad participation and learning objectives. On a general basis, these normative aspects were seen as uncontroversial in the local context. My concern is, however, that although a learning focus was accepted as implicit in the project, it became hard to realise radical learning processes within the context of local governance. The reasons for this could be seen in relation to the elaboration and findings from the learning process presented in the previous chapter. Before I address this challenge, I continue with some conditions for learning processes in local governance based on the analysis of learning in the Vennesla development coalition.

7.2.1 Redefining the Role of Politicians and Public Administration in Economic Planning

As mentioned above, the project led to a temporary reorganisation of the planning and development process. It is fair to say that after the privatisation of economic planning and the establishment of a local economic development agency in the late 1990s, more

ad hoc activity became dominant at the expense of long-term strategic planning, separated from the control of the public administration and political system. I argue that the formal organisation of the development coalition in the project, represents a re-established relationship between the agency and the public administration, and thus a more direct role of public administration and local politicians in economic development. There are several reasons for this. First, there is the direct control of the project by the politicians in the executive committee of local council. The committee made the decision to accept the strategy plan and budgets in the action plans. Second, there was direct participation by politicians and public administration in the development coalition. In addition, there was a new focus on strategic planning and broad participation in economic development processes.

The aforementioned illustrates how economic development has been reorganised in two phases, first the privatisation of the activity in 1998 that represented a market orientation, second, a re-anchoring of the activity in the public administration and the political system in this project five years later. It is thus interesting that the private–public development coalition in the project did not represent a new model of governance that challenged established government systems. Instead, the development coalition became a way to redraw planning activities and claim back control of economic development from a private agency and place it in the public administration and the municipal council.

7.2.2 Governance in Relation to Learning Processes in Local Development

In general, governance theory seems to address the more structural relations in the regional institutional landscape with reference to regulation theory (Amin 1994; Painter 1997). This attention to structures and relations between regional institutions at the sacrifice of old boundaries comes in contrast to the social processes highlighting trustful relations, cultural differences, and social learning. I therefore find it important to distinguish between governance structures and governance processes in accordance with Cars et al.'s (2002) perspective highlighting processes, active agency, roles,

relationships, and mobilisation capacity, over formal structures and formal power (over resources and regulations).

On the one hand, the perspective in Cars et al. (2002) correlates with the normative approach to regional governance in the VC 2010 project in Agder. Through an action research strategy and a dialogical development model, the mobilisation capacity enhanced. On the other hand, the organisation of a development coalition, closely related to the municipal administrative and political organisation, but also representing a cross-institutional network, included structural change. The case is thus in line with the identification by Jessop (1994) of a shift from government to local governance whereby several institutional bodies enter into arrangements to regenerate the local economy.

The inter-institutional position of the development coalition is important for the legitimacy of the new coalition. It has the strong support of the local authorities on the one hand, and the development agency on the other hand. The coalition became an arena for collaboration. This was a major change from the initial situation. When the economic development agency was established in the late 1990s, the local authorities outsourced the activity of economic development and planning to the agency. At the same time, local enterprises became co-owners (together with the local authorities) of the agency. With this project, a new organisation was established.

The change could be related to the complex nature of local development and a need for coordinating organisations. It also relates to the much broader approach to local development taken in this project compared to a more ad hoc focus on economic development on the agency side. In the particular situation, neither the agency nor the local authorities could be such a coordinating arena. The agency had no experience of broad and place-based development processes and the public administration in the municipality did not have experience from economic development projects. The agency also represented a close relation to many local enterprises. As a consequence, the coalition found legitimacy for its activity in many sectors, both public and private.

From industrial democracy to participatory democracy

The strong focus on democratic dialogue and a participatory democratic practice embedded in the normative approach of the action research project addresses explicitly the identified concerns for democracy in the governance literature, and in addition offers an alternative approach to processes occupied with democratic development (Johnsen, Normann, and Fosse 2005)

In a presentation of the VC 2010 programme, Gustavsen argues that the programme will gain legitimacy from both above, in the cooperation between the social partners and the long tradition of this partnership, and from below through the anchoring of the programme in participation from enterprises (Gustavsen 2002). These regulating forces will in turn contribute to democratisation of development coalitions (Johnsen, Normann, and Fosse 2005). In relation to the Vennesla case, the same sources of legitimacy could be activated, but in addition established representative democratic structures should be emphasised. Although the Vennesla development coalition was established with the participation from public administration and politicians, the decision-making process, accepting strategies and budgets from the coalition was handled by the politicians in the executive committee of the local council.

The representative democratic system in the municipality and the introduction of a participatory approach through the concept of industrial democracy did not become competing democratic practices. Rather, they became complimentary in many ways, revitalising local democracy. A new arena for public-private cooperation and direct participation in strategic planning was established in the project, but within the frames of a representative democratic body. Legitimacy could thus be found in two democratic models.

The industrial democracy model of participatory democracy represented, however, an important supplement in terms of the learning perspective in participatory democracy approach (Dewey [1927] 1991; Pateman 1970). In the previous chapter I have argued,

in line with the action learning perspective of Dewey (Dewey 1929), and in addition to the action research approach in the industrial democracy concept, that learning starts on the basis of action, and reflection based on the experiences from action. Local governance represents an opportunity to realise the complimentary aspects of a participatory democracy concept emphasising the learning possibilities in the participatory practice.

The relevance of the action learning perspective in the industrial democracy concept to local governance should be obvious. In order to support the concept of governance processes emphasised by Cars et al (2002), social learning based on action–reflection circles and the construction of knowledge from shared collective experiences seem important. They are certainly an answer to how the challenge of developing new roles and a capacity to act in collaborative processes could be addressed.

In addition, a dialogical approach to social change implicit in the VC 2010 project should be emphasised. I have argued in the previous chapter that action and dialogue seem complimentary in the enhancement of learning processes. On the basis of action–reflection circles and simple learning, reinterpretations of the local context (such as the governance of place) emerged through the active construction of new realities. In the reconsideration of the local context, a potential for radical learning could be found. The governance context was reinterpreted in two ways. First, the role of the local authorities (public administration) in change and development was reconsidered. It was particularly the shift to the role of active agency in addition to mere administration and regulating activities that was focused on in the evaluation conference closing the project. The point is that these reflections developed on the basis of experiences from the activities in the project, reinterpreting the potential of the public support in economic development. Second, an explicit focus on collaboration in municipal development emerged in the project. Experiences from the development coalition in general and the reorganisation of place making activities in particular were important for these collective reflections.

Based on the analysis of the learning process in development coalitions, and the discussion of learning in governance organisations, conditions for social learning in governance organisations could be identified. Three elements have been emphasised: a) shared experience from collective actions, b) collective reflections and dialogue based on shared experience, and c) evaluation of both results and process.

7.2.3 Learning in the Context of Governance – Critical Reflections

Conditions as well as constraints to learning in the context of governance may be identified. I will now focus on constraints related to transforming the idea of industrial democracy into a model for regional development and planning. It is not my purpose to argue that there are ‘either/or’ answers to the question of the potential for learning in governance organisation. It is perhaps rather a question of substantiating a potential for learning. I argue that the degree of motivation and willingness among participants to engage in collective knowledge generating processes is to be found on a continuum between low and high. The reason for this lies in the difficulties of turning governance into the type of activity highlighted by Cars et al. (2002), or in other words, the problems of turning the idea of industrial democracy into practice in local and regional planning.

First, there seems to have been a commitment among the participants in the Vennesla project to engage in concrete problem solving activities based on the established interpretations of local realities. There was thus an action orientation in the coalition that developed at the expense of an explicit focus on planning process. As a direct consequence of the prominence of results before process, a focus on learning was oppressed. Although learning certainly takes place as new experiences are gained from actions taken, this in itself is not sufficient in order to experience radical learning, or reinterpretations of the local context as a basis for change in practice. As I have already argued, an explicit attention to the evaluation of both results and process are thus an opportunity to collectively focus on shared knowledge generation.

Second, in order to support efficiency in problem solving activities, attention to the coordination of different types of resources became emphasised in the Vennesla development coalition.

Third, the reinterpretation of roles became to some extent neglected in the coalition. The challenge was to take step outside established roles and relations between persons and institutions. In the problem solving approach, new roles for politicians, bureaucrats and private business representatives in collaborative processes were left unaddressed.

Fourth, in line with the action orientation, it became explicit in the project that actors were concerned with defining a specific reality (Flyvbjerg 1998). The most important reasons for this seem to be related to the argumentation towards the national government and the application for financial support based on industrial restructuring, to support the interest in keeping established roles and institutional organisation, and to protect established cultural structures. These concerns were more present than a concern for the learning process. It is thus fair to say, in line with Flyvbjerg (1998), that power seeks particular types of change, not knowledge.

The Vennesla project represented a reorganisation of the planning and development work in the municipality. It thus represented a major challenge to all participants to take on new roles and collaborate in new settings with new actors. In addition, the reorganisation represented a challenge to legitimacy. This was not a simple shift. I argue that this reorganisation represented a new and challenging situation to everyone involved in the project.

Thus, to facilitate learning in collaborative planning, processes should include a focus on reflective practice concerning both process and content. The more fundamental shift in practice, from government to governance, actualises the importance of this dual focus in planning practice.

7.3 Readdressing Planning

Throughout the planning theory review in Chapter 3, I emphasised the challenge to planning in contemporary Western societies. Healey (2001) explicitly identifies this challenge as a shift from conflict management to place making, from regulation to development, and to fit in a new political and economic configuration (Cars et al. 2002). Her approach to place making as a collaborative planning process comes close to the conceptualisation of local governance in Cars et al. (2002), as seen above, and to a participatory dialogical approach to development as seen in the VC 2010 programme. The shift in planning practice suggested by Healey is, however, not yet a reality; planning practice is still in the grip of a performance criteria and regulatory approach (Healey 2001: 268).

The Vennesla case could be interpreted as a concrete example of an attempt to introduce a new practice in the ‘no man’s land’ between planning practice as conflict management, and the promotion and production of particular qualities of place (Healey 2001: 271). It is thus implicitly an attempt to rethink planning practice in the local context. I address the implications of this planning practice context for learning processes in the following analysis.

7.3.1 Planning in relation to learning processes in local development

The concerns about the relevance of planning activities highlight normative suggestions for a new planning practice. The suggestions presented in this thesis are closely related to collaborative planning theory (Healey 2006). Based on analysis of the learning process in the previous chapter, I will elaborate further on the theoretical perspectives in planning. The learning process in the Vennesla case indicates that different theories about planning become relevant in the practical facilitation of learning in local development. I argue that the facilitation of learning in the context of local planning practice needs to integrate a practical action orientation with particular attention to the communicative aspects of collective meaning construction. In addition, power relations

potentially obstruct learning, with the consequence of suppressed attention to knowledge generation. To enhance learning in planning, processes should thus build on the complementary perspective in pragmatic and collaborative planning theory.

Pragmatism and social learning

From the study of learning in Vennesla development coalition, an explicit argument for experience-based social learning may be developed. As a tacit and informal type, social learning is articulated as change in practice, not in the formal language of scientific discourse. As an experimental approach, redesigning local planning processes, the Vennesla project comes close to the social learning tradition in planning theory, with some important additional perspectives. Primarily, the fundamental viewpoint of a socially constructed reality and the dialogical production of knowledge suggest that social learning needs to include a focus on communicative processes and structures.

Collaborative planning

In addition to the perspective of pragmatism on action and learning relations, a communicative turn has been suggested (Healey 1996). Communicative planning highlights a focus on interaction and interpretation, mutual reconstruction of interests, and conflict identification and mediation. In line with the approach of social constructivism, reflexivity and mutual reconstruction of pre-existing, diverse and overlapping 'discourse communities' (Healey 1996) are important parts of the dialogical process. I have argued that such dialogues are essential in the co-generation of knowledge. Thus, in line with Healey's argument, they are essential in the social learning process. However, I find it important to emphasise that such dialogical processes are complementary to the action orientation in the planning perspective of neo-pragmatism.

Communicative planning theory brings additional concerns about the ability to realise dialogical practice and social learning in planning and development. One important concern relates to the existence of diverse and overlapping discourse communities. Each

of these has its own meaning system and their interaction is thus potentially a source of conflict. Mediation processes based on the identification of conflicts becomes central in the communicative process. A change in context, as in the application of the idea of industrial democracy in municipal development, reminds us about the social complexity of the environment in which many discourse communities co-exist. My experience from the Vennesla case is that the scope and fundamental character of differences between stakeholders goes beyond the attention to this challenge in the work life research literature. It is these and other problematic aspects of realising the idea of industrial democracy in municipal development that I will discuss next.

7.3.2 Learning in Planning Processes – Critical Reflections

To emphasise the fundamental viewpoint of a socially constructed reality, Healey (2006) uses Schön as a straw man. Her point is that social learning processes need to build relations of collaboration (i.e. power sharing) and trust, and the mobilisation of power through communicative work: *'consensus on problems, policies and how to follow them is not something to be uncovered through collaborative dialogue. It has to be actively created across the fractures of the social relations of relevant stakeholders'* (ibid.: 264). An important argument is that through critique of dialogical practices, a new practice of democratic dialogue has the potential for distorting established power relations.

There are many similarities between the dialogical approaches to work life research seen in Gustavsen (1992; see also Johnsen 2001) and the collaborative approach to planning by Healey (2006). They both find a procedural approach to collaborative dialogues in the work of Habermas (1984), and they emphasise a social constructive epistemology. Knowledge is co-constructed through collaborative dialogue. Differences between this particular discourse in work life research and the planning discourse are more related to emphasis on mobilisation of power in planning across 'the fractures of the social relations of relevant stakeholders'. Generally, it is thus fair to say that the work life discourse highlights *similarities* (shared experiences and mutual interests)

between stakeholders over *differences* as a basis for collaboration and learning, while the planning discourse highlights *differences* between stakeholders over *similarities* because differences represents a real threat to trustful collaboration and social learning. The reason for this difference might be found in the long history of collaboration between the social partners in Norwegian work life, and the strong legitimacy this historical national political agreement has developed. These kinds of trustful relations are quite different in the planning context. There is no strong history of collaboration in planning practice dominated by a regulatory and conflict solving approach.

I find this difference to be central to the challenge of facilitating social learning in municipal development. If we anticipate some extent of similarity in interests, objectives and motivation between stakeholders in this particular context, we fail to handle divergence and lack of trust in the collaborative process. This might be fatal to the collaborative process in an environment that for the first time experiences collaboration instead of 'business as usual' in established institutional roles, division of labour, and juridical structures. The obvious consequence of this is that social learning is more complex to achieve in the municipal context. Throughout my analysis I have related this argument to the importance of shared experiences among participants as a foundation for learning.

While collaborative planning highlights social interaction, mediation of conflicts and consensual decision-making, industrial democracy highlight broad participation. There are some important differences between a participatory and a collaborative approach to development. A participatory democracy is closely linked to industrial democracy (Pateman 1970), but is also included in the collaborative planning theory (Healey 1996, 2006). In industrial democracy, participation relates to the experience and competence of the individual as a basis for involvement in social change processes. Participation is also closely linked to learning and education in democratic practice according to the thinking of John Dewey (Dewey [1927] 1991; Pateman 1970). In contrast, collaborative planning is more occupied with interaction and the procedural aspects of cooperation

and involvement at the expense of the potential in individual participation. It might be fair to say that collaborative planning adapts to the established representative democratic system by offering a new collaborative practice within the system, while participatory democracy in the work life context offers a democratic practice in a field where democracy often is lacking. The problem identified relates to the challenge of introducing participatory democracy as a supplement or alternative to established democratic practice in a municipality.

In addition to established municipal planning practice, different representations of place should be seen in relation to the learning process that developed in the Vennesla project. In the next section I readdress the conceptions of place presented in Chapter 3.

7.4 Readdressing Conceptions of Place

In the theories about place and conceptualisations of place, place was presented as social constructs. A particular challenge was identified to be the complex process of creating shared meaning of place in an environment of multiple 'discourse communities'. This process is characterised by conflicts and the continuous process of identification. It is therefore processes where power relations come to the surface and influence the outcome in the production of place.

In the data from the Vennesla project, examples of different representations of place are found. The process was characterised by its reinterpretation of the history raising questions about particular features of the community. In addition, related to the signs of a shift in the economy, the future situation for the industry and anticipated cultural and social implications of a new economy were central in the planning process. Another characteristic is the basis of the project. A dominant local discourse on the emerging shift in the economy had a mobilising effect in the municipality. A crisis was heralded, related to the local economic dependency of industrial workplaces.

It is possible to develop an argument for the embeddedness of learning processes in both temporal and spatial contexts based on the Vennesla case. In the following analysis, the

articulation of this embeddedness of learning is discussed. The analysis concludes with the identification of relations between forms of learning (simple and radical) and temporal and spatial aspects.

7.4.1 Place in Relation to Learning Processes in Local Development

In simple learning, performance is evaluated through reflection and then corrected or improved. However, in Bateson's (1972) deuteron learning, or second order learning, there is a need for new sets of action alternatives, other than the set of alternatives available to us in the reflective learning process. This also implies that alternative sets of values and norms guide our actions. Amdam and Amdam (2000) emphasise this as a fundamental change in how we understand the present situation we find ourselves in and how we define our visions for the future related to the change in guiding values and norms in the second order learning process. They also point to the relation between these changes in values and the legitimacy of the plans and actions. This in turn points directly to the understanding of learning as the individual and collective competence or capacity to reformulate the problem definition. This implies a reinterpretation of the local context in order to reformulate the problem. Bateson understands this as the challenge of interpretation and the change or ability to see beyond established values and mental frames. Another important element in deuteron learning is the relation between first order learning, or what I have called reflective or simple learning based on Argyris and Schön (1996), and second order learning. It is the contextualisation of the simple learning experiences that brings the learning process further and increases the chances for radical learning experiences.

This theoretical approach to learning (deuteron learning) is the starting point of the analysis in this chapter. My aim is to discuss findings in the Vennesla project, based on the reflective learning cycles analysed in the previous chapter that suggest examples of a radical learning experience in the project. These examples represent what I have identified as main *turning points* in the learning process (Amdam and Amdam 2000; Bateson 1972). I expect, however, that if radical learning appears, it appears more

seldom than simple learning. However, I argue that some issues raised in relation to the reflective cycles discussed above have brought reflective learning to a level of more fundamental and sustained social change. These issues are all related to the local context in which the project takes place and are thus all brought up in the discussion contextualising the reflective learning experience. The issues are: *location and place, local identities, the role of the local authorities in place making and economic development, implication of the knowledge economy, and local action space and action opportunities*. The issues are interrelated in the way they address the interpretation and reconstruction of the local context.

Territory and place

It is my experience that territory and place have been continuously reconstructed throughout the Vennesla project. It is obvious that place making and economic development address fundamental questions about the past, present and future of a place. Two examples of how this was articulated in the Vennesla project will be analysed: first, a definition of territorial boundaries in the project; and second, the location and interaction of the municipality in relation to the region.

The strategy developed and the related discussions in the development coalition emphasised the importance of thinking in terms of the territorial area defined by the municipality borders. This relates to earlier experiences in the local authorities when critique was raised from remote villages. People living in such villages claimed that there had been a lack of focus on their needs and that most money had been invested in the municipal centre. This conflict of interest between different places within the municipality dates back to the early 1960s and the merger of several municipalities effectuated at that time. Some concrete actions were taken to handle the potential critique from these villages. As mentioned, the development strategy defined an objective stating that this process was aimed at developing the whole geographical area. The group working on place making also visited one of the villages, and participated in a local meeting about local community development. The geographical distribution of

participants was also a guiding principle in the project. The more proactive role of the development coalition, addressing the question of defining the territorial target area of the development work, was a successful strategy.

I argue that the points made in the paragraph above are of particular importance in order to grasp the complex spatiality of local and regional development. The proactive role of the coalition prevented potential conflicts about geographical location. The more general point, related to the differences between development coalitions inside enterprises and regional development coalitions, is the importance of defining the spatial boundaries of the coalitions' work. Why, then, is this important? Regional (or municipal) development projects raise expectations among stakeholders within an area about the inclusion of places in the project. A region, as has been seen, is not 'out there', waiting to be discovered, but rather regions are our own and others' constructions. However, these constructions, whether they follow the municipal borders, or include several municipalities (or other non-administrative spatial constructions), have an important impact on the coalition. They define (to some extent) who is able to participate in the coalition, and in relation, the identification of stakeholders in the process. They address the expectations of inhabitants and other interests of the municipality about the effects of the project and the location of its activity.

Most importantly, defining territorial boundaries also defines the solutions to identified problems available for the coalition. It is in this perspective that the rescaling of local industrial policy should be seen. In particular, the identification of an emerging crisis based on a dominant representation of place exemplifies the role of spatiality and scale. The relative location of the municipality in the larger city region of Kristiansand was discussed on several occasions. In an early phase of the project, it was stated that one of the aims of the project was to develop a *complete* municipality, i.e. a municipality that provides both jobs and housing with attractive living conditions. To be a suburb of Kristiansand, providing housing for people working in the city, was considered undesirable despite the considerable interaction between Vennessla and Kristiansand, in

particular because of the commuting involved. In the development coalition, there was strong consensus on this objective. I will shortly relate this consensus to a strong local identity but first argue that although this consensus remained throughout the project, a change in the views on regional interaction could be identified.

Parallel to the Vennesla project, an inter-municipal collaboration in the Kristiansand city region developed.⁶³ Local authorities, represented by the mayor, have had a leading position in the collaboration. In addition, a national, regional and local debate was started in Norway by the government regarding the administrative organisation of the nation (Stortingsmelding nr 12 (2006-2007)). Merging of municipalities and larger regions was in the centre of the debate. Based on the observations made throughout the project, the research team has seen tendencies for a reorientation in the municipality towards the region. Whether this relates to the more general debate about inter-municipal collaboration or to the project discussed here is difficult to find out, but it affected the evaluation of the project strategy and the interpretation of the meaning of a *complete* municipality. A reinterpretation of this objective involved a rethinking of the local identities and the notion of us and 'other' related to industrial history and culture, and represented, for example, by an increased focus on the distinct local dialect. The attitudes in Vennesla Municipality towards the city and city region have been discussed in the regional newspaper on several occasions, often with a perspective of otherness and stereotypes:

The people in Vennesla are not the only ones in this county that think they should be protected. But it is a fact that they have a particular strong urge to hedge their self. (Opinion in Fædrelandsvennen 28 May 2005)

In the article quoted from *Fædrelandsvennen* above, the newspaper concludes a discussion about why there seems to be a negative attitude in the municipality about a

⁶³ <http://www.knutepunktsorlandet.no>

merger with the city of Kristiansand. Our observation relates however to the change from a defensive protectionism of local distinctiveness among key stakeholders in the project to a more proactive approach to regional interaction. To rethink the role of the local authorities in relation to the region is thus to reconstruct local identities. The newspaper fails to report this because they keep to stereotypes and neglect the mobility among inhabitants and an interest among politicians in the municipality to collaborate and interact within the larger city region.

To continue the analysis of place and identity, I argue that the local culture also represents a demarcation between what actions are in line with established and traditional norms and values and what actions represent a break. It seems to be important, based on discussions in the regional newspaper for example, to pay attention to the diverging voices expressing their ideas about the way the municipality should (as they see it) develop in the future. These voices mirror the important social context and/or infrastructure in the municipality. The social context seems to have a direct influence on the local development work. Two points could be made in this respect. First, the dominating local discourse of possible action opportunities determines the development work. This dominating discourse is effectively displayed in one critical situation in the project, which I will return to shortly. Second, what I have termed 'local meaning constructionists' could evoke effective influence on both the local discourse and the concrete project at stake. In the following, I will turn to the empirical material and briefly describe the essence of the critical situation that evolved in the project.

One idea that came up in the place making work group was to arrange a river festival in mid-June 2004. The River Otra is important historically and runs throughout the municipality. Much of the industrial history is strongly connected to the river, through the floating of timber, saws located along the river, hydroelectric power from waterfalls, etc. Today, the river is again in focus as an attractive location for salmon fishing and recreation. The focus is now on the aesthetic and physical qualities of the area.

The idea was to connect the industrial and cultural heritage related to the river to cultural work and artists in the municipality. In addition, different concerts with famous national and local pop and rock groups would be held on the initiative of the owner of the local hotel. The local hotel owners' initiative was appreciated by many but not by all. Based on previous concerts arranged by the hotel owners, discussions in the municipality about the type of music and the image of the rock artists emerged. A pastor from the large religious community in the municipality wrote in the regional newspaper (*Fædrelandsvennen* 21 April 2004) that the influence and attitudes of the rock stars were not something that was wanted in the municipality in the future. There were also some complaints about violation of the rules for serving alcohol during the concerts. These complaints led to an official warning from the local authorities; if one more warning had to be given the hotel would have lost its licence to serve alcohol. To arrange the concerts and secure the income needed from the festival, the licensee needed approval from the local authorities to serve alcohol outside the hotel, yet based on earlier complaints he risked losing his licence if any new complaints were made during the festival concerts. As the hotel owner could not afford to take that chance, due to his dependency on the income from sales of alcohol in the hotel, the concerts were cancelled and the festival could not be arranged as planned.

The people that had been intensively involved in the planning process changed from feeling enthusiasm to frustration, among them the director of the local development agency and project leader of the project. In a newspaper interview (*Fædrelandsvennen* 27 May 2004) in relation to the cancellation of the festival, he criticised the politicians and the municipal administration and said that they had caused an unfriendly industrial environment in the municipality. One conservative politician followed this up in an interview to the same newspaper (*Fædrelandsvennen* 27 May 2004), in which he expressed his concern about the way the local authorities treated the development work in general and their creative entrepreneurs and their ideas in particular. The critique led to meetings behind closed doors between the director of the local development agency and the major, and they concluded that the communication between them should be

better in the future, and that the critique had been given when the director was frustrated and was therefore not valid.

My first argument is that the dominating local discourse of possible action opportunities determines the development work. The conflict presented above is one example of how the ideas and initiatives coming from the project can have a particular destiny when it comes to action and implementation. The people taking the idea about a river festival met further problems, as has been seen. Why did it come to this situation? Of course, an initiative such as this depends very much on the fiery souls, the ones that take risks and put a lot of energy into undertakings. Yet these persons were present, and they were very enthusiastic about the festival. The question is rather what kind of conditions and social and/or cultural environment did these persons encounter when they were working on their project.

Based on the critique presented in the newspaper articles, the environment for business and industrial development was marked by a restrictive attitude among politicians and a local culture not interested in any change in terms of new cultural influence in the municipality. Others have expressed that this was related to religion. Members of the large religious community in the municipality have, for example, expressed their opinions in newspapers about how they want the municipality to develop in the future, and also their views on the influence that some concerts and cultural expressions have had (*Fædrelandsvennen* 21 April, 2 June, 19 June 2004). It is within this social and cultural framework that the project evolves.

It is a reasonable assumption that the long history and dominating role of manufacturing industry in the municipality, and the just as dominating religious community (Sørensen 1982) represent a social and cultural environment (or social infrastructure) that only reluctantly and very slowly takes part in the change process that is initiated and in a way demanded by the economic restructuring of the manufacturing industry. From my point of view, however, it is not possible to argue that this is the only reason for the problems that have occurred. I will therefore give two additional arguments.

My analysis points at two important elements. First, to which degree politicians and public administration are focused on how they (all sectors and committees of politicians) are, and can be, involved in the development work. It is my understanding that the example above should not just be seen as an effect of the attitude towards change. My argument is that this rather is a matter of the understanding among, for example, local politicians and employees in public administration, of the broad scope of local development work. A broad approach to local economic restructuring will consequently mean that the whole municipal organisation as well as other private stakeholders can be involved in one way or another. The warning given to the licensee of the local hotel by the political welfare committee was the result of a lack of understanding of how this decision effected the cultural river festival.

The lack of focus on how development processes and place making projects involve all actors in a regional context adds a new element to the difference between enterprise development and regional development. The complex environment with many stakeholders and sometimes a lack of coordinating institutions reflects one important challenge for regional development coalitions: the regional development coalition cannot control the implementation of the action that is planned. Often, many persons and sectors are involved and each of them could potentially hamper effective action, and as seen in the Vennesla case, could potentially ruin initiatives and ideas.

It is thus important to identify why conflicts did not stop or destroy the project. First, there seems to be a general agreement within the participants that there has to be some kind of change. This agreement relates closely to the decline in the manufacturing industry and the historical shift that this community now faces. Yet the municipality faces several challenges, some of which relate to the tendency (presented earlier) for regionalisation, a merger of municipalities, and the development of city regions in Norway. The local authorities need to make a decision about the future and their position in a new regional landscape. There seems to be a consensus in this case towards a strategy for an attractive and independent position. My point is that there is a general

consensus, albeit not explicitly stated, on some important and superior issues (e.g. the need for change, and the role and position of the municipality within the region) that make a framework for the development project.

Second, there seems to be a change in the general understanding among the participants towards an emphasis on a continuous focus on development. This shift from a fragmented to a continuous focus on development could be related to the experiences they gain from this particular project. It is my interpretation that it took time to acquire sufficient experience from the development project to enable such a shift. However, in the Norwegian context and based on experiences from other municipalities, this turn comes rather late⁶⁴. For several years, many municipalities have had a particular focus on local development supported by national regional policy and regional development programmes. My point is that this first long-term development project representing shared experience among participants that was a premise for change.

I will argue that the lines of demarcation that have been elaborated on above in terms of mediation of diverging interests should be supplemented with an additional focus (Healey 2001). The focus should also be directed towards discourses of identities and the mediation of these discourses that took place within the project. The issues discussed in the development coalition and in the work groups were often related to local identities, and these discussions formed the ground on which decisions about more concrete action were made. It is my interpretation that the discussion on mediation should be refocused, from mediation of interests to mediation of identities. The reason for such a shift is the importance of fundamental conflicts and mediating processes related to the construction of local identities.

⁶⁴ Amdam and Amdam (2000) point to the fact that there is a difference between municipalities when it comes to their ability to turn experiences into learning.

To summarise, the following arguments have been discussed. *First*, there is the important change in focus from defending and legitimising one's argument in dialogues on planning and development to communicative procedures with a focus on what to do. This kind of dialogue is different from other dialogues such as hearings and juridical quarrels which are more common within planning practice; it brings people together with another aim.

Second, the development coalition was an arena for a proactive approach and a frame for negotiation of diverging interests. However, there are limitations relating to the influence of the work done in the project. In a complex environment such as a municipality (or a region), and the shift from functionally to territorially organisation of the development work, coordination could become a major dilemma. I have shown that decisions taken by others have had a strong influence on the initiatives taken in the project.

Place and learning

I argue that there is a close link between Bateson's (1972) understanding of contexts as *mental schemes* and learning on a collective level. In the Vennesla project, interpretation of new experiences became explicitly related to the perception of place. This suggests, as discussed above, that to realise radical learning (or learning II) in the context of municipal planning, a change or reconstruction of the meaning of place needs to take place. This implies the fundamental point of view that contexts (as mental frames) are socially produced and changeable.

It is, however, important to discuss the scope of such a change in context with caution. Instead of suggesting wide local effects of the project, beyond the participants in the project, a more modest effect could be discussed. I find it relevant to understand the effects on the basis of how diverse and overlapping '*discourse communities*', with their own meaning systems, interact in arenas. Acknowledging the existence of diverse discourse communities and the importance of mediation and respectful discussions

between those discourse communities within the development coalition was an important precondition for the learning process, and for radical learning in particular.

The representation of diverse discourse communities in the collaborative arena is restricted in both time and scope. A consensus articulated in strategy plans on objectives in local development is an expression of the mediation process between discursive communities in the arena, but this consensus is, in addition, restricted to those taking part in the planning process. It is plausible to think that the existence of diverse discourse communities in a municipality goes beyond the collaborative arenas in a development project. The ability to change contexts and thus go beyond mental schemes could thus be restricted to individuals and the collective of those involved in the learning process.

The learning process discussed in the Vennesla project exemplifies how a place is a node existing in a flow of time, having been like something, being something now, and with the possibility of becoming something else (Lloyd-Jones, Ericson, Roberts, and Nice 2001; Thrift 2001). The project also represents an example of the fundamental difference between simple and radical learning. To realise radical learning in a planning process seems to require the ability ‘step out’ of time and place and reinterpret the past, present, and future, and the spatial organisation. In contrast, simple learning represents a learning process within the constraints of ‘here and now’ and based on established representations of a place.

7.4.2 Learning in Place Making Processes – Critical Reflections

‘Stepping outside’ time and place in order to realise radical learning represents a real challenge in planning practice. Although techniques such as ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ dialogues on development are applied in an action research approach in organisational settings (Eikeland and Berg 1997), it seems rather difficult to motivate and organise for similar processes in planning practice. In the Vennesla project, such an arena was, however, organised in the evaluation conference. The conference represented

an opportunity to ‘step out’ of time and place in order to focus on the planning process and the results without being ‘in action’, realising strategies and objectives. This provided me with the experience that evaluation processes are central in a learning perspective, and crucial to the realisation of radical learning. In line with the critique of the concept of learning in the innovation literature (Nilsson and Uhlin 2002), *without a strategy for the realisation of radical learning, regional development coalitions fail to produce learning beyond simple reflections.*

I have argued above for the importance of power in processes of identification (Dyrberg 1997). Place identities, or place identification, are processes where conflicting realities regarding the past, present and future of a place meet and connect to each other. The Vennesla case suggests how this identification process proceeds through the planning process, connecting action strategies and activities to collective reflections and the transformation of contexts, or meaning schemes (Bateson 1972).

Two main analyses have been presented. First, I have presented a discussion about who participated and who decided to include or exclude participants in the core arenas such as the development coalition and the dialogue conferences. Critique was raised about this selection of participants both from within and outside the project. I have suggested (above) making the process of selecting participants into a more open and transparent process in addition to an explicit focus on participation in an early phase. Second, and in contrast to the first point, the principle of broad participation and the actual participation in the Vennesla project was emphasised as a legitimising aspect by key stakeholders in the project. The principle of broad participation – in the organisational development literature (Gustavsen 1992), the participation of those effected by the project – is, however, more problematic in a regional or municipal context. It is often unclear what it means, for example, to be effected by the project, and the kind of experience or competence that qualifies for participation when experience from practice is a too vague definition.

The potential in communicative action to reach legitimate claims of validity and truth is the basis of an alternative rational decision-making process aimed at the redistribution of power. In planning theory based on pragmatism, critique has been raised because of its blindness to power and conflicting interests (Allmendinger 2001; Hoch 1984; Pløger 2005). One argument that is emphasised is the role of regulations and resources as counteractive forces in the establishment of progressive and enlightened planning practice (Allmendinger 2001; Pløger 2005). The Vennesla case has provided several examples of the relevance of such critique. Finding its hybrid position between the principle of a network organisation and hierarchical government structures, and in the development of a cross-sectoral strategy plan, the development coalition in Vennesla constantly faced problems of coordination between established structures and new initiatives. These problems were, in particular, articulated when strategy and action plans were implemented through activities.

The power issue is important in local planning and development. Both place making and economic development are the art of the possible, open to strategic and opportunistic behaviour. Above, I have emphasised how conflicts or disputes about the local context and the interpretation of problems to be addressed in the strategy plan became important to the project. A discussion on power in municipal planning and development is thus a discussion on the many realities that constitute a place and place identities.

7.5 Summary

I conclude this chapter with the identification of what I call thematic 'layers' in the learning process. In my analysis I have found that reflective learning focusing on action based on the identification of a problem was an important first step in the process. The problem solving approach in the project led to the reflective processes identified in Chapter 6. These learning circles were close to the simple learning concept of Argyris and Schön (1996). Based on the shared experience from action taken, new 'layers' in the learning process developed. These were successively oriented towards the organisation of the learning process, relations between the established planning practice

and the new practice in the project, the governance of place based on experiences from the project, and finally, the historical and cultural meaning of place.

Facilitation of learning: An explicit focus on the organisation of the learning process was added to the problem solving approach. The question of *what to do* was supplemented with *how to do it*. In addition, new relations between the problems identified and the organisational aspects and a wider context were addressed.

Governance of place: The introduction of new actors in the planning project and the reorganisation of the process in a development coalition represented an opportunity to reflect upon the collaborative structures and the governance of place. The involvement of stakeholders, and legitimacy through both broad participation and decision-making in the representative democratic system, became important factors in the project.

Planning of place: The role of the local authorities in development work and planning as a means to enhance collaborative cross-sector learning processes should be emphasised. In addition, contrasts between established planning practice and the reorganisation of the planning approach in the project gave opportunities to rethink planning practice.

Conceptions of place: The learning process continuously addresses the meaning of place, what it has been and what it should become. The learning process was embedded in the historical situation and the future-oriented perspective. There seemed to be a general agreement between participants about a present economic, social, and cultural shift in the historical development of the municipality, although they disagreed on the preferred direction of the further development. In addition to the focus on *what* and *how*, a question of *why* was addressed related to the social construction of place. Thereby, radical learning processes were potentially realised, reflective about the governing principles of action.

In Chapter 6, I argued that both the facilitation of learning processes and the action-learning approach was important in the Vennesla project. In this chapter, I have shown how both facilitation and learning processes in themselves are contextually embedded. I have identified three contextual issues in the Vennesla case: 1) local planning practice, 2) local governance, and 3) location or place.

I argue that learning in the municipal planning project evolved from an explicit focus on action and the facilitation of learning or reflective processes based on concrete action. In the reflective processes, collective experience is gained and becomes the foundation for further reflection. These reflections relate action to discussions about planning practice and the governance of place. In addition, and as a main reference in reflections in all phases, our understanding of place is reconstructed and reformulated. It is not a linear process, but rather an interactive process in which many things are mixed and reflected upon at the same time. There are, however, some identified issues at stake, categorised in the different reflective steps of the learning process illustrated in the model. By discussing place last, I suggest that learning processes should be seen as fundamentally unique and constituted by the social interaction in a particular place at a particular time.

It is the 'layers' that come in addition to facilitation of learning that are unaddressed in the industrial democracy literature, and thus represent a challenge to the transformation of the idea of industrial democracy to a regional context.

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Learning in Planning

Adapting and copying different conceptual models for regional development from one regional context to another is not new. The importance of context has been a general critique to such a practice. It is also not unusual that theories developed on one institutional level inspire theory building on another institutional level. In planning theory, organisation theory has had such an influence. This thesis applies a conceptual framework developed in enterprises and organisations on a municipal level, in a municipal development project. As the thesis suggests, this implies both possibilities and challenges. The possibilities identified are closely related to the opportunity for learning in planning and development activities. The regional development coalition concept includes a strategy for learning based on the idea of learning organisations, an emphasis on relations between knowledge and action, and an action research strategy. In addition, it includes a focus on local theory and the importance of local resources as the foundation for economic growth and social prosperity. Challenges relate to the shift from an organisational context to a municipality. A municipal development project organised as a development coalition includes new actors and a shift from a sectoral to a territorial organisational approach. I argue that this makes a particular demand on the ability to enhance learning among all participants in a challenging new setting. The regional development coalition concept proved to be promising at this point in the

Vennesla project. The potential of the regional development coalition concept to enhance learning in municipal development and planning is, however, conditional.

This study has addressed two main aspects related to the use of a conceptual model adapted from organisation theory focusing on organisational learning in a municipal development project. First, the learning perspective was investigated in the project at stake, building on social learning theory. Second, the implication for planning practice has been analysed discussing the potential of seeing planning as learning. I summarise my answers to the research questions in the following.

8.2 Learning in Municipal Development Projects

My first subsidiary research question was:

First subsidiary research question: How can municipal economic planning and development processes become learning processes?

In Chapter 6, I analysed the data presented from the project based on this question.

I find learning in municipal development projects to be closely related to the social processes taking place in the collaborative setting. I find that the problem solving activity taking place in this setting is the starting point for the reflective process based on the collective experience gain from this activity. I find this type of learning to be close to the simple learning described by Argyris and Schön (1996), a type of learning that is elaborated more in the reflective learning cycle of Kolb (1984). There is, however, a potential for the simple learning processes to be advanced into a more thorough reflection of the governing principles of action. This type of radical learning implies a process of contextualisation in which experience from problem solving dialogues and action brings a change in understanding and the reconstruction of realities.

My main argument has been the necessity of shared experience among actors in the collaborative development project and that this shared experience could be gained through collective problem solving activity. In addition, the dialogical process interpreting the condition for our actions in the particular context enables the realisation of radical learning. Finally, such knowledge generating dialogues seem to be supported by an explicit focus on evaluation.

8.2.1 Learning in Regional Development Coalitions

My analysis of the Vennesla project suggests that the learning taking place in the project first and foremost could be understood as a simple learning process. The participants learned through the action–reflection cycle, adjusting and adapting further action within an unchanged interpretation of reality, and also stable problem definitions and mental frames. This is the kind of learning called simple learning by Argyris and Schön (1996). I find in the Vennesla case that the participants extended reflective learning cycles on some occasions. Through the process of collective reflections in the coalition, an ability to readdress some assumed realities about ends and means in the development project became explicit. I have identified these situations as turning points in the development project and see these situations as indications of a radical learning process. These turning points relate solely to the meaning of place. They are thus part of a continuous struggle over the construction of place and place identities. It follows that regional development coalitions involved in the reconstruction of place addressing issues of relevance far beyond the coalition or organisation itself. These issues relate to the reconstruction at an institutional level.

My analysis of learning in regional development coalitions suggests that learning needs to be understood as a fragile relation between processes on different levels. However, I see the concrete reflective process in a problem-solving approach, including the action–reflection cycles based on a socially constructed problem definition, as a preferred starting point for a learning process in this particular context. On the basis of action–

reflection cycles, collective reflective processes could occur in the coalition with relevance to a wider context.

8.3 From Organisational Development to Municipal Planning

My second subsidiary research question was:

Second subsidiary research question: Is it so that regional learning processes are different from social learning processes within enterprises, and what are the implications for an action research strategy in a regional context?

In Chapter 7, I analysed the data presented from the project based on this question. I have readdressed the perspectives on governance and planning presented in the theoretical chapters and related them to the analysis of learning in Chapter 6. I have also analysed how learning in planning and development processes should be related to the spatial context and the constitution of places. Being confronted with new challenges related to context (such as new models of governance, established planning practice, and territorial and/or temporal settings) in which action is launched had a strong impact on the ability to facilitate and enhance learning processes.

As argued above, the shared experience among actors in the collaborative development project gained through collective problem solving activities was an important starting point for the learning process. Seen in relation to the contextual issues discussed, several points could be made. First, I emphasise the importance of shared experiences in a group of participants new to each other. Second, turning planning practice into a process of place making and not just a regulatory-oriented practice challenged the roles of professional planners and their involvement in the project. Third, and a core point in my study, the learning process was embedded in the reconstruction of the local identity and the constitution of place at a particular time in history.

8.4 Conclusion

All planning activities provide learning opportunities. To organise for learning in development and planning processes should, however, build on the knowledge generated from the analysis of learning in regional development coalitions. The relevance of this approach may be linked to identified challenges to a collaborative planning process (Allmendinger 2002b), and to the legitimacy and relevance of planning in the intersection between government and governance. I thus argue for a renewed interest in what has been identified by Friedmann (1987) as the *social learning* approach, or what has been discussed above as neo-pragmatism, to planning in the public domain, but taking account of the shift to a social constructivist position maintaining that knowledge and understanding are produced through social interactive processes (Healey 2006). Only through the process of learning together can a shared understanding of reality be attained.

The change articulated in the evaluation conference was therefore based on the history, of a radical kind. In the conference, the mayor emphasised the importance of the development focus in the municipality, arguing that the municipalities that take the role as developers are also the best providers of public service to the inhabitants. This is an argument in line with the learning perspective discussed in this thesis. In addition, the argument refers to a rethinking of both the willingness and capacity to take on the role of the developer, in collaboration with others. It could be argued that the project, through the collaboration between many insiders and outsiders, succeeded in opening up new possibilities, and a reconstruction of the role of the local authorities in a community with a comprehensive industrial history and where the influence of a few enterprises has been important for municipal development.

The answer to the main research question summarises the essence of the process described. The main research question is:

main research question: How can action research and development concepts adopted from the industrial democracy tradition enhance the learning capacity in municipal economic planning and development processes?

Based on the findings in this study, a strategy for learning in planning and development can be identified. *First*, I emphasise a renewed focus on social learning processes supported by the conceptual model of organisational learning. *Second*, I subscribe to a collaborative process between research and local stakeholders based on an action research approach focusing on the co-generation of knowledge (Greenwood and Levin 1998). *Third*, the collaborative process should be based on the generation of shared experiences as a starting point for learning and the social construction of knowledge.

It has been important for me to emphasise that the Vennesla project showed in many ways that learning processes are embedded in the social, cultural, economic, and territorial contexts in which they take place. It is thus not a straightforward process to adapt organisation theory and models of enterprise development in a regional context.

It has also been important to argue that to turn planning into learning processes, a problem solving approach including problem definition and real experience from action should be the starting point. New collaborative settings often include diverse stakeholders with very heterogeneous backgrounds. To take advantage of this diversity in the creative process, a collective problem solving process succeeded by action and evaluation seems preferable in order to enhance learning.

I find it important to emphasise differences in the epistemological positions in planning theories, particularly between theories building on pragmatism and theories building on a communicative approach. First, a pragmatic theory of knowledge is indisputably linked to the *learning-by-doing* approach of Dewey. Through action, new experience is gained, and theories-in-action are developed. This is, as I have noticed, an important starting point for a learning process. Second, communicative theory represents a different epistemological approach. Building on the theory of communicative action, an

argument emphasising reflexive dialogue and the power of the better argument is built, suggesting how we can arrive at conceptions of what is both right and true (Habermas 1984).

Integrating these positions could, in line with the co-generative action research model (Greenwood and Levin 1998), represent a way forward. Obviously, it could be an answer to the critique of pragmatism regarding tendencies of relativism and power blindness (Pløger 2005), and to communicative planning in the absence of practical application (Allmendinger 2002b). This suggests that planning practice in a regional development context could gain from the exploration of organisational development theory focusing on learning and participatory processes between multiple stakeholders in the same way as planning theory has been inspired (Forester 1999). Such approach was included in the VC 2010 programme, finding its entry into regional development on the basis of the application of organisational learning theory and the implementation of regional development coalitions.

In addition, and as a consequence of a shift to a 'development regime' in Norwegian regional policy (Amdam and Bukve 2004) and the evolution of new models of governance in regional and sub-regional settings, new actors are involved in planning and development (Jessop 1994). My research has addressed learning processes within such a model of governance, in the Vennesla development coalition. However, to include new actors on a collaborative arena involves a transformation of the role actors could or need to take, i.e. a formation of roles significantly different from traditional roles within the functional divisions in the sectoral state and a managerial regime. My interest is thus in the direction of learning strategies among these new actors, and their adoption and formation of roles in collaborative planning settings. The normative concern related to this approach is to support the development of both individual and collective learning strategies in local and regional planning and development. There is the potential to explore as well as initiate such learning processes through action research projects in municipal contexts. The problem is that the action research

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approach in the facilitation of change and learning in the regional (or municipal) setting is at risk of only producing simple learning processes and thereby restricting the possibility of sustainable social change in regions.

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APPENDIXES

Answers group work first, second and third dialogue conference
Appendix Table 1 Group work dialogue conference I

	Visions for the future	What should be done?
Group 1	Physical regeneration in local town	The physical regeneration work should include broadband infrastructure and development of new meeting places, supported by the private sector, and coordinated by the local development agency
	Business activity in town centre	
	Increase in commerce	
	Centralisation/concentrate the activity	
	Active focus on training in cooperation between industry and education	
	Place marketing strategy	Vocational training and education strategy should be tailor-made for local needs, focused on further education for adults
Group 2	Increase the scope of industrial activity	Develop new meeting places
	Local ownership	Display the success stories
	Focus on innovation	Proactive housing policy
	Increase in number of 'knowledge enterprises'	Spatial policy for enterprise localisation
	Broad networks	
	Services and commerce	
	Expansion in e.g. handcraft businesses working outside the municipality	

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<p>Group 3</p> <p>New perspective on the whole region</p> <p>Vennesla as a central part of the Kristiansand city region</p> <p>Competence development – cooperation with Agder University College (Høgskolen i Agder)</p> <p>Higher level of education</p> <p>Youth business in schools</p> <p>Local service</p> <p>Broadband infrastructure</p> <p>Cultural facilities and recreation</p> <p>Free public transport</p>	<p>Dare to be unpopular in order to make good plans for spatial and economic development</p> <p>Minimise bureaucracy</p> <p>Proactive housing policy</p> <p>New cultural centre</p> <p>New kindergartens</p>
<p>Group 4</p> <p>Physical infrastructure</p> <p>Strong local development agency</p> <p>Place marketing</p> <p>Focus on entrepreneurs</p>	<p>Parking space in town</p> <p>Talk positively about the place/municipality</p> <p>Area for camping</p> <p>New entrances for some shops in town centre</p> <p>Motivate public and private sector to cooperate</p>
<p>Group 5</p> <p>More diversity of enterprises</p> <p>Housing policy</p> <p>Physical regeneration in town centre</p>	<p>Spatial planning</p> <p>Services from public administration</p> <p>Proactive development strategy</p> <p>Communication/infrastructure</p> <p>Investments</p>

		Focus on aesthetics in town centre
Group 6	More diversity of enterprises	Areas for business localisation
	Localisation of business park	Politicians must support the industry
	Housing policy	Schools must be more open to the community
	Kindergartens	Proactive housing policy
	Cultural facilities	Network for innovation support
		Further dialogue between public and private sector
Group 7	'Vennesla will become the most attractive municipality in the region, too live in and to do business in!'	Housing policy
		Areas for business localisation
		Kindergarten/Schools
		Care for elderly people
		Cultural facilitation
		Joint strategy
		Sell stocks in regional electricity company owned by the municipality
		Education and training, scholarships for higher education
Group 8	Support economic growth through spatial planning	Cooperation between public and private sector
		Proactive politicians
		Private sector must take a leading position
		Support entrepreneurs and good ideas

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Use nature and physical qualities, such as the river

No parking problems

Kindergartens

Area for business park

Appendix Table 2 Group work dialogue conference II

Associations and resources to support these associations	What should be developed further and where should we start?
Place making:	Resources to build upon:
Aesthetics and recreation in the natural qualities (river, skiing, salmon fishing, bicycling),	Living conditions
Historical railway (Setesdalsbanen),	Varied and beautiful nature
Housing policy,	High level of service
Vigeland Estate	Town centre
Social issues:	Operational knowledge
Good living conditions,	Diverse industrial structure
Leisure activities,	Participation
Healthy environment,	Central geographical localisation
Good neighbourhoods	Historical railway
Culture:	Vigeland Estate
Place identity: values, proud, inclusive, solidarity, voluntary communal work (<i>dugnad</i>), safety, un-snobish, belongingness, dialect, trustworthiness, supporting, good cultural facility within art, music, and sport	Rich cultural life and many activities
Service:	Which resources must be developed further?
Good schools	Aesthetical qualities
High level of service in retail	Cultural activities
	Identity
	Competence/Human resources
	Schools

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Communication:	Support for entrepreneurs
Localisation near a major city	Areas for industrial development
Potential for development along the highway (Riksvei 9)	Collective and innovative milieus
Free parking	Place marketing
Industry:	New housing areas
High level of practical competence (<i>realkompetanse</i>)	Boast about the place
Traditions in handcrafts	Success stories
Knowledge-intensive enterprises	New kindergartens
Manufacturing industry	Extend natural park along River Otra
Innovation	From town to city status
Commerce/retail	State-owned liquor store (Vinmonopol)
New activity on Hunsøya industrial estate	Support creativity
Tourism	Public service
Traditions in shift work	New library
Stable workforce	New public swimming pool
Quality	Museum displaying industrial history
'We can do it'	Increase in collaboration between landowners, public sector, and other stakeholders in the development of natural resources
Facilities for young people	
Living quality	Broader scope in retail (more niche thinking)

Proactive municipality	Where should we start?
Connecting different parts/communities within the municipality	Library and culture centre
Integrated in the common work and living region of Kristiansand	Centre for competence/human resource development
Find its 'place' between coast and mountains	Business park
Not become the 'Craft City'	Swimming pool
Have strong gender perspective	Course and competence centre (hotel?)
	The river, aesthetics
	Place marketing
	Competence/education
	Participation from young people in the development work
	Youth enterprises (<i>elevbedrifter</i>)
	Development and coordination of activities along the River Otra

Appendix Table 3 Group work dialogue conference III

Further work	Challenges	New initiatives	Continued focus
<p>Use the report from the landscape architects showing the potential for spatial development along the River Otra</p> <p>Is there a need for further restructuring, and are things are going rather well in the local economy?</p> <p>Further support of individuals who lose their jobs in the manufacturing industry</p> <p>Development of the Høgvollan area</p> <p>Broad engagement</p>	<p>Define our own position in the region</p> <p>Vennesla as an attractive living area</p> <p>Focus on the closeness to the city of Kristiansand as a positive thing</p> <p>Need for a vision for the future</p> <p>Focus on new visions and strategies in the municipal plan</p>	<p>Walking path along River Otra</p> <p>Music activities for young people</p> <p>Development in the winter recreation areas (cross-country skiing areas)</p> <p>Support the development at Vigeland estate</p>	<p>Business park</p> <p>Broadband infrastructure</p> <p>Pedestrian shopping street in town centre</p> <p>Brand Vennesla</p> <p>School</p> <p>Local landowners and business development in tourism</p>
<p>Continue the work started</p> <p>Focus on measuring the results</p> <p>New collaboration partners in competence/education and investment</p> <p>Activity on Vigeland Estate</p> <p>Further development of the facilities in the business park</p> <p>Focus on new enterprises as an economic drive</p>	<p>Public finance problems</p> <p>Gender issues</p> <p>Attitudes towards change</p> <p>A desire for growth, not too laid back</p> <p>Attitude towards education</p> <p>Women's</p>	<p>Direct support for enterprises in the business park</p> <p>Measurement of restructuring work</p> <p>Participation from young people</p> <p>Areas for housing</p> <p>Parking places</p> <p>Infrastructure</p>	<p>Youth businesses</p> <p>E-commerce</p> <p>Dialogue between public and private sectors</p> <p>New leading and future-oriented enterprise</p> <p>What is our profile?</p>

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<p>What are our economic growth visions?</p> <p>What kind of consequences does this growth have related to public services and infrastructure?</p> <p>Do we need different strategies in different parts of the municipality?</p> <p>I</p> <p>It is a pre-condition that the municipality has economic room to manoeuvre</p> <p>‘Give a boost to’ local talent</p> <p>Focus on place-making in all parts of the municipality</p> <p>Support initiatives in all communities</p> <p>Information about places along the roads</p>	<p>participation in public life and business</p> <p>Level of education</p> <p>Ability and willingness to change</p> <p>Qualified workforce</p> <p>Few retail and service enterprises</p> <p>Downscaling of agriculture and the consequences for the cultural landscape</p> <p>Utilise the policy instrument</p>	<p>Minimise bureaucracy</p> <p>Focus on the aesthetical and recreational qualities along the river and the fjord.</p>	<p>Branch of business park in other parts of the municipality</p> <p>Farmer tourism</p> <p>New local enterprises within handicrafts</p>
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Action Plans

In the following table provides an overview of proposals in the action plans. The executive committee in the municipality accepted this plan on 18 May 2004. The first column lists the three categories in the strategy, the second column the action proposed in the action plan, the third column gives a short description of the action, and the far right-hand column gives the status of the proposal. To describe the status (or progress) of the action or activity, I use 'completed' for actions implemented, 'not completed' for action started but not finished, and 'not started' for action not taken. These measures are based on the presentations from the work group leaders in the evaluation conference.

Appendix Table 4 Strategy, action plans and status in the Vennesla project

Strategy	Action/Activity	Definition	Status 2005
Innovation	Infrastructure	Broadband, ADSL	Completed
	Business park	Aimed at both developing new networks in old and new industries and having the role of 'office hotel' for new small enterprises.	Completed
Vocational training and education	Young entrepreneurs and student enterprises	Economic fund and professional advisors to support initial phase	Completed
	Career counselling for adults and financial support	Advice and assessment of competence in order to motivate for further education and training	Not completed

Internet presentation of available private summer accommodation in the municipality	Realise the potential for bringing more tourists to the municipality and to facilitate for private persons to letting out their houses in the summer	Not started
Courses in tourism and business development in the agriculture sector	These courses should increase the knowledge about the sector and motivate private farmers and landowners to develop niche products and other spin-offs	Not started
Training in e-trade	Support existing business and increase their knowledge about e-trade	Not started
Support network in the service sector	Coordination and collaboration in the sector to develop a strategic core in order to enhance local competitive advantages	Not started
Counselling of enterprises in the business park	The aim is to increase the knowledge held by enterprises in the park about the advantages the park gives and how they could adapt to and utilise these advantages	Not started
Motivate women in work life to take leading positions	Support and encourage the motivation, both individually and in the	Not started

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		organisations to use women in leading positions	
Place making	Otra River Festival	A cultural and music festival where the river and the historical development of the industry and society related to the river is in focus	Not started
	Place marketing	A strategic project to develop a communication and information strategy for the municipality, both internally in the municipality and externally to outsiders	Not started
	Support and involve in local development initiatives	Take local mobilisation in small communities as the starting point to establish a collaboration between the municipality and the local initiatives	Not completed
	Green tourism, hunting and fishing	Support and motivate local landowners and farmers to take advantages of natural recourses in spin-off activities	Not completed
	New outdoor culture scene/arena	To find new activities and use of a closed power plant that has natural and	Not started

historical qualities

Participants in Vennesla Development Project

Vennesla Development Coalition:

Torhild Bransdal	Leader, Major Vennesla Municipality
Berit Kittelsen	Deputy Leader, Politician, Vennesla Municipality
Trygve Rønning	Politician, Vennesla Municipality
Birger Tellefsen	Politician, Vennesla Municipality
Hans Chr. Garmann Johnsen	AgderResearch/VS2010
Johan Pensgård	Director of Industrial Development, Vest-Agder County
Alv Anders Ropstad	Euronics Vennesla AS (owner)
Frank Rosaas	Ti-Tech Sveis AS (owner)
Halvor Rismyhr	Project leader, Director Vennesla Vekst AS
Olav Norheim	Coalition secretary, Dep. of planning, Vennesla Municipality

Innovation Group:

Torhild Bransdal	Major Vennesla Municipality
Frank Rosaas	Ti-Tech Sveis AS (company)
Helge Haugland	Huntonit AS (company)
Arne Setane	Br. Mangseth (company)
Steinar Holbæk	Steinar Holbæk AS (company)
Halvor Rismyhr	Vennesla Vekst AS
Sigvart Bariås	Vest-Agder County

Vocational Learning/Adult Education Group:

Egil Lindekleiv	Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation
Alf Holmelid	Research Director, Agder University College
Knut Førrelund	Representing the agriculture sector
Roy Johnsen	Director of Education, Vennesla Municipality
Torkild O. Haus	Principle, Vennesla High School
Anne Marie Mortensen	Hunfos Factory (company)
Ove Erkleiv	Vigeland Metal Refinery AS (company)
Berit Kittelsen	Politician, Vennesla Municipality

Place Making Group:

Alv Anders Ropstad	Euronics Vennesla AS (company)
Per Anders Ropstad	Sparebanken Pluss (company)
Ole Henning Lohne	Hægeland Landhandel (company)
Margit L. Olsvik	Vennesla Hotell og Gjestgiveri AS (company)
Aslak Wegge	Vennesla Municipality
Finn O. Hansen	Vennesla Municipality
Kristin Syvertsen	Vest-Agder County
Trygve Rønning	Vennesla Municipality

Researcher and PhD student Jens Kristian Fosse from Agder Research/VS2010 has participated in all groups.

Newspaper articles, selected 2002–2006*Appendix Table 5 Newspaper articles selected 2002 -2006*

Date	Newspaper	Headline	Category
21.06.2002	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Vennesla did not get restructuring status] Vennesla fikk ikke omstillingsstatus	News
21.06.2002	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[See light in the tunnel] <i>Ser lys i tunnelen</i>	News
11.02.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Think Vennesla should be a city] <i>Mener Vennesla må få bystatus</i>	News
12.02.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Vennesla will always be Vennesla] <i>Vennesla vil alltid være Vennesla</i>	News
10.03.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Think Vennesla has become a client municipality] <i>Mener Vennesla har blitt en klientkommune</i>	News
11.03.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Vennesla client society] <i>Klientsamfunnet Vennesla</i>	Editorial
12.03.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Answered the critics] <i>Blåser ut mot kritikerne</i>	News
13.03.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Think Christian Democratic prevent development] <i>Mener KrF hindrer utvikling</i>	News
14.03.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Last chance for the <i>Venndølene</i>]	Opinion

	<i>Siste sjanse for venndølene</i>	
07.05.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [Venndølene and other people] Venndøler og andre folk	Editorial
10.09.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [Finally – Vennesla!] <i>Endelig - Vennesla!</i>	Opinion
16.12.2003	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [Vennesla will become new next year] <i>Vennesla blir nytt neste år</i>	News
25.02.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [King of pop in Vennesla] <i>Popkongen av Vennesla</i>	News
26.02.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [They will speed up Vennesla] <i>De vil få mer fart på Vennesla</i>	News
04.03.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [Salmon bigwig in Otra] <i>Laksekakser i Otra</i>	Reader's letter
05.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [Wants 50 workplaces] <i>Vil ha 50 arbeidsplasser</i>	News
05.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [Started their own business – now they lack people] <i>Startet for seg selv - nå mangler de folk</i>	News
11.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [[Morton] Abel to the River Festival] <i>Abel til Elvefestival</i>	News
25.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i> [Liquor licence trouble stopped River Festival]	News

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		<i>Skjenkebråk stopper Elvefestivalen</i>	
27.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Fear hotel owners will leave the community] <i>Frykter at hotelleiere rømmer bygda</i>	News
27.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Might have to move] <i>Kan bli nødt til å flytte</i>	News
28.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Attacked the Christian Democrats] <i>Fyrte løs mot KrF</i>	News
28.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Rismyhr needs to explain] <i>Vil kalle Rismyhr inn på teppet</i>	News
29.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Debility in Vennesla] <i>Avmakt i Vennesla</i>	Editorial
29.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Long for real nightlife] <i>Lengter etter skikkelig uteliv</i>	News
29.05.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Vennesla must remain Vennesla] <i>Vennesla må få være Vennesla</i>	News
02.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Debility in Vennesla?] <i>Avmakt i Vennesla?</i>	Opinion
07.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Quarrel moved behind closed doors] <i>Flytter krangel til kammerset</i>	News

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09.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Spoke out behind close doors] <i>Snakket ut på kammerset</i>	News
19.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Debility and critique in Vennesla] <i>Avmakt og sure toner i Vennesla</i>	Reader's letter
19.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Vennesla wants business park] <i>Vennesla vil ha næringshage</i>	News
19.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Versatile in Vennesla] <i>Allsidig i Vennesla</i>	News
22.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Women speed up the community] <i>Kvinner får fart på bygda</i>	News
23.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Bold plans for Vennesla] <i>Dristige planer for Vennesla</i>	News
23.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Strongly connected to the river] <i>Sterkt knyttet til elva</i>	News
23.06.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Prepared for conflicts] <i>Forberedt på konflikter</i>	News
11.09.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Hunsfoss fire 80] <i>Hunsfoss sparker 80</i>	News
13.09.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[New challenges] <i>Nye utfordringer</i>	Editorial

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18.11.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Fights for 300–400 workplaces] <i>Kjemper om 300-400 arbeidsplasser</i>	News
19.11.2004	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Filadelfia church new king of property] <i>Filadelfia ny eiendomskonge</i>	News
01.04.2005	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Establish department in Vennesla] <i>Oppretter avdeling i Vennesla</i>	News
24.04.2005	<i>Aftenposten</i>	[From backwater to talent factory] <i>Fra bakevje til talentfabrikk</i>	News
28.05.2005	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[We don't want to be a part of the city] <i>«Mi he 'kje så heljeli' løst å te byen»</i>	News
06.12.2005	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Attractive property at Hunsøya] <i>Attraktiv tomt på Hunsøya</i>	News
28.01.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[<i>Venndolians</i> in the backwater] <i>Venndøler i bakleksa</i>	Opinion
06.02.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Is Vennesla victimised?] <i>Blir Vennesla mobbet?</i>	News
06.02.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Stop victimising Vennesla] <i>Slutt å mobbe Vennesla</i>	Reader's letter
28.02.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[First Drammen, then Vennesla?] <i>Først Drammen, så Vennesla?</i>	Opinion

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03.03.2006	<i>Vennesla Tidende</i>	[Ready for collaboration] <i>Er klare for samarbeid</i>	News
07.03.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Industry executive throws mandarin orange at renter] <i>Næringssjef kastet mandarin etter leietaker</i>	News
21.03.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Transforms Vennesla] <i>Forvandler Vennesla</i>	News
23.03.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Soon get go-ahead signal for Drivenes] <i>Snart klarsignal for Drivenes</i>	News
30.04.2006	<i>Fædrelandsvennen</i>	[Crisis that never came] <i>Krisen som aldri kom</i>	News