# Developing Local Community: Municipal Policies Oriented Towards Place Branding

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## Abstract

To date, there has been scant research on place broadcasting activities (PBA) such as promotion, marketing and branding in Norwegian municipalities, especially research into effects. This paper examines two rural Norwegian municipalities in which place branding - i.e. the planned and strategic external communication of place qualities - has been a prioritized policy strategy. The research was designed as a comparative case study based on data acquired via methodological triangulation. An analytical model served as a framework to identify the effects of a focus on place branding in non-core municipalities. In the model, policies oriented towards place branding are treated as a variable that is thought to influence (1) employment, (2) settlement, and (3) the desire for rural living. The analysis revealed no quantifiable effects of such policies when compared with 17 comparable municipalities. However, based on the qualitative data and analysis, the authors found effects related to the desire for rural living, implying arguments in favour of non-core regional policy and planning beyond a focus purely on growth. Our results seem to indicate that strategies oriented towards place branding should also focus on material issues, housing development and job opportunities for example.

## Introduction

Regional innovation, growth, and the reduction in disparities between regions that are economically leading and lagging behind are overriding goals of regional policies in Europe (Baumgartner, Pütz, & Seidle, 2013, Cooke et al., 2011). Concerns about increasing centralisation and rural depopulation in many countries in Europe, including Norway, have focused on population growth in rural and peripheral municipalities (e.g. Eimermann, 2015; Niedomysl & Amcoff, 2011). Irrespective of centrality, there is an ongoing competition between regions, places and localities to attract investment, businesses, residents and visitors (Malecki 2004; Zenker, Braun & Petersen, 2017). Policies on what Ma et al. (2019) term place broadcasting activities (PBA) – promotion, marketing and branding - in different types of location (e.g. urban, city, destination, place) have consequently been widespread in recent decades (Boisen et al. 2018; Ma et al. 2019, Kavaratzis 2020). This makes studies such as our investigation of two rural Norwegian municipalities (Rauma & Rindal) in relation to use of strategies orientated towards place branding of interest. The literature on place branding has to a large extent focused on cities, urban regions and places high up in the hierarchy of centrality (ibid.). However, Norway is an

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elongated country with a low population density, i.e. a large number of small municipalities and places which need jobs and have a declining population. This makes the focus on jobs and population development close to the core of local policies and a legitimate yardstick for local projects and activities. The use of policies and strategies related to PBA in the Nordic context of strong internal mobility, growing cities and shrinking populations at the periphery (Grunfelder et al. 2020), is somewhat different than that emphasised by most of the literature in the field.

Explaining growth and change in cities and regions on different geographical scales and contexts is one of the major challenges for researchers in the social sciences. All geographic levels in the economic system are contained within complex economic development processes that are shaped by an almost infinite number of forces over time (Storper, 2011), and the practices and instruments promoting local and regional development are constantly changing. Globally, an increasing number of cities, municipalities, regions and nations have adopted promotion, marketing and brand concepts as tools to increase their attractiveness in order to recruit investors, businesses and residents, as well as visitors and events (e.g. Gertner, 2011; Niedomysl, 2006; Pasquinelli, 2012). As Kotler et al. (1993, p. 37) have argued: "[…] Place marketing succeeds when stakeholders, such as citizens, workers, and business firms derive satisfaction from their community, and when visitors, new businesses, and investors find their expectations met." However, as pointed out by, for example, Vuignier (2017), Boisen et al. (2018) and Ma et al. (2019), there is no consensus in the literature and practice of place promotion, marketing and branding regarding the meaning of these concepts and their policy implementation.

Pike (2015, p. 176) points out that space- and place branding remains an emergent and growing field beset by fundamental and unresolved issues, for instance with regard to definition, conceptualisations and theorisation. As Kavartzis (2020: 25) argues, the distinction between the concepts "remained rather vague in the literature until, very recently, adequate explanations were provided in the insightful work of Boisen". Ma et al. (2019) show that promotion dominated the first phase of PBA-research (in the eighties), marketing the second phase (late eighties) and branding the third phase, with the concept of "city branding" gaining particular popularity. According to Boisen et al. (2018:6), place promotion is *supply-driven*, and the task is to increase attention on the place among selected target audiences, while place marketing is *demand-driven,* with the task of managing what the place offers (supply) and the demand of people in the selected target groups (ibid.). Place branding refers to the "development of brands for geographical locations such as regions, cities or communities, usually with the aim of triggering positive associations and distinguishing the place from others" (Eshuis et al. 2014:154). In Norway, the concept of 'reputation'[omdømme] has become increasingly popular (Elgvin, 2013, p. 6). Conceptually, place reputation management represents an important element in place branding (Boisen et al. 2018). The literature on reputation has been influenced by scholars of both tourism management and geography for decades. It is claimed that the reputation of a place reflects how *others see it* (the place) and *how it sees itself*; its management moves its reputation forward to where it *wants to be seen*. (Morgan et al. 2011, p. 17), or as Boisen (2018: 7, our

italics) formulates it: "In contrast to place promotion and place marketing, *place branding is identity-driven.* It represents an inside-out approach that seeks to express selected values and narratives of the place in question. *The task is a conscious effort to sustain and/or improve the reputation of the place; in other words, reputation-management*".

Many municipalities run their own projects or have combinations of fully or partly outsourced projects in cooperation with external partners to promote places as lifestyle choices through physical amenities and opportunities to secure genuine rural lifestyles (Lysgård & Karlsen, 2002). In Norwegian regional policy, '*blilyst'* and '*bolyst*' have been articulated as important concepts and goals of branding-oriented policies in non-core regions. The terms are difficult to translate but relate to 'place satisfaction', 'place attachment' or the 'desire for rural living' (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013). In this article, we have opted to use the latter meaning. Different definitions of such complex concepts may give different answers. There is a need to use approaches that are suited to include people's subjective perceptions of them in practice. Desire for rural living can be perceived as a motive for moving to or continuing to live in rural communities.

In 2007, 100 municipalities in Norway used specific slogans (Daler & Stafsnes, 2007), and the number is probably much the same today. However, as Elgvin (2013) has argued, there has been scant research on such issues in Norwegian municipalities.

At the start of the millennium, two peripheral Norwegian municipalities, Rindal and Rauma (in the county of Møre & Romsdal), opted to use policies oriented towards place branding to promote population growth. In this article, we elaborate upon the importance of brand concepts and projects for regional (municipal) development and illuminate the following research question:

- What effects related to settlement, employment and the desire for rural living can be identified in two municipalities related to their place-branding oriented policies?

In investigating this question, the aim is to contribute to comparative empirical research on the effects of branding-oriented policies as instruments in non-core regional development. Here, 'non-core' is an umbrella term featuring the attributes of the rural and/or peripheral (Baumgartner et al., 2013; Leick & Lang 2018). A further aim is to contribute to theory development in relation to such issues based on non-core north-European contexts.

## Review of literature on place and place branding oriented activities

Place broadcasting activities such as promotion, marketing and branding are about making places more attractive. Place is a complex geographical idea, and this complexity must be taken into account. An important element is to move away from a 'taken-for-granted' understanding of places, with place understood as an objective, measurable unit, towards an understanding based on relational factors and subjective perceptions.

Agnew and Duncan (1989) and Castree (2003) divide the concept of place into three main meanings: location, sense of place, and locale. *Location* refers to

a specific point on the earth's surface. *Locale* refers to the context and scale of people's daily actions and interactions. *Sense of place* refers to subjective feelings about places, including the role of places in people's individual identity and group identity. Sense of place concerns the relationship between individuals and the place, making it a key concept in discussions on place strategies oriented towards branding (Berg & Dale, 2004). These three meanings are analytical categories and will interact. For instance, "sense of place" cannot be seen as something isolated from the other aspects of place. Berg (2009) discusses the relevance of theories of place in an analysis of residential choice and mobility. She points out that residential choice is a question of key factors such as mobility, rurality, urbanity and home, all related to, and to varying degrees emphasized in, theoretical arguments on place, such as locality as residence. Localities are meeting places for social, material, and cultural relations that extend beyond the local (Berg, 2016). Relational processes build places stone by stone, elevate places, and create expectations and awareness. Berg and Dale (2015) promote a nuanced view of the relational understanding, perceiving places as events, places as movement and/or mobility, hybrid places – reflecting sociality and materiality, places as assemblages, and places as becoming. Place can be understood and based on a continuous discursive (re)forming through metaphors, allegories and representations. However, in this respect branding-oriented policies in the form of slogans and profiling have been key elements for many Norwegian municipalities. The notion of describing places as hybrid places, reflecting sociality as well as materiality, should be investigated as branding and reputation management could be seen as managing the materiality of a place through its sociality. The connection between management and material effects is also the focus of our study.

The rapid and global spread of place branding as a strategy for growth has received considerable criticism (Pasquinelli, 2012, p. 17). Several authors (e.g. Medway et al. 2015, Vuignier 2017, Bell 2016) question the effectiveness of place branding. According to Vuignier (2017, p. 447), the literature on place marketing and branding 'lacks empirical evidence and explanatory articles, meaning that the numerous hypotheses concerning its effects on attractiveness remain unsubstantiated'. Bell (2016, p. 247-248) summarises the main criticisms and shortcomings of place branding as: 1) practices designed for businesses and products cannot be translated to places or regions because they are more complicated than place brands have proven to be 2) not sufficiently comprehensive, 3) not sufficiently distinctive and too homogenous and 4) difficult to measure with regard to effectiveness.

A critical perspective might be framed either as being critical at a meta-level in analysing the policy shift from earlier paradigms of regional policy into a new paradigm focusing more on branding, marketing and reputation management, or more narrowly, simply critical of what types of action do work. At a meta-level, this shift reflects broader societal changes, such as those related to New Public Management (McLaughlin, Osborne, & Ferlie, 2002), neoliberalism (Harvey, 1989b) and new global patterns of capital accumulation, and thus mobile finance capital and footloose firms and people which constitute a new form of competition – a battle for attention - between places. This may be viewed as an extension of broadcasting activities such as promotion, marketing and branding,

which traditionally promoted single businesses and products, into regional development policy and complex geographical entities (Bell 2016). Nyseth (2009) refers to place marketing and branding as part of the neoliberal vision and a standard strategy used with the intention to transform places. Such a broad perspective is useful when engaging in critical discussion of the growing support for these types of strategies in regional development policies. Even though we do not use the term "neo-liberal perspective" as such, our vantage point is that from 1990 onwards, there was a shift in the direction of more corporate-inspired and marked-oriented perspectives, which, in addition to traditional place development, included perspectives from promotion, marketing and branding. This shift started with the emphasis on place promotion, but the orientation on branding has been growing in strength as we move forward in time, see e.g. Ma et al. (2019). Studies of policies oriented towards place branding may also have different ontological and epistemological positions, which Lucarelli and Brorström (2013) differentiate into six different perspectives (Productive, Co-productive, Consumer-oriented, Critical Structuralism, Critical Humanism and Appropriation). Our study focuses on the effect of this shift in two peripheral Norwegian municipalities and is probably closer to Critical Structuralism than Critical Humanism. As Lucacarelli (2017) claims, this new turn in regional development policies places branding-oriented strategies as part of discourses surrounding urban policies in general. An example of this is the rise and fall of the slogan "München ist bunt" (Munich is colourful) (Vallaster et al. 2018:56). This demonstrates that place brands are part of, and reflect, the general political debate, but also that sentiments on the ground can shoot down a brand if it is not seen as appropriate (Boisen et al. 2018). The intriguing question is – So what? This question is interesting because place brand-oriented initiatives are viewed by some, including local politicians and development agencies in Rauma and Rindal, as instruments for regional development.

Looking outside the traditional circles oriented towards place branding in regional development research, a discourse exists concerning the return of materialism. This re-materialisation of geographical studies takes as it point of departure that such phenomena are more than simply social constructions (Amin & Thift 2005:224), or "more than representational" to follow the title of Lorimer's (2005) article. Employment, places to stay, and people's experiences of their livelihood, are more than simply representations.

In a Nordic context, Bærenholdt and Granås (2008), and Nyseth and Viken (2009) have explored places, mobilities and reinvention strategies in non-core regions and places at the northern rim of Europe. Cassinger et al. (2019) have recently contributed to knowledge of the Nordic brand and its implications for place branding along three themes (poetics, practices and politics), rather than dealing with the instruments and effects of branding. Overall, there has been limited research on the effects of policies and strategies oriented towards place branding, but Niedomysl (2006) provides a survey-based overview of 220 Swedish municipalities' engagement in place marketing in order to attract inward migrants. The results show that this type of marketing has become more prominent in Sweden in recent years, but yield little evidence that the marketing has had any significant effects on migration flows. Additionally, Niedomysl has scrutinized the results of recent survey-based research on motives for migration

in the Nordic countries and found that the results emphasize the importance of employment-related motives. Individual and family needs, demands and specific preferences are central factors for mobility, and '*the attractiveness of places*' increases with the successive fulfilment of these factors. However, the more factors a migrant seeks to fulfil in his or her choice of destination, the fewer the destinations that are available (Niedomysl, 2006).

Work has frequently been shown by scholars to be the main motivation for moving, but that factors related to work also interact with other factors (Sørlie, 2006; Sørlie, Aure, & Langset, 2012). People's motives and preferences are influenced by the opportunities that exist and are adjusted during their lifecycle processes (Sørlie et al., 2012). Jobs seem considerably more important for the decision to move among highly educated migrants compared with migrants with lower educational levels (Hansen & Niedomysl, 2009; Niedomysl & Hansen, 2010). More people have preferences for rural residency in Sweden than the actual number of migrants to rural areas suggests, indicating a general potential for rural population growth (Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011). However, the aging population that remains means that the numbers of people moving to or having preferences for rural residence are too low to alter the depopulation trend (ibid.).

Eimermann (2015, p. 398) explores Swedish municipalities' international rural place-marketing efforts directed towards affluent Western European migrants in the Netherlands and argues that 'it is hard to distinguish the effect of rural place-marketing campaigns from the myriad possibilities for migrants to gather information' about potential destinations.

The intention behind the measures in Rauma and Rindal has been community development. In both municipalities, the branding goals identified in the municipal plans were population increase and strengthening of job opportunities. Critical research may then investigate whether those goals are achieved through such strategies and define a simple model looking at the interaction between strategies oriented towards place branding and the following variables as focused on in this article: (1) job opportunities/employment, (2) population development, and (3) the desire for rural living (Figure 1). The model also includes interaction effects between dependent variables, as well as accepting other (non-brand-project related) variables as relevant.

*Figure 1. Interactions between key factors.*
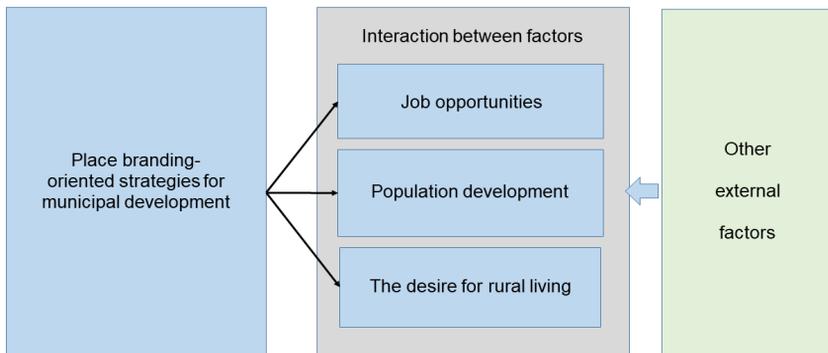
# Methodology

## Study design
A case study design (Yin, 2009) with two separate cases is used. The case selection can be based on Flyvbjerg's (2006 p. 230) notion of critical cases, based on the following criterion: "If this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases". The branding-oriented policies and actions in Rauma and Rindal are widely perceived as successful, and we can therefore argue that together the two municipalities constitute 'a critical case'. The fact that the two municipalities differ in size, centrality and economy strengthens that claim.

The three impact variables selected correspond to key goals in the two projects, implying the need for a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2007).

## Data collection and analysis
The data collection process started with a comprehensive study of three categories of documents: (1) descriptions of previous and existing local development projects and processes,[1] (2) evaluations of a range of development projects (e.g. Holm & Krokan, 2009; Holm & Stræte, 2006, 2008; Miljøverndepartementet, 2005), and (3) municipal documents. This gave us valuable information about the projects and the situation in the two municipalities.

Next, we conducted two initial group interviews in each municipality with representatives from municipal institutions and key development actors in the business community. The interviews included 3–5 informants, lasted 3.5 hours, and gave us important information on how the groups perceived the projects, their development, the actors involved, and results, which was helpful in developing our preliminary hypothesis.

In addition, we conducted 18 interviews by phone – lasting from 20-90 minutes - with informants selected from a national database of companies, crosschecked against existing lists of business representatives, companies, clubs, associations and individual names. We used the snowball method, also known as chain sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994), to gain access to additional informants. The focus group interviews lasted aroundabout 1.5 hours and included 16 and 14 residents respectively, divided into eight groups. A semi-structured interview guide was developed, focusing on the informants' perception of local development projects and activities, preferences and plans regarding the place, dwelling, and income. The three interview sections represented different phases that built on each other (Cameron, 2016; Krueger, 1994). Using qualitative methods made it possible to identify strengths and weaknesses in the two cases.

We also investigated possible effects on employment and population change through the use of official statistics from Statistics Norway (2013a). The statistical quantitative analysis followed a "non-equivalent control-group design" (Graziano & Raulin, 1989, p. 271), comparing the development of demographic and economic variables in the two cases with a control group of other structurally similar municipalities, selected on the basis of SSB's classification of Norwegian municipalities. The variables of (1) population, (2) restricted costs,

and (3) free disposable income were used, where 2+3 define the municipal economic conditions (Langørgen & Aaberge, 2011; Langørgen, Aaberge, & Åserud, 2001; Langørgen, Galloway, & Aaberge, 2006), with 2003 as a reference point. Based on the division used by Langørgen et al. (2006), municipalities in the same group were used from the three counties Møre og Romsdal, Sogn og Fjordane and Sør-Trøndelag. This resulted in a sample of 17 reference municipalities in the Rindal group and 8 in the Rauma group. The control group provides a representative picture of '*the average development*' for municipalities of the same classification as Rauma and Rindal. They were both selected for our study because they were perceived by key public institutions as forerunners and better than average at using strategies oriented towards place branding. Our basis is therefore a hypothesis that the effect in those two municipalities from such strategies will be greater than in the average comparable municipality, i.e. we do not base our argument on the fact that such strategies are not used at all by the reference municipalities. Although the design of our analytical model does not have the same explanatory power as a true experiment, we anticipated that our methodical triangulation and analysis would uncover 'breakpoints' in the development of the populations, employment and commuting in the two cases municipalities. To conduct this kind of analysis, we constructed a timeline of events in the municipalities based on the qualitative data and then compared the timeline with the quantitative development in the two cases, using the developments in the reference municipalities as controls (see figure 2 & 3).

Our methodological approaches were to some extent complementary regarding population development and employment. We had no statistical data for the variable 'desire for rural living', and consequently had to rely solely on the results of our analysis of the qualitative data.

In the subsequent section, we discuss our findings in relation to our analytical model (see Figure 1).

## Results and discussion

Both cases face challenges related to regional development, i.e. maintaining and developing settlement and employment, but they differ slightly in size and centrality. Rauma had 7,312 inhabitants living in an area of 1,502 km$^2$ on 1 January 2013 (Statistics Norway 2013b). The municipality includes several hamlets, as well as the small town of Åndalsnes, which is located a 1 hour and 45 minute drive from Molde, the county capital. The town is strategically situated at the inner end of Romsdalsfjord and at the end of the Romsdal railway, which connects the area with Eastern Norway. The highway between Eastern Norway and the western coast passes through Rauma and the municipality has some of the most spectacular mountain areas in Norway, such as Trollveggen, Romsdalshorn, and Trollstigen. The spectacular landscape means that tourism is an important business in Rauma, but there are also various types of manufacturing industry and service businesses in the municipality.

Rindal is much smaller than Rauma in terms of inhabitants (2,061 on 1 January 2013) and area (632 km$^2$) (Statistics Norway 2013). Rindal is an inland municipality, located about a one hour drive from Trondheim, one of Norway's

largest cities (191,000 inhabitants in 2017) and about 30 minutes from the town of Orkdal. Rindal is an agricultural community, but has also had a tradition of small-scale industry and entrepreneurship, and for several years was home to one of the leading ski manufacturers in Norway. A bakery and a second-home manufacturer are currently among the most important employers. Despite having a tradition of creating jobs in manufacturing industries, this has not been sufficient to halt the decline in population.

## Common and different characteristics

The cases have a long history of regional development projects and challenges in terms of economic marginalization. The marketing dimension has strengthened since the start of the new millennium, especially since 2005 (Rauma) and 2008 (Rindal). During the rollover of the municipal plan in Rindal (2006), it was decided that families concerned about nature, the environment, safety and job opportunities would be particularly targeted in the development work (Karlstrom, 2012). Figure 2 gives an overview of development projects in Rindal and the gradual shift in focus of policies oriented towards place branding.

*Figure 2. Timeline Rindal.*
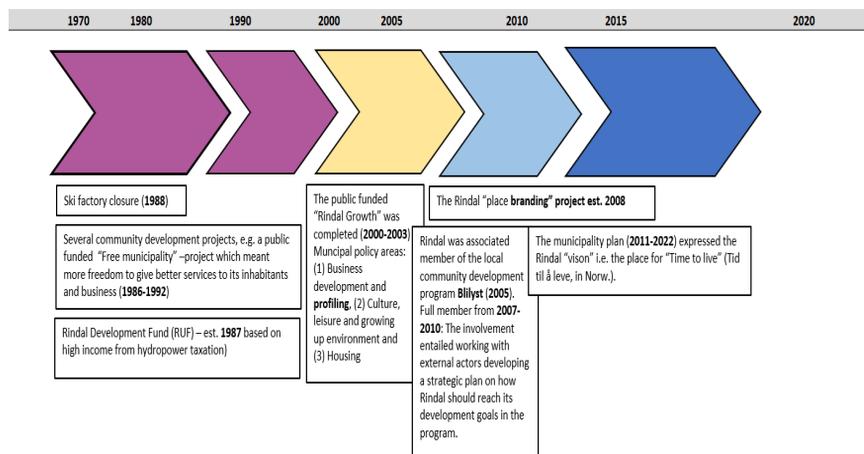


By contrast, Rauma has increasingly focused on branding through the development company Nordveggen, which has made extensive use of participation and a governance style of management. Figure 3 gives an overview of development projects in Rauma and the gradual shift in direction of policies oriented towards place branding.

*Figure 3. Timeline Rauma*
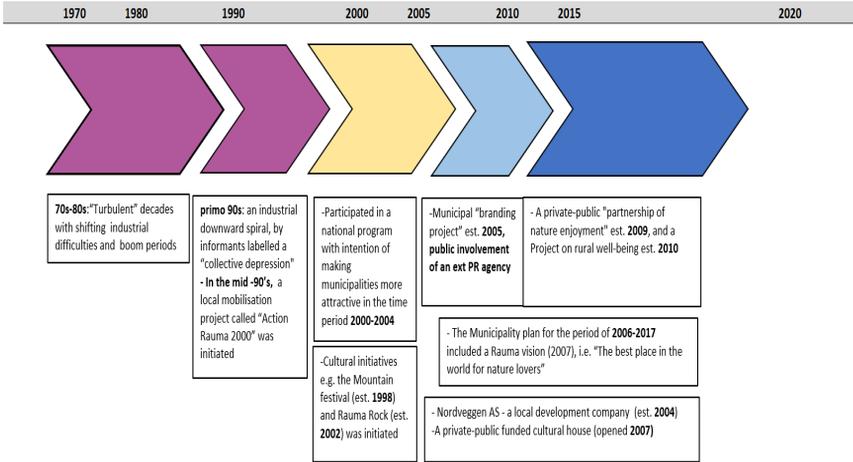


## Employment

One important dimension regarding regional development is stable or growing employment opportunities. If a specific project influences employment growth, it might be anticipated that there will be growth in employment in the period after the implementation of a successful branding-oriented policy. To ensure this, it would be relevant to check whether employment growth was not just a general trend, but something that could be attributed to the specific actions. To control for general trends, we compared the two cases with other municipalities. The changes in employment in the case municipalities and the reference municipalities are shown in Figure 4.

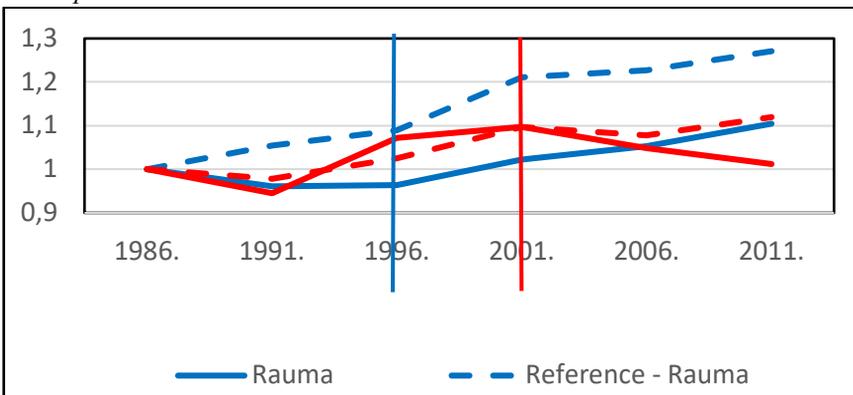*Figure 4. Change in employment in the case municipalities and reference municipalities*



Figure 4 shows a more negative development in employment for Rauma relative to the reference municipalities in the period before 1996, a year that seems to have marked a turning point. Development in Rauma subsequently

seems to be rather similar to the development in the reference municipalities. There do not seem to have been any clear turning points in the period after 1996.

The development in employment in Rindal seems to have followed the same pattern as in the reference municipalities. A closer look at the development reveals that the year 2001 may have marked a turning point, with the development taking a more negative direction than the reference municipalities. The trend since 2002 has been a relatively weak decline in the number of people in employment. According to Bråtå, Alnes, and Lundhaug (2016, p. 116), the relatively sharp decline in employment from 2008 to 2009 occurred because the administrative responsibility for 'substitutes' in the agriculture sector was formally moved from Rindal to a neighbouring municipality as part of an organizational change. In our study, there seems to be little reason to anticipate the place branding initiatives having any clear effects on employment.

## Population

One aim of the place marketing projects is to secure a stable or growing population. The development in population size in the two case municipalities was compared with the development in selected reference municipalities (Figure 5). It was also of interest to identify specific turning points in the size of the population in the municipalities. We used 1975 as point of reference and looked at the relative change in population size in the case and reference municipalities from that point onwards (1975 = 1).

*Figure 5. Population development in the municipalities of Rauma and Rindal compared with the reference municipalities.*
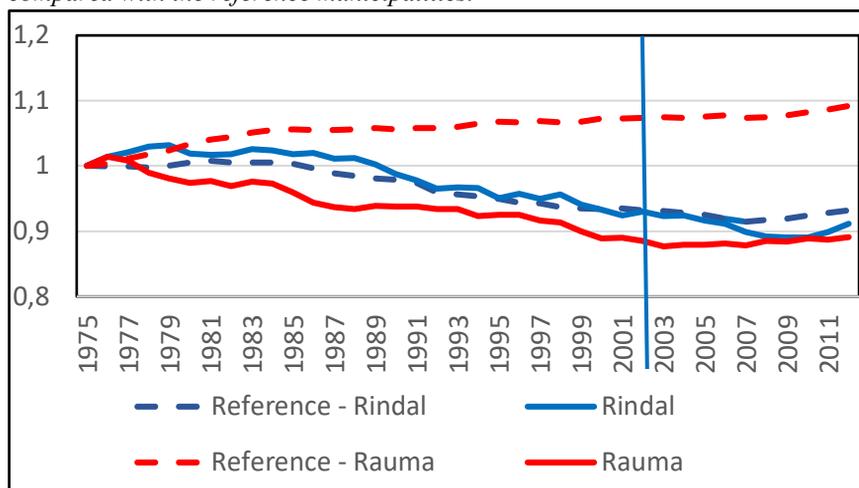


Figure 5 shows that Rauma appeared to have a more negative population development than the reference municipalities in the period 1975–2003. A turning point occurred in 2003, when the development became more similar to the reference municipalities, i.e. at the beginning of the timeframe, probably too early to be explained by the branding activities initiated by the development

company Nordveggen (established in 2004). Two specific development projects had started earlier: 'Rauma 2000' (in 1995) – focusing on future visions and relocation opportunities - and 'Tettstedsprogrammet' (2000-2003) - focusing on physical (built) place development. It is difficult to know whether those projects were the reason for the change, but they could have been part of the reason. None of those projects focused specifically on place branding. There were strong variations in net migration, especially before 1990, linked to periods of high levels of petroleum-related industrial activity in the municipality. The stabilization of net migration had also occurred before earlier development projects. Given our findings, it is consequently difficult to identify effects on population of specific branding projects. The interviews gave an impression of how people in Rauma perceived the effects of the work on managing brand reputation. The housing situation, integration, and intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship are examples of what the informants referred to as important aspects, and people involved viewed them and the related activities as successes.

Rindal seems to have had approximately the same population development as the municipalities in the reference group, and there is no reason to suggest that the development was any different from them. Our comparison of the changes in employment and population in Rindal show less of a decline in population than the development in employment would indicate. A smaller proportion commutes in the other direction towards the Trondheim region. The proximity to the urban region around Trondheim may constitute a significant difference from Rauma. This has also had administrative consequences, with Rindal transferring from Møre and Romsdal county to Trøndelag in January 2019.

## On the 'desire for rural living'

The 'desire for rural living' was mainly highlighted through our study's qualitative data. *Municipalities as places* will have different meanings for different groups, such as youths, the elderly, second-home owners, residents or tourists. Additionally, relations with other locations may differ between individuals and groups. People's changing experiences and relationships influence this dynamic understanding of places. The perspective can therefore also concern the importance of extra-regional relations, multinational enterprises, international markets and foreign industrial ownership. It is also relevant for efforts to understand the municipalities' involvement in national policies and programmes and the impacts of such programmes, of which there are several examples in both cases.

The branding of Rauma as 'the world's best place for nature lovers' (translated) has been a double-edged sword: The ambition is that such priorities are an element in stabilizing population development, help to provide the business community with skilled labour and improve the well-being of the municipality's inhabitants. On the other hand, according to some subgroups of informants, inhabitants and potential immigrants may not identify with the vision, and by this feeling alienated.

The Rauma identity, self-image and reputation is coupled to and managed by the Norwegian Mountain Festival (held since 1998), the annual Rauma Rock festival (held since 2002), the development-company (est.2004), and the culture centre (est. 2007), as well as the comprehensive development of hiking

destinations in the municipality (see figure 3): They were all referred to by several informants as examples of positive contributions in reducing barriers between local communities in the municipality and creating a common sense of place and belonging. However, informants also suggest that for many of the inhabitants and potential migrants to Rauma, the strong focus on the potential of activities in the surrounding mountains may also appear exclusionary.

Our findings also indicate limited progress on the physical development, housing projects and interaction between businesses in Åndalsnes, despite Rauma Municipality's role as a place of residence, a workplace and a place for visitors (i.e. for tourism), and thus for the credibility of the brand. Collective place branding is about citizens' physical presence, contributions and positive participation as part of the dissemination of local qualities and experiences to visitors and potential newcomers. As Zenker et al. (2017) argue, residents are an important target group for destination branding as they function as place ambassadors. However, as in this case, simplified messages might not be effective for complex brands. Residents have a wider knowledge of the place and might not agree with a simplified brand. For residents, positive attitude to place and place behaviour increases with a higher brand complexity. A positive relationship between brand complexity and place attitude and behaviour is stronger for residents than for tourists.

The Rindal interviews indicate perceptions of an attractive domicile, despite poor employment growth. Its location offers opportunities for people to commute to *live* in the municipality and *work* in neighbouring municipalities. However, is local and municipal enjoyment and pride a prerequisite for, or an effect of, the development work exemplified by the place branding policy, or does it arise from below? The latter notion is more in line with the literature on reputation which argues that such processes also come from below (see introduction and literature review), i.e. that a reputation is built on people's experiences more than just a designed brand. Our findings suggest that inhabitants' identification with the brand has resulted in a sense of pride and reinforced a strong sense of identity. However, the timeline of events in terms of community development has shown a society based on a collective spirit influenced by socio-cultural and politico-institutional factors over the years, such as a portfolio of local development projects, the sports club, strong traditions for many venues and a high commitment to volunteerism (see figure 2). Nevertheless, according to some informants, some individuals and groups experience marginalization and fall outside 'the mainstream' as successful participants and citizens in the 'five-minute society' (*5minutt-samfunnet*), indicating geographical proximity as a central brand element in Rindal, (see figure 2).

A relevant comparison is Lysgård and Karlsen (2002), who researched on peripheral municipalities that used such strategies to maintain the population level and attract new businesses and people. Vågå managed to attract people from urban areas through place broadcasting activities targeting families seeking to move away from a stressful urban lifestyle. This indicates a shift towards focusing on positive and more entrepreneurial perspectives of regional and local development. However, the shift was also a shift away from production towards consumption, i.e. different 'goods' one can attain in the area, not on how to

develop the area, although initiatives may be directed more towards attracting tourists than towards potential inward migrants (ibid). We did not measure growing attractiveness to tourists in our study.

Another problem with such strategies is that it represents a potential homogenization of place images, targeting urban, highly educated persons wanting a quiet new life in the countryside. This might have built a positive atmosphere around a specific place and pride, but it might also have contributed to a consensus that led to the exclusion of some sub-groups in the local community (Lysgård and Karlsen 2002), which, as discussed above, broke with the ideas of place diversity. This also implies a turn in the focus of competition between places and not a systemic focus on changing what rural places should be and how to develop them in a broader perspective.

In our cases, the municipal branding policies are new dimensions or approaches. The same changes occurred in both municipalities, but there were also some differences. Groups outside the public sphere, especially from the local business elite, were central in the Rauma brand initiatives, whereas in Rindal the initiatives largely grew out of a coalition of public institutions, namely the municipal administration and local business network. The focus also differed somewhat. The former has a dramatic mountain landscape, with features that led to its reputation as a destination for nature tourism and inspiring its branding strategy, anticipating that such branding would attract skilled and educated young people (see Cotgrove & Duff, 1980). However, as Nyseth (2009) points out, 'place branding does not do justice to the richness and diversity of places and their peoples'. We are thus back at the aspect of place diversity and brands that provides room for this diversity, i.e. a brand based on what Kjeldstadli (2008) labels 'cohesion in diversity'. A concept from another field of research illustrates the combination of accepting differences but at the same time including commonalities that bind the community together.

It is uncertain whether place branding based on 'cohesion in diversity' would be sufficient to draw people to Rauma, even if the brand and the qualities of the place were perceived as attractive. Would work opportunities, or more precisely the lack of them, be more important in people's decision-making? As Sørlie (2006) argues, throughout most of the 20th century, the settlement pattern in Norway was characterized by centralization, primarily occurring as (in)direct effects. Directly, as moving during adolescence entails that a certain percentage of the population in each cohort is more centrally resident as adults than as children. Indirectly, as the pattern of places in which the next generation of children grow up is influenced by their parents' original migration. As a result, an increasing proportion of all movements in Norway take place within metropolitan areas (Sørlie, 2006), not to non-core places such as Rauma.

The place branding in Rindal focused more on community relationships, expressed in slogans such as 'time to live' and 'the five-minute society', which envisaged a close society in which 'everything' was readily available within a 5-minute drive by car. Nevertheless, although the brand profiled the idea of a quiet and easy rural lifestyle, it is not necessarily enough to persuade people to move to the municipality.

A conceptual place-analysis might start with 'sense of place', meaning being an attractive place where things happen locally through people moving to the

place, starting up businesses, and developing the community. In opposition, the localization of business is a precondition for attracting settlement, business activities and job opportunities. Temporary visits and degrees of permanent residence may also give people a sense of place. Based on data from a Norwegian study conducted in 2008 on motives for dwelling and moving, Sørlie et al. (2012) show that work was the main motive for young people who moved to cities and those who moved to the periphery of cities. In areas where a large number of people commute to their workplace, moving is mainly justified in terms of housing or lifestyle. This also seems to have been the case in Rindal and Rauma.

The introduction of the branding elements into the development policies in our two cases has not contributed to a clear break in the development of employment and population. Nevertheless, there might have been differences in the development. The Rauma community is bigger but more isolated than Rindal, in regard to both area and numbers of inhabitants. Compared with other, structurally similar municipalities, the branding approach in Rauma does not seem to have changed the development track in the municipality. Rindal seems to have had a bigger loss of job opportunities than expected, given the development in the population. A relevant explanation for this is that more people have been commuting out from the municipality to Trondheim and elsewhere for work. A sense of belonging (i.e. a sense of place) may have contributed to people's desire to stay in Rindal despite having to commute for work, the data is not clear on whether this is connected to the place branding or not. However, the qualitative data shows that satisfaction with the living conditions may slow down willingness to move. Rauma has other contextual variables due to its longer commuting distances to workplaces, which nurtures Rauma's stronger local business community due to its isolation. As argued by Sørlie et al. (2012), place-related factors and the physical environment are important for staying, while family-related motives are especially prominent among those who have moved over a short distance and outside metropolitan areas.

## Conclusions

There has been an extension of branding-oriented activities such as promotion, marketing and branding, which have traditionally promoted single businesses and products, to regional policy and complex geographical entities (Bell 2016); it has evolved from being a tool for attracting tourists and business to becoming a fundamental part of public planning and the development of places and regions. The two cases have a long history of municipally initiated development projects, but the content has changed over the years. They have mainly had a broad agenda of networking and specific initiatives based on starting up specific activities. In the period after the turn of the millennium, place branding dimensions have become central in the policies of both municipalities.

Based on our findings, the introduction of such approaches does not seem to have changed the pattern of development in either of the two municipalities compared with other, structurally similar, municipalities. However, we do not know what would have happened in the communities if there had not been such

priorities and activities. European regional policy and planning trends mean that such initiatives are common, and in a situation where most municipalities in the urban-rural axis have similar projects, they end up having little effect due to the "stalemate" between competing communities.

Niedomysl and Jonasson (2012, p. 223), argue for a more rigorous approach to the scientific study of such issues, suggesting a conceptual framework based on spatial competition for capital, and demonstrating that testable hypotheses can be deduced from the framework to provide a structure for research. Their argument is that empirical testing of such hypotheses would significantly advance our understanding. We agree with this and suggest that our approach to testing employment and population statistics against references for relevant historical turning points is an attempt in that direction.

The two cases were represented by engaged citizens and organizations concerned about population development, job opportunities and the desire for rural living. Job and housing opportunities are of particular importance for the long-term sustainability of the local communities. A lack of attractive jobs, housing and amenities will consequently influence the *desire for rural living* and vice versa. The case of Rindal only represents an argument in favour of the impact of place branding if conditions such as regional job opportunities are in place. The case of Rauma indicates that the homogenization of a brand can be a double-edged sword, in that it both attracts some groups in society and simultaneously alienates others. Putting both Nyseth (2009) and Bell's (2016) arguments together, our claim is that place reinvention, which is about changes in the industrial base – namely, how economic restructuring is followed by a redefined meaning of place – is relevant. Place branding - oriented policies should be in accordance with possible development routes that are open for the local community, including its cohesion and diversity. Supplementing place branding and the development of reputation with place reinvention consequently indicates 'that something has been left behind in terms of different audiences, domains and sectors of place, through both a territorial (places as scalar and bounded) *and* relational (places as open and unbounded) understanding and approach.

The structures of centralization and demographic development, as well as other forces on the centre–periphery axis, are so strong that it is difficult to reveal quantifiable effects of the place branding initiatives, indicating that materiality cannot be neglected in policies oriented towards place branding. The sizes of the population in our case municipalities will probably continue to develop, irrespective of place branding projects to recruit inhabitants to most inland peripheral areas, implying avenues for policy and planning beyond the growth paradigm in non-core regions (Leick & Lang 2018). However, longitudinal studies may identify long-term effects and implications that were not identified within our timeframe. Given the closeness to the urban region of greater Trondheim, the estimates for Rindal's population by 2040 are much more positive than for Rauma (Statistics Norway 2018).

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## Notes

[1] These included municipal plans and strategy documents, project descriptions, annual reports, Municipal websites, private sector service facilitators' websites and other relevant material available