

V.1. ALVDAL IN NORWAY: Building on an entrepreneurial spirit

By Mari Wøien and Karen Refsgaard, 2018/2019

Abstract

Why are some municipalities better than others at deploying their resources, attracting people and creating jobs? This was the key question studied in this analysis of the attractiveness of 14 rural municipalities in the Nordic Region.

The 14 areas selected are all defined as attractive in the sense that their populations and the number of people in work have increased in recent years. The nature of the boost to employment in some sectors has been identified by means of shift-share analyses to determine how much of the change is attributable to specifically local factors.

Interviews then probed key stakeholders about motivation, working conditions, job creation and living conditions. These interviews were with public sector representatives (e.g. mayors and heads of planning and development), business representatives and entrepreneurs, high school students and people from the education sector, as well as families. Combined with analyses of other data and information, the interviews helped us to understand why some places do better than others.

Description and overview of the municipality

Alvdal is a geographically large (but demographically small) municipality in the north eastern part of central Norway. The municipality borders Tynset in the north, Rendalen in the south and east, Stor-Elvdal in the south and Folldal in the west. Riksvei 3, national road number three, runs through the municipality, connecting the south of Hedmark to the county of Trøndelag. The county municipality renamed Riksvei 3 as the 'the Green shortcut'⁸ in June 2018 (Rv3, 2018). Alvdal is also served by Rørosbanen – the trainline connecting Trondheim to Oslo.

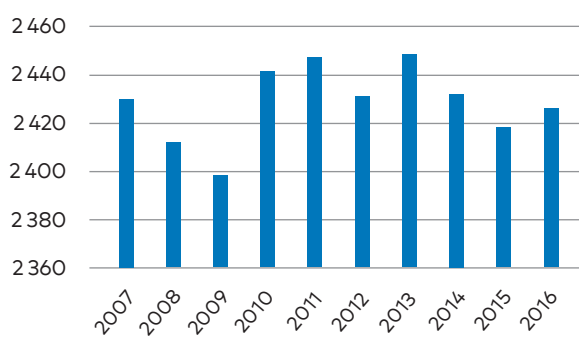
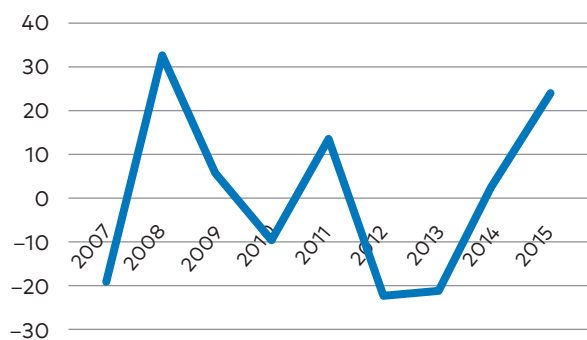
8 The 'Green Shortcut' is a collaborative tourism project facilitated by the Visit Elverumsregionen- organisation, promoting a road through Østerdalen which takes 45 minutes less to travel as an optional way of reaching Trondheim through the traditional Gudbrandsdalen – the Gudbrand's valley. The organisation promotes events and attractions along the road, helping passers-by to find suitable accommodation, eateries and historic sites. Although Alvdal is not part of the organisation, events and sights are promoted on the Green Shortcut's websites.

Alvdal is ideally situated, close to the regional centres of Tynset and Røros municipalities, which has probably helped maintain a relatively stable population throughout the last decade (figure V.1.1.). Though the projections indicated a significant out-migration, the municipality has in fact seen a small but steady increase in its population. According to Statistics Norway (SSB), 2,420 people currently live in Alvdal, with a slight increase expected to 2,446 in 2030 and 2,531 in 2040. The municipality is comprised of 16 mountain hamlets⁹.

Within the county of Hedmark, Alvdal is one of the municipalities with net in-commuting, sharing its labour market with Tynset especially, and also to a lesser degree with Hamar, Folldal, Tolga, Ringsaker, Elverum, Rendalen and Os (SSB in County for Hedmark, 2017).

Since 2003, Alvdal, Tynset, Folldal and Rendalen have been developing a well-functioning inter-municipal collaboration, including a focus on their internal ICT services, according to Alvdal Municipal Interviewees. Joint decision making helps to facilitate collaboration between schools, financial services and staff, and also helps when overcome the problems and drawbacks associated with running small municipalities. According to an interviewee in the Alvdal municipality, the decision to run joint systems also helps guarantee a critical mass of staff with sufficient experience and competence in child protection and other disciplines requiring particular levels of expertise. The municipality holding the position of chair of the collaboration delegates certain areas of expertise to other municipalities. This is a way of recognising and utilising the area of expertise held by the administrative manager (rådmann, or administrasjonssjef). Alvdal's expertise is in agricultural and environmental management.

9 Hamlets in Alvdal: Strand/Barkald, Plassen, Brandvålen, Plassmoen, Lian, Hauan, Huseidalen, Moan, Sjurdhusvangan, Baugen, Steivanglia, Tangensætra, Strand, Strømmen, Strømsøyen, Tronsvangene.



Figures V.1.1. and V.1.2. The change in population from 2007 until 2016. The total population from 2007 to 2016

Aldersfordelning

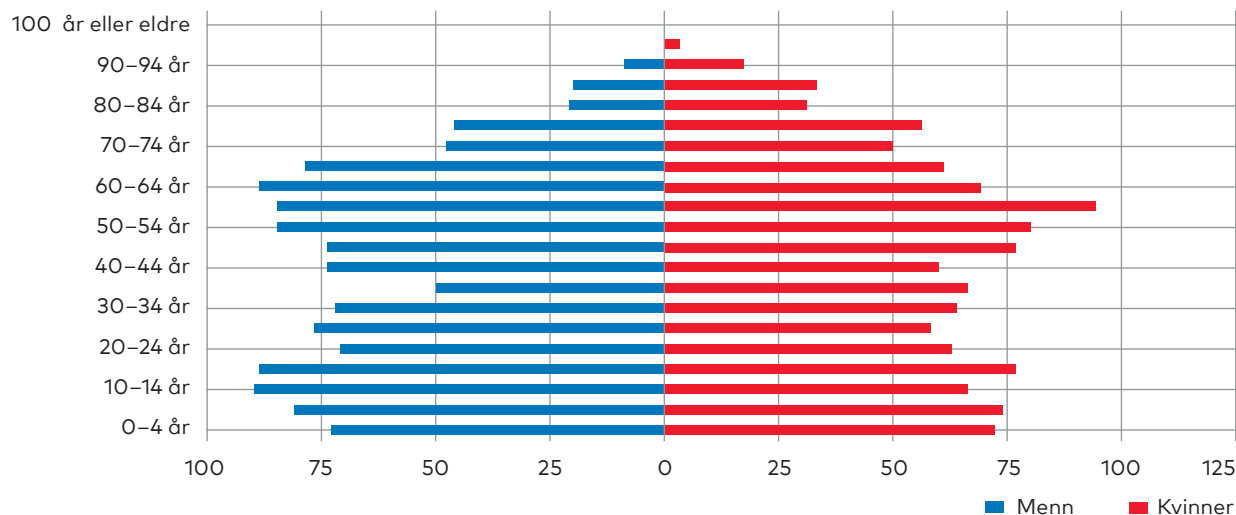


Table V.1.1. Age distribution in Alvdal as per 1 January (Statistics Norway, 2019).
Kilde: Folkemengde, Statistisk sentralbyrå

Demographic trends

The municipality has observed a steady migration to and from Alvdal each year (Alvdal Municipal Interviewees). This is confirmed in the Figures V.1.1. and V.1.2., which show that the population remained stable over the last decade, starting at 2,426 in 2016 and ending with a slightly positive net change.

The majority of the population is aged 40–70, and there was a slight increase in the number of people aged 70+ a slight increase in older people (SSB, 2019; Alvdal Kommune 2017). The number of people aged 40–67 suggests a steady supply of labour. This buttresses the perception of a relatively balanced population held by key actors in the municipality, despite the fact that there is a slight birth rate deficit of 20–30 per year (Alvdal Municipal Interviewees).

Although the challenges associated with attracting new settlers to the municipality are real, Alvdal's situation is similar to other municipalities in rural areas throughout Europe and the world (Alvdal Kommune, 2017). Creating an ever more attractive municipality with real options and opportunities for all is necessary in order to keep and entice existing and prospective 'Alvdøler'.¹⁰

Labour market and employment

Alvdal's labour market is relatively traditional, with the majority of women working in the public sector and the majority of men in primary or secondary industries (see <https://www.ssb.no/arbeid-og-lonn/statistikker/regsys> for further de-

¹⁰ Name for people living in Alvdal.

tails). In Synnøve Finden, the gender distribution is 38% women and 62% men. Of the men, 85% are in the skilled employee bracket. Among the women, the number of unskilled workers is much higher. Although work roles are gender-neutral by nature, technical positions such as electro engineering, bioengineers, dairy plant production specialists (meierist) and automation technicians tend to draw either men with families or single men to Alvdal (Interview 10). On the other hand, skilled women tend to work elsewhere due to the lack of relevant jobs in Alvdal (Interview 10). Another trend seen in Synnøve Finden concerns people's unwillingness to move. Whereas job applications used to come from throughout the country, this is no longer the case according to our interviewee. That observation is also in line with Kann et al (2018), who document that the lower the unemployment, the more restricted the mobility.

The majority of the population work in secondary industry, hence the importance of the few large industrial sites in the area. Services also play a major role in the labour market, alongside the public sector, the largest one, which embraces jobs in healthcare, geriatric care, social services, and education (SSB, 2019; Alvdal Kommune, 2017b). In terms of gender, women make up 78.2% of the workforce in the public sector. About 50% of the adult population has completed upper-secondary school, and one-fourth has a higher-education degree. One-fourth of the population has completed lower-secondary schooling, and a minority either did not respond to this question (SSB, 2019).

Although 36.6% of the population live on farms, the primary sector, including fishery and forestry, is still only the fourth largest employer in Alvdal (SSB, 2019). The local business development plan also says that although the number of employees in agriculture is declining, productivity still remains high (Alvdal Kommune, 2017).

Existing opportunities

Figure V.1.3., looking at the distribution of jobs in 2016, shows the local employment effect and the predicted shift in employment for the period 2017-2016. The manufacturing, construction, transport and storage, education, human health and social work sectors all demonstrate a positive local employment effect, implying either a higher than expected growth in jobs, or else a smaller than anticipated decrease in jobs in the period 2008-2016. This notably positive local employment effect in

several sectors was investigated in greater depth and confirmed by interviews carried out in Alvdal. The vitality of the labour market was repeatedly mentioned by interviewees as one of the key success factors for maintaining a steady population. Whether it is the availability of jobs, the nature of the jobs offered or the ability to create new businesses through entrepreneurship, perceptions of the labour market are relatively positive (Interviews).

A few industries have emerged as dominant in Alvdal. They stand out because of their different and apparently unrelated nature. As industrial pillars they help create a stable labour market and economic diversity. According to the head of administration in the municipality Alvdal performed among the best municipalities for job security in the country in a Nationwide survey, the so-called Bærebjelkerapporten. In fact, Alvdal climbed all the way to the top in the Nord-Østerdalen area. Its performance may be connected to the availability of permanent jobs in secondary industries in the area. Drawing on existing competences in machine operations and transport, there seem to be signs of de facto smart specialisation centred around advantages that the national road, Riksvei 3, provides. This has allowed for diversification within areas of distribution and transportation, on account of its natural position as a connecting node between the cities of Oslo and Trondheim.

For the purpose of this case study, three of the largest employers outside the public sector were interviewed: Gjermundshaug AS, Espeland Transport AS and Synnøve Finden AS. Alvdal Skurlag, one of Norway's largest producers of lumber for external use as building material is another important local business.

Gjermundshaug AS is a family-owned construction company, established in 1949, with subsidiaries providing a variety of services along the construction value chain (Gjermundshaug AS, 2019). Its presence in the Alvdal labour market has contributed to a steady flow of recruitment to the business through apprenticeships and further education of its employees. This is part of a conscious strategy for the future. The fact that the company takes skills enhancement seriously has encouraged the local population to make the most of the opportunities available. The company's long history has produced a high level of expertise in the field of construction, which has clearly played in its favour. Gjermundshaug employs people in a variety of positions, ranging from machine operators to

Alvdal – employment 2008–2016

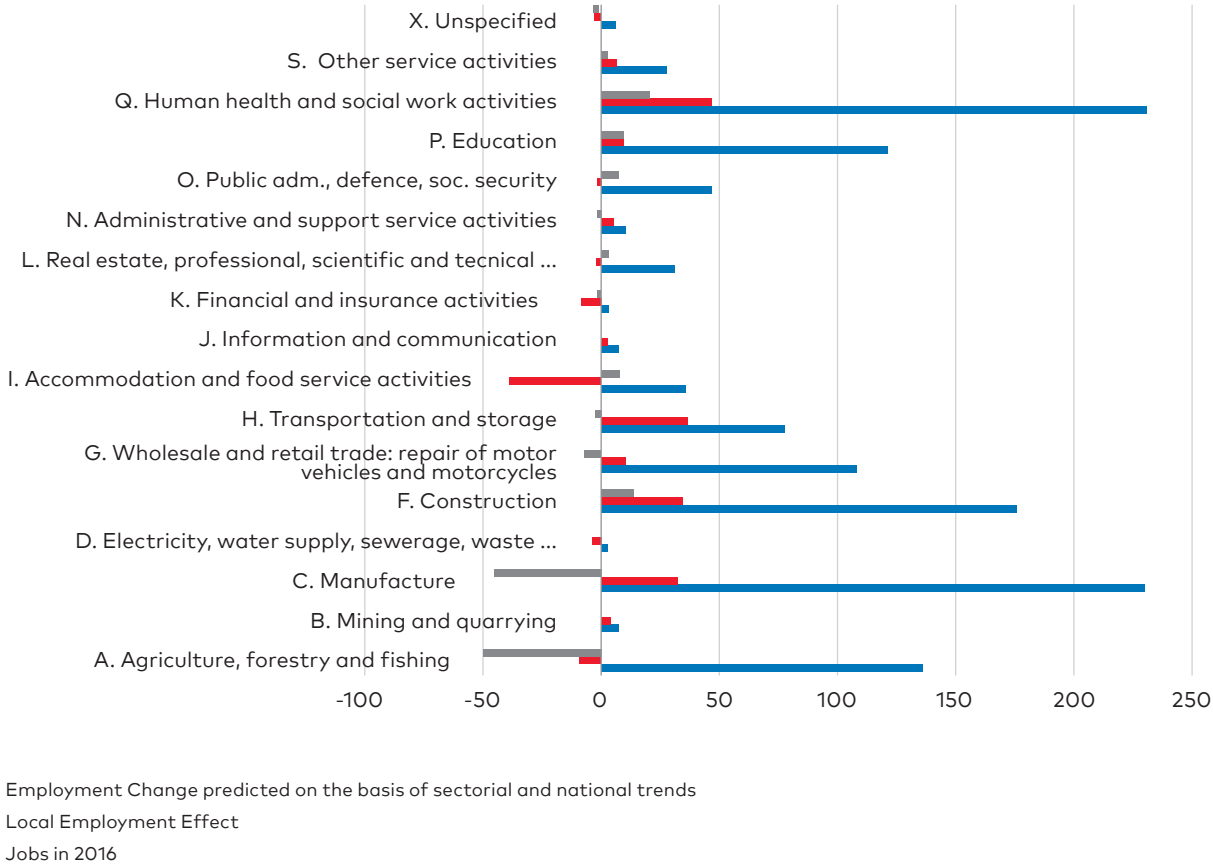


Figure V.1.3. Employment at sector level in 2016, the local employment effect, and the sum of expected national and industrial sector changes for the period 2008 to 2016.



Photo left: Karen Refsgaard. Photo right: Courtesy of Espeland Transport.

Jobs in Alvdal									
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Jobs in 2016
A. Agriculture, forestry and fishing	196	188	200	186	161	166	172	149	136
B. Mining and quarrying	3	3	3	3	3	4	5	7	8
C. Manufacture	243	239	226	211	202	209	221	222	230
D. Electricity, water supply, sewerage, waste management	6	9	9	6	9	5	4	7	3
F. Construction	127	136	145	165	179	196	195	200	176
G. Wholesale and retail trade: repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	105	107	103	104	105	103	97	101	108
H. Transportation and storage	43	57	57	61	59	67	62	80	77
I. Accommodation and food service activities	67	34	31	28	25	30	36	37	36
J. Information and communication	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	5	7
K. Financial and insurance activities	12	15	11	7	9	6	7	4	3
L. Real estate, professional, scientific and technical activities	31	38	35	37	24	31	43	24	31
N. Administrative and support service activities	6	4	6	16	15	15	8	10	11
O. Public adm., defence, soc. security	41	41	42	53	55	55	48	46	47
P. Education	102	111	118	108	114	112	114	119	121
Q. Human health and social work activities	163	170	166	184	184	192	175	219	231
S. Other service activities	19	20	22	18	22	23	27	27	28
X. Unspecified	6	5	7	4	11	10	9	9	6
SUM	1174	1180	1184	1194	1180	1227	1227	1266	1259

technical and engineering operatives (Interview 1). Their expertise has also been deployed to develop autonomous dumpers that can also be adapted for military use, e.g. to prevent injuries caused by dud explosives on former artillery ranges (Interview 1).

Espeland Transport AS is a transport firm located along the national road Rv3 between Oslo and Trondheim. Since this road is the main trans-

port link for freight transport, nearly twice as many trucks use it compared to E6 (Europe Route 6) through Gudbrandsdalen in to the west of Østerdalen (Interview 1). The reason for this is its relatively flat topography, with no steep mountain climbs, stable weather conditions throughout the year, and a slightly shorter overall route.

The owner started out with a single lorry in the 1970s and the number of employees and business

opportunities has increased steadily. Although from an agricultural background, family circumstances led the owner to find alternative employment opportunities. Today, Espeland Transport employs 95 people, in addition to the CEO. There are 88 drivers, 75 lorries and eight people working in the administration. The company also has several subsidiaries, including Inge Espeland AS transport and equipment rental, and Paureng Eiendom (PE). PE is a real estate company responsible for the development of terminals for bus services, as well as renting out bus garages to external firms, running a tire shop and a truck garage, and maintaining office buildings on the premises. Espeland Transport employs drivers from Norway and from abroad, though the majority are Norwegian. Most of their services are provided in Norway and stretch between Stavanger in the south west and Tromsø in the north. It also has transport services commissioned from companies abroad in its portfolio, but due to relatively high labour costs these are few and far between (Interview 3).

Synnøve Finden AS plays an important role in the overall labour market in Alvdal. Establishing production in Alvdal in 1995, Synnøve Finden started production in Alvdal in 1995, moving into premises vacated by the major dairy producer TINE after a round of restructuring. It saw significant potential as a result of the dairy plant's location and the existing know-how. The municipality also came on board early on in the process and provided (Interview 10).

The scale of development in the dairy plant has been formidable. Starting out with 12 permanent positions in 1995, the Synnøve Finden branch in Alvdal has grown to host over 115 full-time equivalent positions. It now has a total of 120 employees. Synnøve Finden has several creameries, cheese factories and distribution centres across the central belt of Norway. The company also produces fruit and berry concentrates for both their own yoghurt production and that of others, as well as acting as a distributor and reseller of other types of imported goods and products (Interview 10). Despite recent automation, the company's growth has generated new opportunities for its employees. Synnøve Finden's ability to absorb employees made redundant in other businesses has also contributed to a low level of unemployment in the area. According to our interviewee at Synnøve Finden, by 2006 the municipality had lost a total of 60 jobs in various industries. But the presence and

growing strength of Synnøve Finden helped stem unemployment in Alvdal, which was as low as 0.6% in 2018 (Statistics Norway, 2018b).

Entrepreneurial spirit

in the examples of Espeland Transport, Gjermundshaug Gruppen and Alvdal Skurlag show that business start-up and development opportunities are important factors in the continued thriving of small municipalities like Alvdal. The inventive and entrepreneurial spirit was highlighted as one of the key characteristics of the Alvdal spirit by the majority of our interviewees. Alvdal's ability to thrive, despite being located in a sparsely populated area, is the result of its population's ability to adapt and specialise. As one of the interviewees said: *"Our biggest advantage [as a municipality] is the urge to create something. That spirit has always been here."* This relates not only to entrepreneurialism, but also to finding new, innovative solutions within existing businesses. Looking at statistics we can see that Alvdal was the municipality with the third highest increase in jobs 2010–2016. This was above the national average (See: <https://www.hedmark.org/globalassets/hedmark/statistikk/dokumenter/naringsliv-og-arbeidsplassutvikling-2017.pdf>). The region in which Alvdal is located actually has the lowest proportion of public sector jobs.

Moreover, the encouraging of entrepreneurialism starts at an early age. The local high school, Storsteigen, qualifies every other year to participate in the national contest organised by *Ungt Entreprenørskap* (Young Entrepreneurship), a non-profit organisation which is part of the worldwide Junior Achievement network. The ability to encourage young people in entrepreneurial activities is important for an overall sense of achievement among the pupils at Storsteigen. Their track record places the school at the very top in the county. Their most recent contributions to the contest were based around the repurposing of old boilers for alternative use, as well as products related to agriculture. As interviewees from the municipality said: *"You're allowed to be good at things in Alvdal. Doing a good job and persevering at what you do is highly regarded."*

Municipal and public policies to enhance attractiveness (from interviews with the mayor and municipal strategy documents)

In interviews with key players in the municipality, it was clear that the focus on creating a sufficient number of jobs with the skills and competencies required by employers has been an important component in ensuring that the municipality is attractive (Interview 1). That includes conversations with the existing businesses about the need to think consciously about their existing and future requirements for skilled labour, including a focus on attracting young people with apprenticeships. The municipality encourages such schemes and has been open for dialogue with companies in other ways, in an attempt to meet their needs. Industry itself is also active, connecting with the younger generation, creating new work opportunities, and developing processes and products. Alvdal is also home to several entrepreneurs. Overall it embodies the previously mentioned 'entrepreneurial spirit' which seems to have caught on with the local population.

Creating attractive rural areas includes both a favourable framework for business development and factors and conditions that minimise the difficulty of migrating to them. This means ensuring the existence of highly skilled jobs, a good primary and secondary education system and targeted marketing of the advantages of living in rural areas where people live and work close to nature. *"The municipality must be able to offer to a holistic and diverse locality,"* as one of the interviewees put it. *"We are also looking at bettering the fibre network connection. People bring their jobs with them to Alvdal from Oslo, or else they start new businesses here."*

Creating attractive spatial conditions for business development (interviews with business owners and public officials)

The municipal plan for business development clearly states that the municipality must play an active and enabling role for future development, with an emphasis on creating favourable frameworks for business. Moreover, the area and building plans, and social development plans, need to correspond with plans for business development, resulting in a holistic and interdisciplinary approach despite a comparative lack of resources for direct support. The municipality has established a business development fund for local companies (Alvdal Kommune, 2017b). Alvdal has also opted not to have a

business consultant so that companies can establish a direct dialogue with head of administration and mayor. Thus, the assistant administrative manager in Alvdal acts on an ad hoc basis in business development matters (Interview 1). That creates direct contact between all relevant departments involved in municipal planning. It provides a better overview of the state of play and avoids unnecessary bureaucracy. Such an approach is considered vital in a small municipality like Alvdal (Interview 1). Espeland Transport is one of the businesses which has benefitted from this direct contact. *"We have never received a 'no' from the municipality when it comes to investment"* (Interview 2).

Alvdal's business development plan embodies a clear vision of strength coming through dialogue and collaboration with local companies. Areas of special focus are decided on an annual basis as part of the overall action plan for the municipality (2017:5). However, significant time and resources have been allocated over the past five years in order to put in place good planning documents, infrastructure investment, and developing land ready for business establishments, according to our interviewees. This is an important measure, according to local companies.

However, the most important factor of all is that the municipality is willing to support new ventures by providing an arena for growth through planning processes and networks. For these purposes, Alvdal uses the local development company Rådhuset i Vingelen, based in the small mountain village of Vingelen, north east of the municipality. The company runs entrepreneurship schools, and its achievements show the benefits of a productive environment. Alvdal also frequently connects with the regional 'business garden' in Rørosregionen Næringshage, a concept developed at national level to support small businesses in regional business centres. The business gardens are backed by SIVA – the Industrial Development Corporation of Norway (Interview 1).

"How much money we contribute is not that important, but being a supportive party that provides an arena, a possibility, and being someone who listens – that is what is important."

Other businesses highlighted the fact that having a supportive municipality plays an important role in enabling business development in the region (Interview 2). Recognising that there is strength in numbers is something that one of our interviewees sees as unleashing further untapped potential, in

that all municipalities in the region need to work even more closely together to create a critical mass for investment from outside the region (interview). These investments are already happening to some extent, but there is potential for more:

"We are now receiving more venture capital and business investment, both from within and beyond the region. I choose to look at it through a positive lens; that it indicates that someone sees a potential in Alvdal, both in terms of the people and the area." (Interview 1)

Favourable framework conditions

The 'framework conditions were mentioned as highly important for local business development. According to the interviewee at Synnøve Finden, for example, the role of competitive prices on water and sewerage is very important. With a business that requires approximately 200 million litres of water per year and emits large volumes of waste products, these prices make a significant difference.

Another key national measure is differentiated payroll taxes across the country. These encourage businesses to consider less favoured regions and areas as having the potential to be main bases for production (Interview 1). Alvdal falls within band III, with a differentiated tax at 6.4%, compared with to 14.1% in centrally located areas (The Norwegian Tax Administration, 2019). This tax differentiation was mentioned by all three companies interviewed as very important for local businesses. Other important factors such as raw material prices and plans at regional level can also enable or hinder future development. But these are beyond the scope of municipal jurisdiction.

Alvdal is subject to international labour market rules and regulations the same as any other municipality or region in Europe. International agreements (e.g. EEA and WTO) impact on Alvdal's engagement with local companies, e.g. with regards to procurement processes (Alvdal Kommune, 2017b). Attracting technical expertise to Alvdal is also challenging because of the formidable draw of the oil and gas industry in Norway. The fact that oil prices are dropping and wages becoming more competitive, may provide a positive opportunity for local businesses which generally operate with relatively high salaries and good employee conditions.

Ensuring that there is enough housing and facilities such as kindergartens is another important factor that needs to be attended to in order for

industry to thrive, according to the interviewee at Synnøve Finden. Assuming that jobs attract people to some extent, the right framework for people to start families, or to bring their families in, regardless of their age, is an important precondition for creating an attractive municipality. This is particularly important, because people pay municipal taxes where they live, not where they work. This can be an important source of income for the municipality and an important measure for creating an inviting municipality to live in (Interview 10).

Continuing education of employees

Ensuring that there is plenty of space and opportunity to develop as an employee was another significant factor pinpointed by key industrial employers in the area. Both Synnøve Finden and Espeland Transport offer continuing education for their staff. The local high school also runs an agronomic course for adults wishing to retrain as farmers, or who did not complete their formal high school degrees. The entrance requirement corresponds to the completion of the first year of high school. The two-year course is based on self-study and monthly get-togethers and corresponds to the final two years of a high school agronomics course. It is a useful option for migrants to Alvdal, and some of the interviewees have taken the course (Interview 8).

Synnøve Finden has a sizeable group of employees who are considered unskilled. According to the interview, approximately 90 people were unskilled workers, but 55-60 of these now have a Synnøve Finden-sponsored qualification. The company pays the majority of the cost for the course, supplemented by a small tuition fee paid for by the course participant. The voluntary programme is open to those with five years of work experience with Synnøve Finden. The programme is hosted by local education units in Tynset, with course specialisations aimed at enhancing existing and missing competences in specific business roles, such as terminal worker, industrial worker and other requirements within the food industry. Upon completing the course, employees receive a certificate and a pay rise. These qualifications are important for Synnøve Finden's future prospects. It is a cheap but profitable investment – one that creates and buttresses the existing local pool of talent.

Espeland Transport also invests in its staff. It used to recruit drivers from high schools across the region, but that is now less common. The compa-

ny is careful to provide good apprenticeships for young people, so that it will have enough drivers in the future. As a truck driver's licence is costly for an individual to obtain, Espeland Transport trains and pays for them in exchange for five years of service at the end of the apprenticeship. The company has also established a 'buddy' scheme for apprentices to learn more about the profession. There is great competition for young people these days, as the possibilities are endless. It is particularly difficult to attract female drivers, though there are some (see Interview 3). Nevertheless, transport is an important profession, albeit *"perhaps not the first job you want to have [...] Norway has many very long stretches, which means that you are away a lot of the time. Oslo to Tromsø...that is 1,800 km. You would reach France [if you drove south from Oslo]"* (Interview 3).

The workforce of the future

The local high school, with its focus on agriculture, is one source of workers. The local workforce has traditionally been rather divided, with the courses for mountain agronomists at the local high school being male dominated, and the horse and farrier courses being dominated by females. According to the headmaster, 60–70% of students on the agronomics course have some sort of link to a farm, either in the area or elsewhere, whereas the horse-oriented courses could be compared to generalist courses offered at other high schools. It is simply a way of combining interests and hobbies with education. The headmaster also said that although



Young students of agriculture and nature management at the local high school.
Photo: Karen Refsgaard

only one third of students continue in agriculture after they have completed their high school diploma, the 'ballast' the training gives them is nevertheless of great importance. Previous high school students are seen to be taking an active part in the local equestrian clubs, for example, and they contribute to the local community in various ways.

Areas of opportunities

Tourism

The number of jobs in the tourism sector in Alvdal fell by half between 2008 and 2016, when it was down to 36 (2.9% of the total). One of our interviewees identified three main areas from which new businesses can develop and thrive. These are property development for cabins, tourism, and national route three, known as Riksvei 3. For a long time Alvdal has had a ban on property development for cabins and holiday homes, which meant that the few cabins existing in the area were very expensive and almost unattainable, not least for the local population (Interview 2). This ban has recently been removed, and the municipality have become increasingly positive towards developing properties in this way. However, one interviewee involved in business development pointed to the recently devised municipal property tax on cabins as an additional impediment to further cabin construction, due to the extra cost involved. .

The construction firm Gjermundshaug has a plan to build cabins on 85 plots, a proposal welcomed by the municipality. The proposal requires further development of existing infrastructure, including water and sewerage, access to a fibre internet connection, and maintained roads all year round. A development like this needs to take careful consideration of stakeholders along the whole of the value chain. There is great demand from the local population for cabins, and although the potential is not as great as Trysil or Oppdal, it is still a great opportunity. The proximity to Savalen (a lake, spa and experience centre between Tynset and Alvdal) also raises the prospect of further business synergy. (Interview 10)..

Tourism holds significant potential, but the key to unlocking this would be to find a way to market the area in terms of what makes the Alvdal stand out as a destination – including land, hunting grounds and lakes (Interview 6). The local farmers are in possession of valuable resources and could benefit from alternative uses for their land (Interview 2). The proximity of Rv3, the national route,

BOX V.1.1. The Aukrust Centre

The Aukrust centre is a foundation and museum in Alvdal devoted to Kjell Aukrust's life, works and childhood in the area. The foundation was established in 1996, when the municipality was bequeathed the whole of Aukrust's diverse portfolio, including 1,400 illustrations, cartoons, inventions, films, radio programmes and drawings. The museum was very popular in the first few years following its opening, with between 100,000 and 130,000 visitors. This has steadily decreased and has settled at around 20,000 visitors throughout the museum's open season, stretching from 5 May to the middle of October. The majority of the visitors are people travelling along the national route three (Interview 4).

Aukrust's work is considered one of the greatest cultural treasures of recent history in Alvdal, and his illustrations, cartoons, books and stories are well known throughout Norway. The most loved Norwegian film of all times is the stop-motion animated feature film from 1975, *Flåklypa Grand Prix* (Pinchcliffe Grand Prix), with its

creative innovation, clever word-play and characteristic, familiar villagers. It is based on a series of cartoons by Aukrust. The protagonist Reodor Felgen's (Theodore Rimpoke) imagination and ingenious solutions to everyday problems include a pedal-driven shaving machine, plus the infamous racing car *Il Tempo Gigante*, with two speedometers to allow for extra high speed (the second takes over where the first speedometer ends), a blood bank with different blood types (including blue blood for the gentry), a radar system, and a barometer with sounder to check for fish in rivers they drive past.

The museum building is owned by the municipality and was designed by the architect Sverre Fehn, who also designed the Norwegian Glacier Museum and the Ivar Aasen-centre (Arch Daily, 2019). The building is intended as a multi-purpose house, with meeting and conference room facilities and a space for theatre productions. The building also functions as the municipal cinema, which screens films twice a week.

is of utmost importance. It means that Alvdal can become a natural stop-over for passers-by. Recognising the additional potential that this may bring to the area could also help frame Alvdal as a desirable destination, despite the long drive from both Trondheim and Oslo. *"Alvdal needs to find its niche,"* one of the interviewees said. *"We could sell particular sports equipment for hunting and fishing, for example, so that people would want to come here for a purpose!"* (Interview 2).

There are also opportunities to develop local farms. One of the interviewees has combined the role of being a farmer with a successful side-business, selling local produce sourced from the entire region. Sjøberg Gård has long family traditions with a history of strong women acting as the engine for change (Sjøberg gård, n.d.). The entrepreneurial spirit has a strong grip in the area, the owner explains. Though there are challenges posed by the infamous *'bygdedyret'* – the idea that you should not get above yourself and that embodying there can be a sense of intimidation and jealousy amongst peers in small rural communities – when trying to create something new, the owner

stresses the importance of turning a blind eye to this, and continuing with your work regardless (Interview 5). Eventually, the local population will discover the benefit and pride in having entrepreneurs in the area, creating something positive and new for Alvdal. The owner of Sjøberg Gård adds that locals are now travelling to her farmstead in order to show it off to visitors as one of the many positives of Alvdal as place to live. *"You suddenly have a little group of cheerleaders,"* she says (Interview 5).

Young people and families (interviews with local high school pupils, headmasters, and families)

One of the most important and most recent changes in Alvdal is the new school, featuring a brand-new sports hall and a cultural centre. This will undoubtedly enhance the attractiveness of life in Alvdal. The municipality's priority was to build a school that young families could use during the long, dark winters for cultural pursuits that would to close the gap between smaller communities and bigger cities in terms of opportunities. It also helps to create an idea and sense of belonging to



On the left, Young mothers innovating in tourism. From the Kjell Aukrust Center with Il Tempo Gigante. On the right, local farm tourism. Photos by Karen Refsgaard

the community – not least for the young people who are about to move out of the area to take a further education. Encouraging a sense of loyalty towards the place in general, as well as creating a sense of rich opportunities, will eventually help when attempting to encourage young people to move back home, it is believed. According to the municipality:

“Creating a safe and good upbringing for the children and teenagers in the area is one of the most important things that we can do for Alvdal. It creates a positive identity, and this will eventually help bring young people with families back home.”

Investing in building a new school sends an important signal for the future of Alvdal as a thriving community, despite heated debate about the actual site. Our interviewees in the municipality believe this merely illustrates the engaged and vital society that Alvdal is becoming. Allowing plenty of room for debate and discussion is important in small communities, as it helps to generate a better sense of unity when the conclusion is reached, either by majority or consensus. As an example, the community in Alvdal has now overcome earlier disagreements and united on a site for the school.

Why move to Alvdal

Alvdal is part of the what is commonly known as the 'Mountain Region' (Fjellregionen). With its mountainous surroundings, life in Alvdal speaks to the importance of outdoor activities (Interview 8). The production manager at Synnøve Finden also moved in to Alvdal as a result of taking up his job. He is positive about the future of the place, but highlights that the municipality needs to market its advantages and prospects more widely and better:

“It is a safe and good place to raise a family. People here make use of the nature that surrounds them. We need to highlight that better. The threshold for moving to a municipality in the mountains is quite high due to the great distances... but we can be competitive in other areas instead” (Interview 10).

For the purpose of this case study, a handful of families were interviewed about their relationship with Alvdal and their future prospects in the municipality. Speaking to them, we found out that it was first and foremost jobs that had brought them to the region. One of our interviewees, working at the Aukrust Centre, said that it was really the luck of the draw that they ended up in Alvdal:

“My husband and I had a deal that we would

move wherever the first one of us landed a job. I got the job at the Aukrust Centre, so we moved here from Oslo. My husband is actually from this area” (Interview 4).

This interviewee has a background in marketing and had worked in Oslo for ten years before moving to Alvdal. Her family is not planning on moving back to Oslo any time soon. She explained that although there are not many jobs in the arts in the area, this means people stay in their positions for longer. That creates a sense of job security, even though it can be argued that it may contribute to stagnation in terms of bringing in new ideas, because of the lack of new people coming in. With this in mind, individuals can be motivated to become increasingly creative in their work, which is a challenging but rewarding task (Interview 4). Moving to Alvdal for work was also the situation for another family interviewed for this report. This family, originally from Trøndelag and the west coast, moved to Alvdal in 1997, as a result of the husband taking up a job at Synnøve Finden as a coordinator at the dairy plant. The interviewee works part-time in Tynset at the maternity ward for the local branch of the Inland Hospitals ('Sykehuset Innlandet'). She can only work part-time because they have no extended family in the area, such as grandparents, to take care of the children (Interview 8).

Social aspects

The interviews stressed that the vitality of the Alvdal community is one of the main reasons people live and thrive in the area. Despite being a small community, the people in the local area make it interesting, although having children makes it easier to meet new people (Interview 4). One of the interviewees is still part of the maternity group, which meets on a regular basis for coffee and walks. The interviewees also listed a few informal meeting places for adults, such as the arts and crafts café, Huldra, toddler groups organised by the local volunteer centre, and pram-walking groups convened on Facebook (Interview 9). With children creating their own networks too, their roots in Alvdal are growing ever stronger (Interview 9). However, having a customer-facing job makes it easier for adults to meet new people and to create a bigger network (Interview 9).

Creating a social network in a small close-knit community can be challenging, but the sense of unity and of a duty to help make Alvdal a good

place to live remains strong (Interview 8). Several interviewees spoke of the strength of the *dugnad-sånd*, which translates roughly as community spirit and is based on the expectation of nothing more than the joy of working together towards a common goal. This helps to build strong relationships in an otherwise small community (Interview 8).

There are plenty of things for children to do, with short or no waiting lists for various spare-time activities in the art schools, or the chance of being part of the local wind band. In terms of sport, Alvdal resembles much of the rest of the eastern part of Norway, with cross-country skiing, football and handball (Interview 4). The school building is new, inaugurated in October 2018, and the education it provides is good (Alvdal kommune, 2019). It is a safe place to grow up. However, poor public transport is one price to pay for all this, and longer travel distances mean that the families are reliant on their cars.

A lack of public transport also means that most final-year school students have cars, paid for by part-time jobs and/or by summer jobs. Most of them borrow a car from their parents while they save up for their own. This lets them take part in local social life, hanging out with friends and engaging in organised leisure activities.

As in most smaller communities, being young in Alvdal requires a great deal of self-organisation. Parties and events are mainly arranged by groups of friends, but there are also locally organised events such as pub nights. Socially, being a teenager in a small community has its limitations. One high school student said that being different and open to other perspectives is challenging. The students we talked to thought that this would be easier in bigger cities, where the number and diversity of likeminded people is greater. Social networks might be larger too, and there might be a wider range of opportunities to engage in a variety of different activities:

“Some people might just not like being in the mountains and in the forest – maybe this drives them away. It just might not be a place that feels open enough for some people” (Interview 6).

Speaking to local high school students, it became evident that there is a great sense of loyalty to Alvdal. Place-bound loyalty has also been experienced in other case studies, such as Lebesby. Though most of the students wanted to leave after their final year, the majority indicated that they would eventually return to the area. However,

they were also aware of the opportunities in the local job market and felt that there might not be the full range of jobs they need.

The places to which the students were planning to move were still largely undecided at the time of the interviews, but further education played an important role in the decisions they were about to take. With a large part of the student body coming from farms in the area, the inclination was eventually to take on the farm and to continue their parents' work. However, as one of the interviewees said: *"The most important thing is education, before even thinking about taking over anything at all."* This indicates that the students are aware of potential changes in their lives, and that preparing for the future means keeping an open attitude towards what is to come.

Conclusion

It is clear that there are multiple facets that make Alvdal an attractive place to live. Ideas and innovations are both appreciated and welcomed positively by the municipality, enabling local people and companies to develop and thrive.

An entrepreneurial spirit is encouraged from an early age. Smaller places tend to be graced by a shorter distance to the top of local structures, and the threshold for contacting those working in municipal management teams is low. This makes the municipality increasingly dynamic. It is also evident that the differentiated pay roll tax plays an important role in securing jobs. Alvdal is also capitalising on its strength and position as a main thoroughfare between the central eastern part of Norway and the north, reminiscent of local smart specialisation. Local companies are also committed to providing apprenticeships, which will help ensure that there are plenty of qualified staff in the area in the future.

Housing, good internet connections and job security are other aspects that make Alvdal attractive. The families we interviewed see Alvdal as a safe place to raise children, close to nature and with decent leisure activities. Although distances are relatively large, and the municipality is far from the centre of the country, those who leave tend always to want to come back.

Table V.1.2. Attractiveness of Alvdal and obstacles/challenges to overcome

Good practices and main reasons behind attractiveness	Obstacles and challenges
<p>Adaptive/participatory planning Increasingly dynamic municipality.</p> <p>Employment and jobs Stable employment situation. Local companies provide apprenticeships, which helps guarantee qualified labour in the future. Local smart specialisation centred around the advantages of the national road, Riksvei 3.</p> <p>Entrepreneurship culture Entrepreneurial spirit is encouraged from an early age.</p> <p>Governance and participation Small place = easier to communicate with the municipal management teams.</p> <p>Housing Plenty of housing available.</p> <p>Infrastructure and transportation Alvdal is a main thoroughfare between the central eastern part of Norway and the north. Good internet connections.</p> <p>Quality of life and local community Safe place to raise children, close to nature and activities.</p> <p>Taxation Differentiated pay roll tax in Norway helps to secure jobs in Alvdal.</p>	<p>Infrastructure and transportation Distances are relatively vast/municipality is far from the centre of the country; but those who want to leave tend always to want to come back.</p>

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