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Erik Whist and Tom Christensen

The Fjord, the City and the Opera

An Evaluation of Bjørvika Urban Development

Concept report No. 28

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English summary

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Summary

This report gives an analysis of the two projects E18 Bjørvika and New Opera House, which both are parts of what is referred to as Bjørvika Development.

There are four decisions which constitute the basis for development of Bjørvika. The first was Parliament's decision in June 1999 to build the new opera house in Bjørvika. The second was Parliament's decision in 2002 to allocate money to the E18 Bjørvika project, which included the immersed tunnel. Third was the City Parliament's resolution in 2001, which consisted of 36 points with objectives and guidelines for the planning and development of Bjørvika. Fourth, was the City Parliament's adoption in 2003 of the zoning plan for Bjørvika.

Today it looks as if **Bjørvika Development**, which will only be fully finished towards 2020, will be a successful project. The implementation has so far been according to plans. Review of the various objectives shows that they are likely to be attained.

The point of departure for the project was that this should bring back the relation between the city and the fjord. This required a change in the road system, which from a city planning point of view would best be solved with an immersed tunnel.

Through various studies and plans, including impact assessments and architect competitions, shared understanding of possibilities and planning principles was established between stakeholders with different interests, who jointly prepared the zoning plan, approved by the City Parliament in 2003.

The State came to play a very active role. Parliament was a champion together with local interests. It was Parliament who, in 1993, allocated 30 million NOK which made it possible to undertake studies and start planning, which comprised both transportation and urban development. Thereafter Parliament actively intervened to get in place a scheme for financing the project with contributions from the different stakeholders. Parliament told the Government to get involved in order to solve obstacles to the development of the area.

This is a project where central government investments trigger large benefits and profits for non-government actors. This applies to Oslo City, which got access to land for urban development, and property owners, and whose land acquired dramatic increase in value. Parliament therefore made it a condition for Government financing that Oslo City, users of roads and landowners would have to contribute to the financing of the project. It is clear that without the contribution from Oslo City, Parliament would not have approved and allocated money to the E18 project.

In the early stage a comprehensive set of binding agreements for the implementation of Bjørvika Development was put in place by the involved private and public institutions. This set of agreements is considered decisive for the successful implementation of Bjørvika Development. It is still equally valid and binding and no changes have been introduced since it was signed in 2003.

New Opera House appears to be a successful project. The construction of the building went well and a review of the objectives for the new opera house shows that objectives are being attained:

- Number of visitors has doubled from 136.000 in 2007 to 276.000 in 2010.
- New groups of spectators have come to the opera. A survey in 2010 showed an increase of lower income groups and people living in areas of the city where the inhabitants are traditionally not associated with opera.
- Number of performances has doubled since 2006.
- The number of children and youth spectators has increased.

- There is still room for improvement of the artistic quality because the staff has not yet been able to fully use the complicated technical equipment.
- The opera house is a monumental building and has become one of the most important tourist attractions in the city. Some 5 million persons have visited the building since it was opened in 2008.

Both New Opera House and E 18 Bjørvika contribute to urban development of Bjørvika. The decision making processes in the early phase of these projects is quite special because many stakeholders considered these projects to be the start up for urban development of the area. In the early phase of the New Opera House project the focus was on the cultural dimension of the project, but a solution and decision was not made before the links to the urban development of Bjørvika were established.

The cultural aspects are of course important once the opera is functioning in the new building. However, urban development now proceeds without much of a connection to these cultural aspects of the New Opera House. During the early phase the E18 Bjørvika project is disconnected from the opera-process, but eventually these are connected again. As a transportation and road project there is continuity between the early phase and the later implementation and operation phases, but the focus is all the time to open up new areas for urban development.

The decision making process for the New opera house, E18 Bjørvika and Bjørvika Development is characterized by complex coalitions, always with a focus on urban development of the area. Coalitions, which are initiated or supported by Government, are created by public and private actors that make it possible to develop urban space around the opera for apartments and businesses. This brings about the expected benefits for these actors and also for the public. At the same time questions may be posed about the objectives and public benefit of such large scale development, the profits for the private sector, the investment in the costly immersed tunnel and other questions on alternative use of the funds elsewhere in Oslo and in other parts of the country, and which may first be answered when all building investments have been fulfilled around 2020.

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Forskningsprogrammet Concept skal utvikle kunnskap som sikrer bedre ressursutnyttning og effekt av store, statlige investeringer. Programmet driver følgeforskning knyttet til de største statlige investeringsprosjektene over en rekke år. En skal trekke erfaringer fra disse som kan bedre utformingen og kvalitetssikringen av nye investeringsprosjekter før de settes i gang.

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The Concept research program aims to develop know-how to help make more efficient use of resources and improve the effect of major public investments. The Program is designed to follow up on the largest public projects over a period of several years, and help improve design and quality assurance of future public projects before they are formally approved.

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