

Ecological diversity and economic change: Vulnerability in a rural mountain community in Øystre Slidre, Norway



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Focus of study

- How do commercialisation of production and climatic variability and change alter the flexibility with which people manage socio-environmental change?
 - How do people manage climatic variability presently?
 - How may sources of flexibility – ecological diversity, economic diversity, social relations and learning – shift?

Øystre Slidre



Selection of site

- Mountain agricultural site
- Short season – snow cover 6 months a year
- Temperatures and rainfall critical for grazing/harvests
- Ongoing huge changes to agricultural sector and to economic sectors

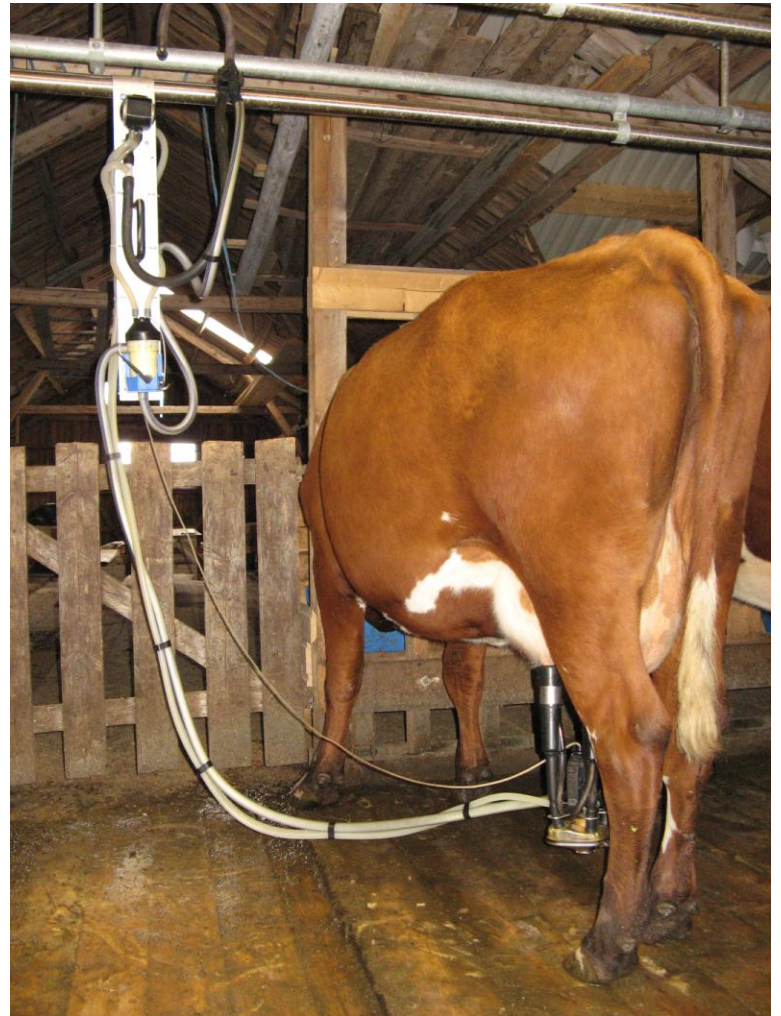


- Move animals to the mountain plot about 8 weeks every summer
- Goats, sheep, dairy, cattle











- Use of valley and mountain plots
- Local knowledge and networks to plan and organise work critical
- Economic diversification



- Rainfall, snowfall and temperatures important for activities at different times in the season
- Informants observe milder and wetter autumn and variable winters
- Increased vegetation growth





Shifts

- Reduction in hunting, fishing and cheese production as source of livelihoods over the past decades
- Agricultural production concentrated on fewer hands
- Increased reliance on economic diversification: nearly all farming households have off-farm employment
- Limited success of niche production
- Loss of grazing rights, prioritisation of commercial tourism development rights

- Informants ascribe changes to policies, changing economic structures, and generation changes
- Increasing production costs: Fertiliser and fuel costs doubled over the past year
- Dependency on state support that varies with national political configurations
- Conflicting policies

Shifts in flexibility and implications for vulnerability

- Tendency towards specialisation of production involving reduced ecological diversity
- Economic sources of flexibility, as well as support for ecological diversity related to high national incomes from oil production

- Importance for well-being of:
 - sense of cultural identity and belonging
 - good social relations
 - being valued by society, have a say in decisions important to their daily lives
- Perceived increasing dependency on fickle and sometimes conflicting national policies
- Powerlessness in the face of commercial tourism interests
- Social networks and cooperation are aspects of quality of life in their own right
- New ways of producing demand new forms of social networks
- Attempts by people to retain control over how the local dynamism is managed