

The Making of a Sub-Arctic Region: Northern Norway, 1900-2000'

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Both in ethnic and administrative terms, Norway is often presented as being one of the most homogeneous nation states in Europe. National minorities make up a smaller proportion of the population than in most countries, and the state is very centralised, with no great counterbalance on the regional level between the state and local government. However, a peculiarity of the Norwegian party system has also been its particularly strong reflection of mobilising forces on the periphery. Although there have not been any strong regional institutions, there has therefore still been a strong regional dimension in Norwegian politics ever since the first parties emerged with the introduction of parliamentary government in 1884. There has been a strong state, but there has not been any geographical hegemony in the form of a dominant capital region, as in Denmark, for instance.¹ In political scientist Stein Rokkan's terms, the strength of the periphery is demonstrated by the exertion of influence through political and corporate channels, rather than regional institutions and regional autonomy.² However, the regional level also came into focus in Norway, as in the rest of Western Europe, after World War II, in the form of regional policy aimed at correcting regional imbalances, especially from the 1960s onwards. There are few signs of the European "New Regionalism"³ of the last 10-15 years in Norway. There is, however, one exception to the Norwegian rule of a strong state and little regionalisation, namely the creation of Northern Norway. This northernmost part of Norway consists of the three counties of Nordland, Troms and Finnmark, and it did not form a unit at the beginning of the twentieth century. The area did not have a name of its own; there was no sign of any articulation of regional interests, or of central government regarding the area as an entity, apart from the fact that it formed a single diocese of the Church of Norway. By the end of the twentieth century, the area has become institutionalised in various spheres: It has in a variety of contexts been treated as a separate policy area by the state, and a North Norwegian regionalism has come into being. Northern Norway has been created both from above and from within. This process of regionalisation is therefore of general interest, as an exception within the Norwegian nation state, and simultaneously as an expression of a general European tendency. Regionalisation has not, however, been a smooth, linear, homogeneous process. There have been tensions and

conflicts along the way, between region and nation, between regional and social movements, between regionalism and ethnic mobilisation, and this has been expressed on several levels. In order to grasp the main characteristics and identify the most important causes, it may be useful to periodise this account according to the most important turning points.

The Northern Norway of the bourgeois elites, 1900-1935

The first signs of a North Norwegian regionalist movement came from North Norwegians in exile, in the diaspora communities of the capital, Kristiania, and among North Norwegian emigrants in the USA. In 1862, Den Nordlandske Forening [the Nordland Association] was founded as an organisation for all who came from the county of Nordland. The founders were a small group of intellectuals who had in common that they had all studied in Tromsø in Troms county, at the only teacher training college in the region as a whole. In the 1880s, the association also received the support of North Norwegians who had successfully set up businesses in the capital, and in the 1890s articles of association were changed so as to include all those "born and bred in the Diocese of Tromsø", i.e., the three northernmost counties. At the same time, the organisation changed its name to "Nordlændingernes forening" [the Association of North Norwegians].⁴ At a meeting in 1894, agreement was also reached on a name for the region, "Nord-Norge" [Northern Norway].⁵ However, the time was not yet ripe for region-building within the region itself. Lines of social conflict took precedence, preparing the way for a powerful mobilisation in the two northernmost counties of Troms and Finnmark under the Norwegian Labour Party. It was in rural districts of this northernmost periphery that the socialist movement in Norway made its parliamentary breakthrough - in areas where people lived by practising a combination of farming and fishing. This is somewhat paradoxical, because as in other European countries, the socialist movement in Norway was otherwise rooted among industrial workers in the towns and cities. This political mobilisation, which embraced the majority of voters, was no flash in the pan, but would come to be a lasting feature of the political geography of Norway, with particularly strong support for the labour movement in the northernmost region, which was also the least industrialised area of the country.⁶ Around the same time came the first mobilisation of the Sami minority in Northern Norway. It was especially among the Samis of the coastal areas, who, like the

Norwegian population, lived off fishing and farming, that things now began to ferment. Their greatest spokesman was Isak Saba, who in 1906 was elected to the Norwegian Storting as a Labour Party deputy for Finnmark. Saba's strategy was to unite the Samis and the social interests of the coastal Samis within and through the Labour Party. This alliance between socialism and ethnic mobilisation was not without its own problems. There was Norwegian racism to be combatted even within the labour movement, and this alliance petered out when the social problems became acute with the onset of the crises between the two world wars.⁷ Apart from the fact that social and ethnic divisions began to become apparent, the period following the dissolution of the union with neighbouring Sweden in 1905 also saw a powerful drive towards nation-building and the creation of a national identity.

The simultaneous emergence of national revival in the region, which was particularly marked in Nordland, a stronghold of Venstre, the Norwegian Liberal Party, of social radicalism in Troms and Finnmark, and of this early Sami movement did not provide fertile ground for regionalism to take firm root to any great extent before we get some way into the 1910s. Several factors combined in favour of a new, reinvigorated regionalism in the region itself. The national questions no longer made a cleavage in politics, and economic recovery after 1905 provided the incentive to make proactive demands for public investment in the region. Economic modernisation - which was particularly associated in the fisheries with the motorisation of the fishing fleet - required organisation and regional coordination. In particular preparations for the national commercial exhibition in Kristiania for the celebration of the centenary of the Norwegian constitution of 1814 sparked off a campaign to hold up Northern Norway as a land of opportunity. This perspective was still strongest in the circles associated with the Association of North Norwegians in Kristiania, who in 1916 opened their own "Nord-Norges hus" [Northern Norway House] with a "Café Nord-Norge" and also published the newspaper *Nord-Norge* for a period during the First World War.⁸ But now there was also some concern in certain quarters in the north to further North Norwegian demands. An expression of such a need for regional marking is to be found in those newspapers which proclaimed their region-building ambitions and marked this by adopting new sub-titles.⁹ An interesting intermezzo was the paper *Nord-Norge*, which appeared in Tromsø in 1912-13, in which Erling Steinbø, former editor of the local paper *Tromsø*, was primus motor and editor. This paper declared itself "non-political", intending to "stand above the eternal divisions of

party politics" and work for "the interests of Northern Norway".¹⁰ The newspapers were undoubtedly important in creating North Norwegian public life, and the number of papers rose dramatically from the turn of the century. Whereas there were seven newspapers in the region in 1880, there were as many as 36 by 1920. The regional campaign was concentrated in particular on the development of communications (railways, state roads, the development of coastal shipping) and education (including demands for a university from 1918, but also for rural secondary schools and forestry schools). This regional orientation was also expressed in the organisational sphere in this period. Political, professional and commercial regional organisations emerged, such as Nord-Norges Fiskerforbund [the North Norwegian Fishermen's Association] (1916), Nordnorsk Importkompani [the North Norwegian Import Company] (1919), Nordnorsk presseforening [the North Norwegian Press Association] (1920) and Fiskesyndikat for Nord-Norge [the Fishing Syndicate of Northern Norway] (1922), as well as a number of North Norwegian branches of national organisations.¹¹ These organisations had practical and organisational rather than regionalistic objectives. They reflected social modernisation and the development of communications. Although they did not have region-building aims, they nonetheless pushed in the direction of regional integration.

This early North Norwegian regionalism was in many ways a phenomenon of economic recovery, originating in particular among patriotic business people who wanted to stress the potential for modernisation in the region. The perspective was thus modernistic and aimed at the economic level. But at the same time there arose a culture-based regionalistic movement that rooted regional identity in history and culture. This movement launched another collective name for the three northernmost counties, i.e., the ancient name of Hålogaland, the name of that part of the region that had seen Norwegian settlement in the Middle Ages, approximately as far north as the site of the city of Tromsø today. Such a split in naming practices - with one name for the region signalling orientation towards the future, and one rooting identity in the past - is, as pointed out by Einar Niemi, one for which we find parallels in several other places in Norden. Something similar occurred in the deep south of Norway, where there was a debate as to whether the two counties of Vest-Agder and Aust-Agder should be known by the Old Norse name Agder or the neologism "Sørlandet" [lit. South Country], which came into general use from about 1920. There was a similar onomastic

dualism in the far north of neighbouring Sweden, where "Norrland" [lit. North Country] was used of northern Sweden as the "land of the future", while "Lapland" was used to refer to the archaic and exotic northernmost part of the region.¹² The movement that stressed cultural unity and identified with the name Hålogaland originated among those oppositional elements that were the hard core of the national democratic movement in Norway; their stronghold was the western periphery of Norway, Vestlandet [West Norway].¹³ These were the groups associated with the North Norwegian young people's societies (organised in Noregs Ungdomslag [the Norwegian Youth Association]), the language movement (a movement whose aim is to make the written language closer to spoken Norwegian) and those who were behind the establishment in the region of people's colleges (a radical democratic type of school, targeted in particular at rural youth).

This oppositional movement in Northern Norway thus originated in Norwegian liberal nationalism, but at an early stage developed a competitive regional perspective that was to become increasingly important in the inter-war years. In the youth movement's publications, *Midnattsol* and *Lauvsprett*, there were constant appeals in the 1910s for a North Norwegian revival based on the unity of the region in terms of shared culture and history. Here there was a parallel with the construction of identity we find in general European nationalism: The powerful rhetoric was borrowed from ideas of a medieval North Norwegian Golden Age, when the great North Norwegian chieftains ruled.¹⁴ And, as in both Norwegian and European nationalism, it was the farmers who were the carriers of the core values on which the North Norwegian movement would be built. It is undoubtedly no mere coincidence that this type of oppositional movement had its strongholds in those areas where agriculture was strongest in relation to the widespread combination of farming and fishing, i.e., in Helgeland, Lofoten, the Trondarnes area of South Troms and in Inner Troms. In areas like North Troms and Finnmark, where social polarisation was strongest and the ethnic dimension most conspicuous, such oppositional, nationalistic and regionalistic currents had far less impact.¹⁵ An epicentre of cultural region-building in this period was the group centred on Trondarnes People's College (founded in 1919) at Harstad in South Troms. In 1920, Hålogaland historielag [Hålogaland Historical Society] and the journal *Håløygminne* were founded there "out of a love of history, enthusiasm for the New Norwegian language revival, and pride in being Hålogalanders", as it was put by one of the founders, Halvdan Koht, a professor of history and native of Tromsø.¹⁶

The editor of the journal, Hans Eidnes, immediately compiled a history of Northern Norway, a revised edition of which was published in 1943 with the title *Hålogalands historie* [History of Hålogaland]. In the first issue of *Håløygminne*, he wrote programmatically that it would make the history of Northern Norway the common property of the people, "so that North Norwegians might acquaint themselves with the people from whom they have sprung and the folk memories and family traditions that are their roots".¹⁷ The people's colleges in Vågan and Vefsn also became centres of Norwegianness and North Norwegian regionalism.

The dualistic regionalism and nationalism of this cultural revival is present in all these groups: They were both movements promoting Norwegianness and a North Norwegian cultural mobilisation. An expression of this dualism was the work of developing regional folk costumes, which occurred in the North Norwegian context in the inter-war period, based in the people's colleges in Vefsn in Helgeland, Vågan in Lofoten, and Trondarnes.¹⁸ Work on anchoring North Norwegian regional identity in the past also received a powerful impulse from research into North Norwegian pre-history in this period. Particular attention was aroused by the discovery of the remains of the so-called Komsa Culture in Finnmark in the 1920s, which in their day were the oldest finds ever made in Norway. Other archaeological finds also contributed to improving our knowledge of North Norwegian pre-history. This made an important contribution to reinforcing regional self-esteem in a region that was poorly represented in works of national history.¹⁹ In a region where the most important social movements were on the one hand a labour movement that mobilised wage-earners and fishermen on the basis of social interests, and on the other hand an oppositional movement whose perspective was part regionalistic and part nationalistic, there was little scope for the early Sami movement, which peaked in the first attempts at political unification of all Samis in the late 1910s and early 1920s. The Samis then went into ethnopolitical hibernation.²⁰ Moreover, cultural North Norwegian regionalism came into conflict with large parts of the Sami and Arctic Finnish minority in the north, in that it grew out of a free-thinking, liberal Christianity that clashed with the low-church fundamentalism of Læstadianism, a religious movement that was particularly strong among these minorities.²¹ Moreover, those forces that in Troms and Nordland represented North Norwegian regionalism, came in Finnmark to articulate a Finnmark patriotism²² - a fissure within North Norwegian regional identity that with gradually diminishing strength has persisted until the present.

Regionalisation as integration, 1935-1970

The mid-1930s brought an important turning point in the history of the emergence of Northern Norway. North Norwegian regionalism spread, and Northern Norway was for the first time identified as a policy area by the state. It was in the social-democratic movement, at both national and regional levels, that this coalescence came about. In 1933, the region's two most important communications demands - the building of state roads and a railway through the region - were included in the Labour Party manifesto. These campaigns found energetic support in the Labour Party press and showed the bourgeois parties' neglect of the region in relief. The Labour Party also made a breakthrough in this election in the areas of Nordland and Troms that were dependent on the fisheries, where the party had not done well previously, and Northern Norway as a whole now emerged as a bastion of the labour movement. When the party, therefore, in 1935 established the first viable Labour government, broad groups of people had a new political channel for articulating their interests. Northern Norway was also the part of the country that was hardest hit by the inter-war depressions, due to the particularly dramatic collapse in the price of fish, which was so crucial for the northern economy. The combination of deep economic depression and the new political opening was the signal for a broad regional mobilisation based on the idea that the social and economic problems of the region could be attributed to south Norwegian dominance, and that the way forward was to fully develop the potential that was present in the region itself. Typical of this dual perception is an editorial in *Lofotposten*, the newspaper with the greatest regional impact in this part of the country, which appeared in November 1938, entitled "Nord-Norges frigjøringskamp" [Northern Norway's struggle for independence]:

"Som forholdene hittil har utviklet sig har Nord-Norge faktisk gjennom sin produksjon og sitt næringsliv og den kapital dette har skapt i langt sterkere grad vært med på *og utvikle Syd-Norge enn omvendt (...) Det er et rikt land, men det skal bli ennu rikere når vi har vunnet vår rett, og når det øvrige land har fått den fulle forståelsen av at det vil lønne sig å utbygge Nord-Norge i et raskere tempo".²³

[As things have developed thus far, Northern Norway has in fact, by its production and its commerce and the capital thus created, played a far greater part in developing southern Norway than vice versa (...). It is a wealthy country, but it will grow even wealthier once we have won our dues, and once the rest of the country has come fully to understand that it will be worthwhile developing Northern Norway at a more rapid pace.]

At the same time, in a joint declaration by Nordland Faglige Samorganisasjon [Nordland Joint Professional Association], Nordland Bonde og Småbrukarlag [Nordland Farmers and Small Farmers Association], Nordland Fylkes Fiskerlag [Nordland County Fishermen's Association] and Nordland Labour Party, a number of demands were made for schemes to improve the economy of Northern Norway as a whole through industrialisation and modernisation of the fishing industry. These demands received the full support of *Lofotposten* in editorials with titles like "Bygg Nord-Norge" [Build Northern Norway] and "La Nord-Norge få sin rett" [Give Northern Norway its dues].²⁴ The Labour Party government of Nygaardsvold tackled the social and economic crisis in two ways: On the one hand, by introducing measures that were not in the first instance territorially targeted, but still had regional effects - especially as regards securing the position of fishermen *vis-à-vis* fish buyers; and policy now also took on a territorial aspect, in that Northern Norway for the first time was singled out as a separate area of priority. We find traces of such a reorientation in the evidence gathered by the "Kommisjon for nye arbeidstiltak, planlegging og økt selvberging" [Commission for new job creation measures, planning and increased self-sufficiency], established on the initiative of the Nygaardsvold government in 1935. Underlying this was an analysis showing that the region lagged way behind the rest of the country in industrialisation. In the 1930 census, the total industrial sector accounted for just 15.3% of employed persons, as opposed to 26.6% in the country as a whole. Hopes were tied in particular to the potential for more fish processing, using industrial methods. There was then also greater activity in Northern Norway than elsewhere in the country in relation to acquiring state support, although this was a matter of small amounts, and the northernmost, most crisis-ridden part of the country was only slightly favoured.²⁵

This coalescence of plans from above to raise the region up to the national level in terms of central indicators of modernisation and the emergence of a movement in the region itself to raise regional issues was much more obvious and much stronger in the years immediately following the World War II. Already *during* the war, plans were laid by those in exile in London for the reconstruction of the areas of Finnmark and North Troms that had been laid waste (the "London Plan"). Reconstruction was to be more than mere restoration. It was assumed that the economic and social structures were backward.²⁶ As important as general modernisation and planning ideology was the fact that the idea of improving the national economy by correcting regional imbalances now came into its own. In the work of reconstructing the north, reference was made to the achievements of the American Tennessee Valley project (TVA), which had had precisely the objective of leading a backward region out of depression and unemployment and into the modern industrial society.²⁷ The task of regional planning began in 1948 with the aim of gathering data from the various regions: The objective was that of maximally exploiting national resources and relieving structural unemployment. In other words, the overriding primary aim of this work was national modernisation, but the plans had a territorial impact.²⁸ Modernisation policy also had to have a territorial aspect: It was not just a matter of stimulating industrial renewal and structural rationalisation in the primary industries - structures that blocked progress had to be dismantled, as the Labour Party manifesto for the 1949 Storting election asserted.²⁹

The seed of the perspective contained in the report of the Tiltakskommisjonen [the Ways and Means Commission] of the 1930s, as developed in the reconstruction plans during and after the war, also had a regional impact. In 1947, the "Studieselskapet for nordnorsk næringsliv" [Society for the Study of North Norwegian Commerce] was founded. This was a broadly based organisation that covered the entire region, including politicians, business people and interest groups. It was founded on a new wave of regional patriotism that was very marked in the immediate post-war years. In the initial phase, the society had no programme other than to further North Norwegian interests in relation to central government.³⁰ Soon this regionalism adopted a modernising stance. An expression of this orientation towards structural problems and barriers to modernisation is found already in the first publication of the society, which bore the revealing title *Problemet Nord-Norge* [The Northern Norway

Problem]. It was written by three young North Norwegian social economists, and concluded that in 1939 the region contained 12% of the population, but only accounted for 6% of GNP.³¹

Around 1950, therefore, a coalescence occurred between a modernisation effort from above, based on national economic criteria, and a modernistic regionalism found among the economic and political elites in Northern Norway. Both took the view that a transformation of Northern Norway in the direction of a modern industrial society was desirable and necessary. The shared assumption was that barriers to production and change in the region must be overcome. The aim was to neutralise differences between north and south. These two tendencies coalesced in the North Norway Plan passed by the Storting in 1952. Several different ideas and aims underlay this large-scale modernisation scheme for the northern region. On the one hand, there was a fear that the region would face another crisis once reconstruction of the wartime destruction had been completed. The industrial sector lagged far behind the rest of the country, and was to a much higher degree dominated by construction and building. It was thus extremely dependent on economic cycles. Second, the North Norway Plan represented concrete steps towards a new regional policy that were inherent in the initiatives of the 40s. A third, novel factor was the international background. Following the outbreak of the Korean War and the escalation of the Cold War, the Norwegian government played their defence policy card in favour of the Americans. Minister of Trade Erik Brofoss pointed out that the depopulation of Northern Norway would be politically dangerous for a region bordering on the Soviet Union where Communists were solidly overrepresented. Northern Norway had to become an "Outpost of the West" and a "Fortress of Confidence", he told his American contacts.³² Prime Minister Gerhardsen also went to the United States, where he used the need for industrialisation in Northern Norway to argue for continued American support for Norway.³³ The Americans did not fall for the government's effort to link modernisation policy and defence policy. Even if defence policy cannot be reduced to an excuse for providing American capital, it is still clear that the background for the new emphasis on Northern Norway was to be found in the breakthrough in the 1940s of the idea that public welfare and modernisation policy required substantial government measures. The most important element of the plan was the establishment of Utbyggingsfondet for Nord-Norge [the Industrial Development Fund for Northern Norway], which was intended to stimulate commerce in the region in a variety of ways.³⁴ This was combined with public

efforts to build infrastructure and establish a commercial policy with the intension of promoting the structural changes which were seen as necessary to bring the region up to the national level.

The North Norway Plan was the beginning of Norwegian regional policy, and the establishment of the Regional Development Fund in 1960 represented a extension of this idea of regional imbalance and modernisation. Continuity in regional policy can probably be extended even further. The strong planning ambitions which were inherent in the new Bygningslov [Housing Act] of 1966, and the vision of constructing a hierarchy of plans - ranging from general plans at the municipal level to regional plans and an overall national plan - pointed back to the state interventionism and planning optimism of the immediate post-war years. The new planning offensive of the late 60s must be viewed in relation to the fact that the cost of the modernisation policy and heavy-handed structural rationalisation were beginning to become apparent, for instance, in the number of people deserting the regions and in the growing pains of the towns and cities. This phase, in which regional policy was a means of achieving national growth objectives, culminated in the Storting Report "Om regionalpolitikken og lands- og landsdelsplanleggingen" [Regional Policy and National and Regional Planning] (1971-72) and the regional plans presented around 1970. The Regional Committee for Northern Norway was established in 1969 and presented its conclusions in 1972.³⁵ The report contained some new points in relation to the North Norway Plan of 1951. The most important of these was the idea of growth centres, which was the keystone of EFTA's economic policy in the 1960s.³⁶ By building up a web of basic areas, the depopulation of the region was to be halted.

What brought together the regional and national actors in Northern Norway policy was the idea of national redistribution and integration. What was seen as characteristic of Northern Norway was first of all what was covered by the term "the Northern Norway problem" - low levels of industrialisation, too much small-scale production, lower income levels, and lower educational achievement. The common vision, both nationally and regionally, was to raise the region to the national level and build modern Norway on general public welfare. And in terms of such indicators, regional differences diminished, development went in the direction of national homogenisation in work and ways of living. Industrial employment increased to one third of the workforce, as opposed to a quarter just after the war, and the national discrepancy

was considerably reduced at the same time as the increase in productivity was much greater in Northern Norway than elsewhere. The region's share of GNP increased, and the income differential was dramatically reduced.³⁷ This policy of regional redistribution was not only followed in the economic sphere. In 1968, after a long campaign in the region itself, the Storting voted to establish a university in Tromsø. The university was intended to contribute to correcting a huge imbalance in recruitment to higher education and graduate professions in the region. The founding of national cultural institutions was intended to help eliminate differences in cultural consumption and raise cultural levels in the peripheral regions. At the same time, this policy of national homogenisation was not exclusively directed from above. State funding produced a great deal of local and regional involvement, and the most drastic plans for structural rationalisation of the economy were modified as a result of political conflict and compromise between representatives of various regional and social interests within the hegemonic but heterogeneous social democratic movement.³⁸ The great joint project, the dream of a modern Northern Norway which would embrace most people, both in the region and at the national level, was nevertheless to be replaced by more ambivalent, contradictory views.

Regionalism and regionalisation in a plural Northern Norway, 1970-2000

Regional differences in the country had diminished. At the same time, in the period around 1970 a new type of mass regionalism arose in Northern Norway which focused on the uniqueness of the region and asked questions about the entire project of modernisation. This paradox - that regionalism arose at the same time as similarities between the regions grew - is not peculiar to Northern Norway. It is rather the European rule that peripheral regions mobilised both culturally and politically against social changes that were perceived as threatening traditional forms of life and settlement patterns. This corresponded to great ideological movements elsewhere at the end of the 1960s, such as the youth movement, the women's movement and the Green movement, which all questioned established values and authorities. In many countries, this often also coalesced with mobilisation of the periphery, usually with regionalistic aims. All over Europe this ran parallel with the development of the regional level, in the shape of regional policy and the establishment of regional institutions.³⁹

Nonetheless, it was not a matter of chance whether these anti-authoritarian, often anti-modernistic, tendencies were expressed in the guise of regionalism or not. Some pre-existing foundation was required, usually in the shape of old cultural boundaries or historical experiences that had created unity. Such conditions were present in Northern Norway. The subjective criteria for the establishment of the region of Northern Norway had already been created. These criteria rested on the one hand in the long-term construction of a feeling of North Norwegian unity from the 1910s onwards. North Norwegian patriotism reinforced its grip as a result of the experience of German occupation, since both wartime destruction and the German presence were clearly greater in the strategically important north of Norway than in the rest of the country. Feelings of North Norwegian unity were particularly strongly expressed among migrant North Norwegians in the emergence of many new associations in most of the towns and industrial centres in southern Norway which recruited North Norwegian workers in the post-war years. This probably has to be viewed in the light of the fact that there was a clear development of regional identity in the region, but it must also be seen in the light of the negative images of Northern Norway encountered by North Norwegians in exile in the south.⁴⁰ In 1953, the Association of North Norwegians in Trondheim even started a paper, *Nord-Norge*, which aimed to become a link between the region and all North Norwegians in exile. The following year, the "Samarbeidsutvalget for de nord-norske foreninger" [Joint Committee of North Norwegian Associations] was founded.⁴¹ An expression of a stronger regional focus and self-consciousness in the region itself is the changed view of the region's greatest writer, Knut Hamsun. Throughout the 1950s, there were stirrings of a shift in opinions of Hamsun. While the reception of his books in the inter-war years focused on the general aspects of his writings, now regional features - Hamsun as a *North Norwegian* author - were increasingly accentuated, in spite of his dubious past as a Nazi collaborator during the war. In the 1970s, this became the dominant image of his works, as indicated in the 1980s by the Hamsun Days and the Hamsun-Society, founded in the northern Nordland municipality where he grew up.⁴²

The period around 1970 was, however, a turning point in that the uniqueness of the region now came to be accentuated and held up as a counter-image to 1950s and 60s visions of modernisation. North Norwegian regionalism became a mass phenomenon that took on many cultural expressions. It entered the ballads and popular music of the region as praise of

traditional means of production and ways of life and in the marking of local and regional belonging. It provided fertile ground for a whole literary movement, which was often locally rooted, but which nonetheless formed a regional unity - a *North Norwegian* literary movement which consisted of a strong new generation of authors who organised themselves in Nordnorsk Forfatterlag [the Society of North Norwegian Authors] (founded in 1972) and established a literary profile, for example, through anthologies like *Norfra 1975* [From the North, 1975] and *Nord-Norge forteller* [Stories from Northern Norway] (1977).⁴³ Since 1978, *Nordnorsk Magasin* [North Norwegian Magazine] - edited by the North Norwegian cultural activist, Hans Kristian Eriksen - has been a forum for North Norwegian grassroots regionalism. An important aspect of the new North Norwegian regionalism since the 1970s is the prominence awarded the languages and history of the region. A key cultural institution which placed particularly strong emphasis on the regional perspective was Hålogaland Teater, and a particularly important cultural and political point was the staging of plays in North Norwegian dialect. The general dialect revival pointed in the same direction. As important was the orientation towards the past, the rooting of identity in the history of the region. A whole local history movement grew up, and there was an enormous growth in the museum sector. In the mid-90s, there were a total of 80 history associations, 50 local history yearbooks, and a museum in every other municipality.⁴⁴ Cultural political involvement was institutionally lodged in an ever-growing cultural bureaucracy, which arose out of a change in national cultural policy in the mid-70s which gave prominence to the reinforcement of regional cultural initiative. In the 1980s came a new shift in tourism towards 'experience' and cultural tourism, focused on the uniquely North Norwegian - "the Northern Norway Package", organised by Top of Europe, Norway. Region-building became more conscious, as when the Regional Committee gave as its motivation for compiling a North Norwegian cultural history in the early 1990s the intention of "reinforcing the identity of the people of Northern Norway through knowledge of their own past". This history was published in two volumes in 1994.

The founding and development of the University of Tromsø is in many ways characteristic of the turnabout in the region's own image of itself, from being a backward part of the country that needed to be brought up to the national level, into a region that had values of its own worth preserving. While the struggle leading to the decision to set up a university for Northern Norway in 1968 was driven by the assumption that it would contribute to

bringing the region up to normal Norwegian levels as regards for instance doctor-patient ratios, levels of education, and culture, a new idea of the university came to the fore when the university was being established from 1972 onwards. Now the point was not that the university should help achieve national standards; it was to be a *different* university. And what was to be different was primarily that it should focus its research and teaching on the problems and tasks facing the region. It was to be more socially oriented, preferably "more in the direction of making the university an agent of preservation and consolidation than of modernisation and development", as Narve Fulsås, the historian of the university, has put it.⁴⁵ The founding of the University was important in the context of regional history. It helped to further consolidate Tromsø's functions as a regional centre and helped the city assert itself against competing regional centres. Most important nevertheless was the role this educational institution had in the production of intellectuals whose roots were in the region itself and who held regional patriotic views.

Parallel with this construction of a North Norwegian identity from below, the institutionalisation of the region also occurred from within. With the foundation of the Society for the Study of North Norwegian Commerce in 1947 there arose a tradition of coordinating interests on a regional level. In 1971, the society began to publish a magazine, *Næring i Nord* [Commerce in the North], targeted at commercial interests and political decision-makers in the region. From the mid-60s, there would come many more examples of such collaboration within the region, which helped institutionalise the region. In 1964, Nordnorsk Kulturråd [the North Norwegian Cultural Council] was established and contributed through its newsletter and network to a similar regionalisation on the cultural level. In the same year began Festspillene i Nord-Norge [the North Norway Festival], based in Harstad, which has since been an annual showcase for North Norwegian artistic and cultural activity. North Norwegian cultural cooperation became even tighter in 1974, when the three counties collaborated to establish Landsdelsmusikerordninga [the Regional Musicians Scheme], an institution that was intended to promote professionalism in the musical life of the region. This was the result of a long campaign by the North Norwegian Cultural Council and cultural enthusiasts in the region, and it remains the only regional institution of its kind in the country.⁴⁶ On the political level, the most important event has been the establishment of the Regional Committee for Northern Norway in 1974, in accordance with a resolution of the North Norwegian county

councils. This was an extension of the work that had been done on the regional level for the Landsdelsplanen for Nord-Norge [the Regional Plan for Northern Norway]. The Regional Committee was to coordinate North Norwegian applications for the North Norwegian Funds set up under the auspices of Utbyggingsprogrammet for Nord-Norge [the Development Plan for Northern Norway] of the same year. In the 1980s, the Regional Committee was given a new lease of life, its secretariat reinforced, and it was given broader powers. It took an active part in work on the national regional reports. The Regional Committee exercised greater influence over the county councils and contributed to cooperation between them. Commercial policy was central, particularly those sectors that were most in focus at the time - competence development, information technology and tourism. The frequency of meetings increased, and more parties were represented in, and integrated into, this work.⁴⁷ In addition to this type of coordination of political activity in the region, there were more informal arrangements, such as joint meetings of the North Norwegian Storting deputies, which have secured North Norwegian interests in relation to many siting issues.

Clearly, the region did not thereby express itself with one voice. All was not regional harmony. There were enough internal tensions and regional rivalries, both in the Regional Committee and elsewhere. The Regional Committee was to begin with, at the end of the 1970s, completely overshadowed by the county councils, once they had been given a new lease of life in 1975 by the introduction of direct elections and broader powers. It even went so far that Troms County Council suggested that the Committee be abolished in 1982. In the 1990s, cooperation has been threatened by a schism between Nordland on the one hand and Troms and Finnmark on the other - a situation that is also connected with rivalry between Tromsø and Bodø for hegemony as the leading centre in the region. The above-mentioned cooperation in the Regional Musicians Scheme also threatened to collapse in the 1990s, as the culture sectors of the three county councils became more ambitious and were given wider powers. In the last few years, however, the advantage of standing together as a region in this sphere has gained acceptance. If the development has not been smooth and straightforward, my point is that Northern Norway nonetheless was coordinated in the political sphere to a far greater extent than any other part of the country. On this level, the region is thus at the leading edge of a trend in international development, which now, on the threshold of a new century, has also entered Norwegian public debate. Northern Norway is also in the lead in that the

region has since the early 1990s been part of a transnational region-building process in the "Barents Region", which extends across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Political agencies have been set up for this region, with a secretariat in Kirkenes since 1993. Relations between Northern Norway and north-west Russia have deep historical roots.⁴⁸

The struggle for North Norwegian identity in a globalised world

This region-building from above, within and below has undoubtedly contributed to a new North Norwegian unity, a North Norwegian identity. But what was the **content** of that North Norwegian identity, which was in many ways a new mass phenomenon in historical terms? All identity creation is based on undercommunication of internal differences and overcommunication of external ones, on making a difference between "them" and "us". How inclusive or exclusive identity movements are may vary - the content of a region's identity will therefore give rise to conflict. Some images of Northern Norway came to dominate more than others. A central source of the image created of the region from within the region itself is the book *Hva skjer i Nord-Norge?* [What's happening in Northern Norway?] which was published in 1966 by Ottar Brox, a native of the island of Senja. The crux of Brox's thesis was his desire to turn contemporary ideas of rationality and sound common sense upside down. Where the agents of modernisation saw irrational, old-fashioned dabbling that had to be abandoned in the name of progress towards a highly productive industrial society, Brox looked for the reasons behind the North Norwegian stubbornness in economy – in maintenance of North Norwegian the traditional household economy, primarily in the combination of fishing and farming. He showed that there were rationality behind the chose to maintain traditional way of life, and that it was not necessary to explain this in terms of conservatism, prejudices or ignorance. This was a lasting insight and an important contribution to reinforcing North Norwegian self-confidence, but at the same time he created an image of what was typically and positively North Norwegian, which he then defended consistently - the self-employed fisherman-farmer. He turned normal rationality on its head. In Brox's view of what was typically and positively North Norwegian there was little scope for the type of rationality that saw people moving in droves into the towns and cities and into industry.⁴⁹ I do not think it is putting it too strongly to say that this view of Northern Norway, an image of a region engaged in a steadfast struggle

against the forces of modernisation and clinging to a traditional economic pattern, came to dominate the regionalistic movement from the 1970s onwards.⁵⁰

In other words, a North Norwegian identity had emerged that was rooted in the fisherman-farming community and the past. And here, of course, lies a powerful paradox. First, the region has changed character totally in the post-war era. Whereas approximately half the workforce was employed in primary industries just after the war, the proportion was 2 out of 10 in 1970, and well under one in ten in the 1990s. Today there are far more teachers and researchers than there are farmers and fishermen in Northern Norway. Here, as elsewhere in the country, seven out of ten work in service industries - in the health and social services sector, education, hotels and restaurants, and the cultural sector. An original discrepancy in educational levels, living standards and leisure consumption has largely been eliminated. This is also reflected in settlement patterns. While one third of the population lived in towns and villages in 1950, the figure was one in two in 1970, and two thirds in 1990, as opposed to three quarters in the country as a whole. These are powerful social processes which have rendered differences between north and south virtually insignificant. Moreover, there have been changes on the cultural level which also help to eliminate regional discrepancies. A keyword in this regard is international youth culture, the foremost expression of globalisation in the cultural sphere. It is natural that these social and cultural processes must also represent a challenge for the North Norwegian identity constructed since the 1970s. Regional unity is also being challenged by a new identity movement, a revival of Sami and Kven or Arctic Finn identity in the 1980s and 90s, which underlines the multicultural dimension in the region. This multiculturalism had today been formally accepted by the authorities, by recognizing the saami people as an aboriginal group with the right to a kind of autonomy with their own parliament in 1989 and the arctic finns as a national minority in 1999.

The danger of exclusively associating an identity with particular ways of life is that it may lose its relevance, that it may not be possible to combine it with the other types of identity that emerge in late modern society. This may be a problem for young urban North Norwegians who no longer have links with the primary industries and the country, just as it may also be a problem for young Samis from coastal Sami communities or urbanised areas if Sami identity is exclusively identified with the culture of reindeer herding in some kind of "official Saminess".⁵¹ An essentialist, backward-looking regionalism threatens to lock itself

into a rearguard defence of something which no longer exists, rather than being proactive in realising the potential of the region on the new basis.

On the other hand there has been in the public policy from the early 1990s a revival of the attitudes and images of Northern Norway from the 1950s and 60s in regarding the region as “the problem of Northern Norway”. Once more the small-scale production in fishery and agriculture came under attack, and a policy for reindustrialisation was launched despite dubious outcome, both from an economic and ecological point of view. We are witnessing a kind of revival of fordism, in a period where flexibility and utilizing regional comparative advantages is being more and more important.⁵² A sterile dichotomy between a backward-looking regionalism from below and within and an old-fashioned modernistic view from above and outside has to a certain degree made the terms for the public debate on the policy for Northern Norway.⁵³

In the creation of identity there will be conflict between various groups within the greater unity one is trying to establish - which is to say that it will also be a power struggle. Precisely because North Norwegians are so diverse, it is not possible to create *one* identity with which everyone can identify. If identity is understood in an essentialist way, i.e., as unambiguous, virtually nature-given, then hierarchies will have to be constructed and boundaries drawn - some will be defined out of the group, and distinctions will be made between first- and second-class North Norwegians. What are the implications of these insights? Does it mean we should refrain from speaking of collective identities, such as for example a North Norwegian identity? That would be a very hasty conclusion. The creation of a North Norwegian identity that has taken place since the 1970s is genuine enough - just as the creation of a national identity in the last century was genuine. And just as there is in fact a Norwegian identity, there is today also a North Norwegian one. And just as the struggle for the nation state and identification with it represented important steps towards the democratic welfare state, so will the development of regional identities today be necessary in order to mobilise people to develop regional resources. And of course, there are important aspects of Northern Norway that can only be understood in terms of history, landscape and culture. The problem is not, therefore, the creation of a North Norwegian identity, but the belief that *the* North Norwegian identity has been created once and for all. A modern North Norwegian identity must be based on today's North Norwegian society, which means both emphasising

the potential of the region, in terms of clean, beautiful landscape, rich natural resources, traditions of flexible economic arrangements, and long traditions of cooperation across international frontiers and living in a multicultural society. But identity must not prevent us acknowledging problematic aspects, such as traditional Norwegian attitudes to minorities. It must not render the North Norwegian a figure of pity by concentrating only on the losses the region has suffered as a result of the great modernisation processes and cover up all the problems by reference to south Norwegian exploitation. It is a matter of bringing out both that which makes Northern Norway unique as a region, and those features of development that seem to be general. At the same time as people mobilise to protect regional interests and underscore their common interests, they must also have a keen eye for that which divides the region, in terms of conflicts of interest and power struggles. Such tensions between the general and the particular, between pluralism and unity, between problems and potential, must play a central part in critical regional history in the years to come.

¹ Steen Bo Frandsen: *Opdagelsen av Jylland. Den regionale dimension i Danmarkshistorien 1814-64*, Aarhus 1996 p. 14, 399, 564ff.

² Cf. the collection of articles in Stein Rokkan: *Citizens, Elections, Parties*, Oslo 1970.

³ Jörgen Gren: *The New Regionalism in the EU: The lessons to be drawn from Catalonia, Rhône-Alpes and West Seden*, Göteborg 1999.

⁴ Einar Niemi: Regionalism in the North: the Creation of North Norway, *Acta Borealia* 2-1993

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Drivenes, Einar-Arne und Hallvard Tjelmeland: Die nordnorwegische Arbeiterbewegung zwischen Region und Nation, i *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts Zur Erforschung der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung* (IGA), Heft 19/97

⁷ Einar-Arne Drivenes og Regnor Jernsletten: Det gjenstridige Nord-Norge. Religiøs, politisk og etnisk mobilisering 1850-1990, in Drivenes, Hauan og Wold (red.): Det gjenstridige landet, *Nordnorsk kulturhistorie* volume 1, Oslo 1994.

⁸ Einar Niemi: "Nord-Norsk reisning". Region og stat i Nord-Norge 1900-1940, paper to the conference «Stat, religion og etnisitet», Saariselkä May 1997.

⁹ Examples are: the daily *Tromsø* which from 1915 had the sub-title "Dagblad for Nord-Norge" [Daily newspaper for Northern Norway], *Nordlys* (Tromsø) which called itself "Socialdemokratisk dagblad for Nord-Norge" [Social Democratic Daily for Northern Norway] (but only in 1920), and *Lofotposten* ("Blad for Nord-Norge" [The Paper for Northern Norway]) from 1924-36, and "Hele Nord-Norges avis" [The Newspaper for All of Northern Norway] from 1936, and *Haalogaland* which bore the sub-title *Nord-Norge* from 1914.

¹⁰ The paper itself can no longer be traced. Its declaration is printed in a full-page advertisement in *Nordlys*, 7.8.1912.

¹¹ Based on a survey of the newspapers *Lofoten* and *Nordlys*, conducted by research assistant Marianne Olsen.

¹² Einar Niemi: Region og nasjon, in May-Brith Ohman Nielsen (red.): *Nasjonal identitet og nasjonalisme*, Oslo 1994 s. 77 og Niemi (1993) s. 40.

¹³ Stein Rokkan: Norway: Numerical democracy and corporate pluralism, in Robert A. Dahl (ed.): *Political opposition in Western Democracies*, London 1968.

¹⁴ Roger Lockertsen: Måltreising i Nord-Norge 1898-1940, unpublished thesis to the cand.philol degree in Nordic language and litterature, University of Tromsø 1984, kap. 1.

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- ¹⁵ Svein Sørensen: Frilynt ungdomsarbeid i Finnmark 1896-1940, unpublished thesis in history to the cand. philol. degree, University of Tromsø 1989. Arvid Hansen: Troms Ungdomsfylking. Litt om arbeid, lagsfolk og ledere 1905-1980, Tromsø 1988.
- ¹⁶ Einar Niemi: Nordnorsk lokallhistorie - kulturaktivitet, vitenskap og politisk redskap, *Heimen* 2/1987.s. 63.
- ¹⁷ *Håløygminne* 1920 s. 76.
- ¹⁸ *Håløygminne* 2/1975, Åsa Elstad: Manuscript to the history of Vågan folkehøgskole.
- ¹⁹ Niemi 1997 s. 11. Einar Niemi: Inventing a Region: The Case of North Norway, 1900-1940, paper to International Congress of the Arctic and sub-Arctic Region. Reykjavik 18-20 June, 1998.
- ²⁰ Niemi *ibid* s. 6f., Drivenes og Jernsletten s. 248ff.
- ²¹ Drivenes/Jernsletten s. 219 f.
- ²² Sørensen.
- ²³ Lofotposten 12.11.1938
- ²⁴ Lofotposten 15 og 16.11.1938.
- ²⁵ Hallvard Tjelmeland: Stat, ideologi og økonomi i Nord-Norge 1935-1995, in Øyvind Thomassen og Jostein Lorås (eds.): *Spenningen land. Nord-Norge etter 1945*, Oslo 1997 s. 186ff, Øyvind Thomassen: Herlege tider. Norsk fysisk planlegging ca. 1930-1965, nr. 18 in *Skriftserie fra Historisk Institutt*, Trondheim 1997 s. 87 ff.
- ²⁶ Sanne Steenberg Hansen: Tre forsøg på at planlægge Nord-Norge 1945-1951-1972, unpublished thesis in history to the cand. philol. degree, Univ. i Tromsø 1993 s. 43f.
- ²⁷ The achievements of the Tennessee Valley project are referred to in a note dated December 1944. Hansen, p.44.
- ²⁸ Cf. Bjørn Hersoug and DagLeonardsen: *Bygger de landet?* Oslo 1979 s. 108ff and Per Kristian Mydske: Utviklinga av regional planlegging i Noreg, in Jon Naustdalslid (ed.): *Kommunal styring. Innføring i kommunalkunnskap frå ein planleggingsynstad*, Oslo 1988 s.
- ²⁹ Øyvind Thomassen: Sivilisasjonens utpost. Forestillingar om Nord-Noreg som ein underutvikla og tilbakeleggjande landsdel, in Øyvind Thomassen og Jostein Lorås (eds.): *Spenningen land. Nord-Norge etter 1945*, Oslo 1997 p. 116.
- ³⁰ Inge Strand: Nordnorsk modernisering innanfrå, *Ottar* 2.95 s. 21.
- ³¹ *ibid* s. 23.
- ³² Trond Bergh: *Storhetstid (1945-1965)*, Vol. 5 of Edvard Bull, Arne Kokvoll, Jakob Sverdrup (eds.): *Arbeiderbevegelsens historie i Norge*, Oslo 1987, p.184. Cf. also treatment of this issue in Narve Fulsås: Kvifor fekk ikkje industrikapitalismen fottfeste i Nord-Norge? In Erik Oddvar Eriksen (ed.): *Det nye Nord-Norge. Avhengighet og modernisering i nord*, Bergen 1996, p.62f., and Øyvind Thomassen:
- ³³ Bergh s. 185.
- ³⁴ Are Veiåker: Gjennomføringa av Nord-Norge-planen 1952-60, unpublished thesis in history to the cand. philol. degree, Univ. of Trondheim 1974 s. 132ff.
- ³⁵ NOU 1972:33: Om landsdelsplan for Nord-Norge. Forslag til plan for utvikling av landsdelen.
- ³⁶ Bjørn Hersoug: Mellom politiske idealer og økonomiske realiteter - norsk distrikts- og regionalpolitikk i perioden 1945-85, *NordRefo* 1988 s. 197f.
- ³⁷ Hallvard Tjelmeland: Det seinmoderne Nord-Norge - likeretting eller regionalisering? in Erik Oddvar Eriksen (ed.) *Det nye Nord-Norge. Avhengighet og modernisering i nord*, Bergen 1996 s. 722.
- ³⁸ Tjelmeland 1997 s. 197 f.
- ³⁹ Christoph Harvie: *The Rise of Regional Europe*, London 1994, Peter Wagstaff (ed): Regionalism in Europe, *European Studies Series*, Oxford 1994, , Robert Bennett (ed.): *Territory and Administration in Europe*, London 1989.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Edmund Edvardsen: *Nordlendingen*, Oslo 1998.
- ⁴¹ Information from "Nord-Norge" 5/1954, Ytreberg 1962 s. 149, B.S. Tranøy: *Å eg veit meg eit land, Oslo 1959*, "Nordnorgelaget midnattsol 20 år. Jubileumsberetning 1971-1991".
- ⁴² Nils Aagaard-Nilsen: Knut Hamsun - fra norsk til nordnorsk forfatter, unpublished thesis in Nordic language and literature to the cand. philol. degree, University of Tromsø 1993.
- ⁴³ Finn Stenstad: Når samtidslitteraturen skaper identitet, in Einar-Arne Drivenes, Marit Anne Hauan og Helge A. Wold (eds): Det mangfoldige folket, *Nordnorsk kulturhistorie bind 2*, Oslo 1994.

⁴⁴ Helge Wold: Evig eies kun det tapte? op.cit.

⁴⁵ Narve Fulsås: Nordnorsk eigenart og nordnorsk identitet, in Øyvind Thomassen og Jostein Lorås (eds.): *Spenningenes land. Nord-Norge etter 1945*, Oslo 1997 p. 216.

⁴⁶ Randi Østhus: Musikksamarbeid over fylkesgrenser; fra fengende harmoni til ufullendt rapsodi. En institusjonell historie om Landsdelsmusikerordningen i Nord-Norge, unpublished thesis in political science to the cand. polit. degree, University of Tromsø 1999.

⁴⁷ Synnøve Dalmo: Fra symbolmarkering til politisk organ? En studie av endring og utvidelse av landsdelsutvalgets domene. unpublished thesis in political science to the cand. polit. degree, University of Tromsø 1991 and Eirik Fiva: En slagkraftig fellesnevner i "Det Grønne Arktis". *Landsdelsutvalget 1974-1999*, Bodø 1999.

⁴⁸ Olav Schram Stokke and Ola Tunander (ed.): *The Barents Region. Cooperation in Arctic Europe*, Oslo 1994, Geir Flikke (ed.): *The Barents Region Revisited*, Oslo 1998, Einar Niemi (ed.): *Pomor. Nord-Norge og Nord-Russland gjennom 1000 år*, Oslo 1992.

⁴⁹ Fulsås 1997 p. 213.

⁵⁰ Eli Høydalsnes has shown how such an essentialism has emerged in some parts of the north Norwegian art community in her *Møte mellom tid og sted. Bilder av Nord-Norge*, Dr.art. Thesis, Department of Art History, University of Tromsø, 1999.

⁵¹ Cf. Kjell Olsen: utfordringer og reorienteringer i forståelsen av det samiske, *Norsk Antropologisk Tidsskrift* 3-4/1997. Cf Vigdis Stordahl: *Same i den moderne verden. Endringer og kontinuitet i et samisk lokalsamfunn*, Dr.art. Thesis, Institute for social science, University of Tromsø 1994 chapter 21.

⁵² Hallvard Tjelmeland 1997 p. 201-06.

⁵³ A debate of the different images of Northern Norway has come about in the journal *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* (NNT). Peter Arbo: Alternative Nord-Norge-bilder, NNT 4/1997, Ottar Brox: Peter N. Arbos Nordlandsbilder, NNT 1/1998 and Peter Arbo: Falmende Nord-Norge-bilder, NNT 2/1998.