

## **Capacity building for multi-level spatial development under fragmented institutional conditions**

Jacob Witzell<sup>1\*</sup>, Amy Rader Olsson<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Ph.D. student, Urban and Regional Studies, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden.*

<sup>2</sup>*Researcher. Director, KTH Centre for a Sustainable Built Environment and Theme leader for Policy and Institutions, KTH Transport Platform, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden*

\* [jacob.witzell@abe.kth.se](mailto:jacob.witzell@abe.kth.se)

The R&D-project “The Attractive Region”, initiated by the Swedish Transport Administration, aims at developing processes and methods that strengthen multi-level cooperation regarding the nexus of transport investments and local development in a regional context, outside Sweden’s main metropolitan regions. Using this project as a case, this study analyses the evolution of multi-level strategic planning capacity at the local and regional levels under contemporary fragmented and heterogenic planning conditions. An elaborated theoretical framework based on four key dimensions of urban-regional strategy formation processes, formulated by Patsy Healey, is applied in order to analyze strategic planning capacity among Swedish regions, and its effect on process and outcome in multi-level planning coordination initiatives. The results may contribute to the on-going efforts to strengthen regional spatial planning in Sweden and abroad.

### **Introduction: Fragmented institutional frameworks and unevenly distributed capacity for regional spatial coordination in Sweden**

Regional spatial planning in Sweden is heterogeneous and fragmented in character, involving various parallel and sometimes overlapping organizational structures including directly elected regional councils, indirectly elected inter-municipal organizations, as well as national administrative boards and county councils sharing responsibilities for regional development. Likewise, the level of institutionalized strategic capacity for coordinated action differs widely among regions.

By tradition, Sweden has a strong dualistic state-municipal power relation, with the national level setting the legislative and economic framework, and municipalities

being responsible for implementing welfare policies and increasingly, strategies for development. In the field of spatial planning, municipalities have practically exclusive rights to formally steer land development, popularly named “the municipal planning monopoly”. The responsibilities of the regional level have are focused on health care and public transport, although Sweden’s entry into the European Union in 1995 and change in national policy for regional development has introduced a regional responsibility for economic growth strategies. The coordination of spatial planning at the regional level has generally been weak throughout the 20th century. In recent years though, a few regions have begun to widen the mandatory Regional Development Strategy to also include a spatial perspective. Although such initiatives are rare and still quite experimental in character, a growing interest is noticed throughout Swedish regions as well as the Government.<sup>1</sup>

These factors, in combination with a widening gap between fast-growing metropolitan areas and shrinking peripheral increase the risk of inequality in strategic planning capacity to address social, environmental and economic aspects of spatiality that need to be coordinated at an inter-municipal or regional level.

### **Case Study: Building strategic capacity in multi-level governance initiatives**

In six case study pilots within the R&D-project “The Attractive Region” (2012-2016), municipalities, regional authorities and transport authorities for rail, road and public transport gather in the joint task of elaborating wider spatial development possibilities made possible by infrastructure investment. Several participating municipalities are small (< 10 000 inhabitants) and normally lack economic resources as well as professional capacity to carry out long-term strategic planning, facing social, economic and environmental challenges. We have evaluated these processes during the three year program period, focusing on strategic capacity building within the involved institutions, as well as the joint capacity evolving within the case pilots.

In order to capture differences in process and outcome in relation to the heterogeneous institutional preconditions and differences in strategic capacity among the institutions involved, key dimensions of urban-regional strategy formation

---

<sup>1</sup> Lundström, M., Fredriksson, C. & Witzell, J. (2013)

processes, formulated by Patsy Healey<sup>2</sup>, are applied and elaborated: filtering; focusing and framing; generating mobilizing force; and generating transformative force. The framework allows for comparisons of the strategic capacity among actors previous to the project, as well as the evolution of capacity during the project and project outcomes.

Empirical data is collected by “fly-on-the-wall” participation at meetings and workshops, in-depth interviews with engaged actors, a crude social network analysis of social interactions within and between case pilots, and analysis of meeting minutes.

### **Preliminary findings and contributions**

Preliminary findings suggest that pilots with a more mature, established planning arena at the regional level tend to focus on building capacity regarding practical methods and applications for policy implementation, while regions lacking such common policy for spatial development tend to focus more on developing cooperative structures and a basic understanding of common challenges and development paths. These results may contribute to the understanding of how and why capacity for joint planning among communities in a region might develop.

### **References**

- Healey, P. (2006). Strategy-making in a Relational World. In *Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies – Towards a relational planning for our times*. New York: Routledge.
- Lundström, J., Fredriksson, C. & Witzell, J. (2013) *Planning and Sustainable Urban*

---

<sup>2</sup> Healey, P. (2006)