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Nordic Centre for Spatial Development

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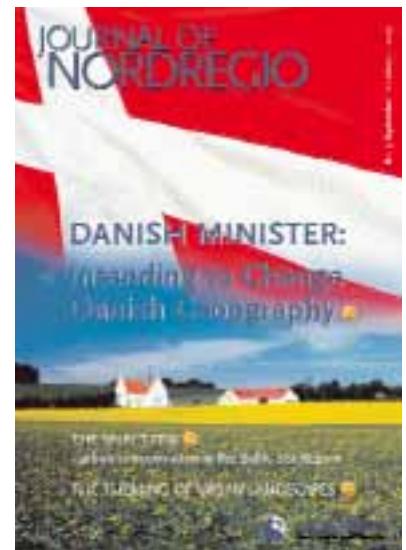
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ON TRACK, OR JUST WALKING AROUND?

Seeking regional economic growth and development is paramount to most countries, and the prestige taken in finding good procedures and practices to accomplish it can hardly be underestimated. Not surprisingly therefore the Swedish government takes great pride in its growth agreements policy and also in their performance.

According to the text displayed on the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication website the Swedish growth agreement concept is a success. The Ministry states that the programmes are firmly rooted in the respective regions and in the needs of their business communities. Furthermore, the participants of the various regional partnerships see great value in having a common programme guiding their work and agree that they bring value added both to private enterprise and to the region more generally.

The responsible body for scrutinising the growth agreements and their concomitant work in regional partnerships is NUTEK, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. The agency's own website proclaims that the growth agreement processes remain on track. The work carried out is characterised by high intensity and a positive ambiance. No major change of direction is needed; the growth agreement processes should rather seek to strengthen themselves within the existing frameworks.

One potential improvement is cited however as the involvement of the national sector authorities is judged as being unsatisfactory in meeting the regional coordination requirements within the processes.

Diving into the report "På väg mot hållbar tillväxt? Regionala tillväxtprogrammen 2004" published by NUTEK, and cited as the reference document for the rosy statements on the web site, a feeling of uncertainty immediately takes hold. The main reason for this is that a number of the conclusions in the report point in a rather different direction to the one presented in the headline statement offered up in the Government.

To cite some of them:

- The conclusion that the growth programmes emanate from the needs of the business community is contested, predominantly by the representatives of the business community themselves, as well as from the organisations representing it.
- Several public authorities describe the mandate for the growth agreement processes as unclear and hence chose to give low priority to participation in these processes.

may be difficult to move from a strategic to an operational level in the field of regional growth politics, this becomes even more difficult when the strategic goals remains unspecified.

- NUTEK refrains from providing even an estimate of the economic effects of the work undertaken thus far. More importantly, NUTEK also refrains from evaluating the effects of the growth agreement process on the conditions for future economic growth.

For anyone familiar with regional growth policies the complexity surrounding these policy fields is well known. On the other hand, these are also policy fields strongly embedded in popular imagination, while expectations remain that such politics can make a difference in respect of regional economic and living conditions. Therefore regional growth policies are at the forefront of the political debate with both politicians and the electorate alike.

Thus to postulate that Swedish growth policy is on track has been reduced to a question of specifying the track.

- Many participants in the relevant partnership processes point to a general incapacity to proceed from a general strategy to the operational policy level.
- National sector authorities mostly seem to ignore the growth agreement agendas, this particularly seems to be the case with such important sectors as those relating to infrastructure, internationalisation and finance. These are however the sectors that could make the difference when reshaping regional policy agendas.
- The reciprocal influence on coordinating the various sectoral policies and on coordinating overall national and regional policies remains weak.
- There is widespread uncertainty as to the concrete outcome of the work performed within the regional partnerships.
- More than half of the regions involved do not have a common strategic document that gives guidelines for their work. Considering that it

NUTEK's double role as governmental policy agency and evaluator of governmental policy success however offers a difficult point of departure when evaluating the success (or otherwise) of Swedish regional growth policy and its prime instruments, namely, the growth agreements and their related partnerships.

When evaluating, the terms of reference will often serve as a means of measurement. In this case this necessary point de repère seems to be missing. This is strange as we do have some evidence of how Swedish partnerships compare to partnership performances in other countries. Thus to postulate that Swedish growth policy is on track has been reduced to a question of specifying the track. As such, the tacit definition of track in this case must refer to any kind of ground found under one's feet when walking.

The Select Few

– Urban Concentration in the Baltic Sea Region



By Tomas Hanell & Jörg Neubauer
Research Fellows, Nordregio

Although lying largely outside the European Pentagon, the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) nonetheless constitutes a part of the European urban system acting as the main transport gateway between continental Europe and northern Eurasia. The BSR contains a significant proportion of the total number of European cities, mainly due to the dense network of cities existent in Poland. Even so, the density of cities is nearly three times higher in the EU than in the BSR. The entire population of the BSR is less than a quarter that of the EU25, although its area corresponds to more than 60% of the equivalent EU one.

Taken as a single economic meso-region the BSR is neither large nor prosperous in comparison with the European core. The size of the BSR's economy amounts to a mere 17% of that of the EU25. The total Gross Domestic Product per capita in the BSR (excluding Belarus) when adjusted for differences in purchasing power amounts to a level estimated as being 28% below the EU25 average in 2002. The inclusion of Belarus would only further lower that ratio.

Cities as engines of development

Cities and urban areas are without doubt the main engines of economic development in the BSR. The concentration of economic activity, corporate decision-making, labour, foreign direct investment, knowledge and innovation to the metropolitan areas in the BSR is sub-

stantial. For example, the nine capital regions of the BSR (plus Hamburg and St Petersburg) account for more than a third of the region's entire production value, although they contain only a fifth of its population on a mere 3% of its land area. In 2002 the GDP per capita in these metropolitan regions was 1.6 times higher than in the rest of the BSR and this gap is steadily widening.

Corporate decision-making in the region is also very concentrated. More than 90% of the HQ's of the largest BSR enterprises are located in metropolitan areas, primarily in the western BSR. In the eastern BSR the concentration to these cities is not as marked, as 60% of the 40 largest eastern BSR HQ's are located in metropolitan areas, most of the remaining ones are however also in large Polish cities (e.g. Krakow and Wroclaw). Furthermore, of the BSR offices of the 46 most global producer service firms, more than 90% are located in only eight metropolitan cities of the region.

The demographic magnetism of larger cities in general and metropolitan areas in particular is also strong. The migration surplus to the twelve metropolitan cities during the period 1995-2001 was on average 0.2% each year. However, suburbanisation and increased commuting entails that the absolute winners among the cities of the BSR (when taken as a group) are smaller settlements in close proximity to metropolitan cities, for which the corresponding figure was 0.5% per year on average.

A further indication of the role of capital cities is that the relative level of housing prices vis-à-vis the second cities in each country is between 10 and 220% higher in the capitals, Berlin constituting the major BSR exception.

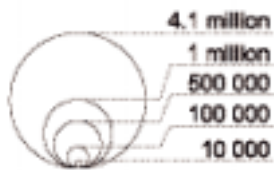
The economic structure of metropolitan cities as well as of most other large cities is dominated by the service sector. In the western BSR, services account for the lion's share of both employment and production. In many large cities in the

eastern parts of the region manufacturing constitutes the main source of economic activity, the most extreme case being Belarus, where in the 24 main urban centres of the country more than two thirds of the workforce is employed in manufacturing. However, cities such as Tampere and Lahti in Finland or Bremen in Germany demonstrate that this is not exclusively an eastern affair. The question however remains whether these cities will in the long run maintain this structure, or whether the economy will be transformed in favour of non-material production. Current trends in most eastern BSR countries indicate that the latter seems to be the case.

The metropolitan cities are also centres for most traffic. An estimated two thirds of all passenger air traffic in the BSR is channelled through the metropolitan areas alone. Moreover, rail and road transport networks in most cases also converge in metropolitan areas. In respect of sea transport however the situation is not as polarised, as many BSR metropolises are either land-locked or do not have significant port functions.

Depending on the varying historical processes when it comes to the founding and location of universities and other academic research institutions, the picture differs slightly from one BSR country to the next. In general however, the larger BSR centres dominate academic research. Thus, when it comes to the level of education, larger cities are generally in a stronger position than smaller ones, let alone rural areas. In the BSR as in the EU as a whole the share of population that has attained a tertiary level education is in general substantially higher in densely populated areas than in sparsely populated ones. For instance in Lithuania the ratio is 1:2 in favour of densely populated areas. Corporate R&D is also concentrated primarily to metropolitan areas, although cities such as Oulu demonstrate that this is not exclusively the case. St Petersburg, with over 12% of all PhD holders in the Russian Federation and nearly 11% of its research staff (as opp-

City population at the end of 2001:

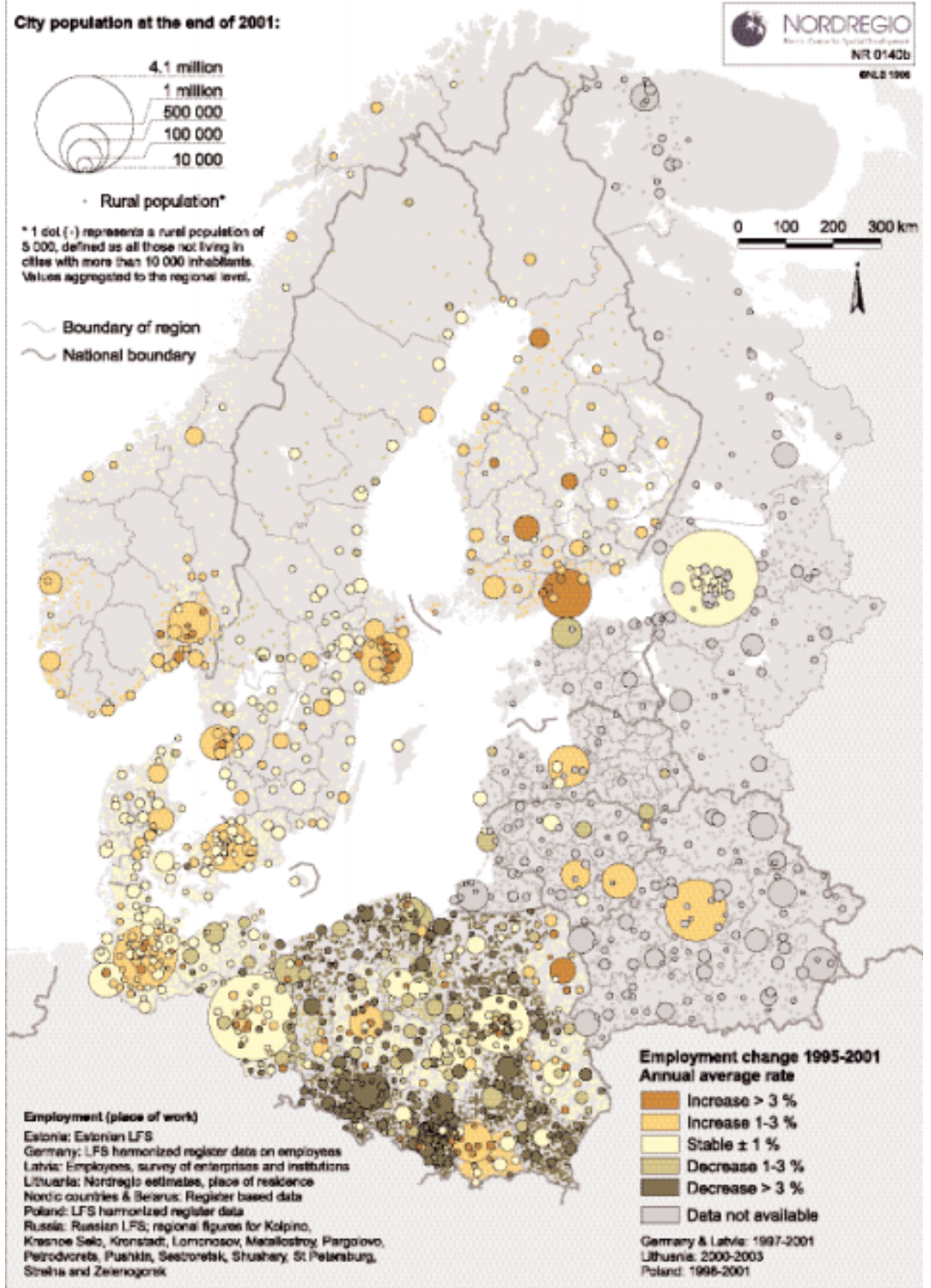


• Rural population*

* 1 dot (•) represents a rural population of 5 000, defined as all those not living in cities with more than 10 000 inhabitants. Values aggregated to the regional level.

— Boundary of region

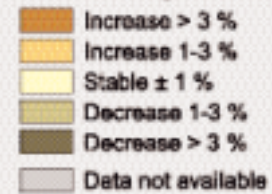
— National boundary



Employment (place of work)

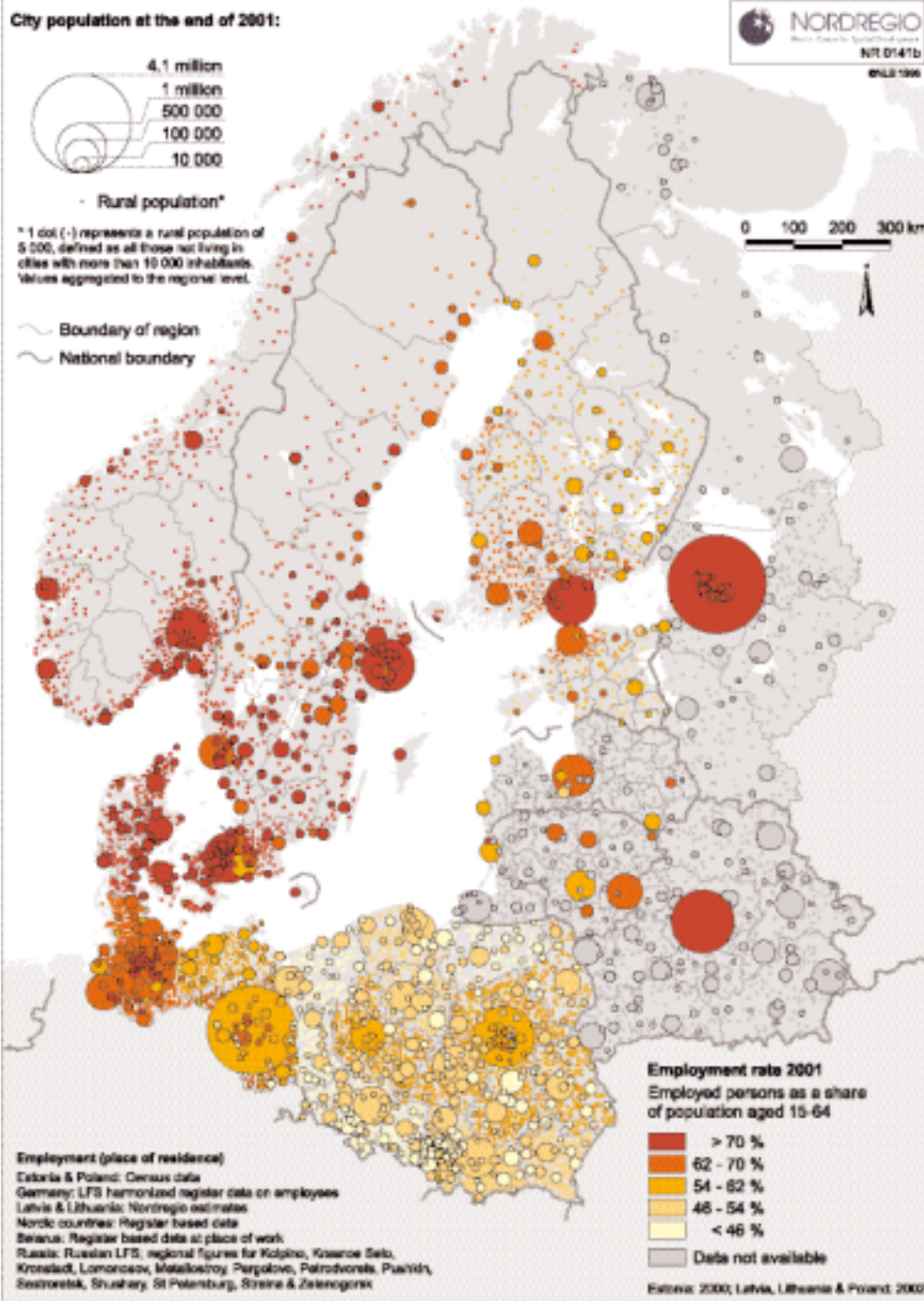
Estonia: Estonian LFS
Germany: LFS harmonized register data on employees
Latvia: Employees, survey of enterprises and institutions
Lithuania: Nordregio estimates, place of residence
Nordic countries & Belarus: Register based data
Poland: LFS harmonized register data
Russia: Russian LFS; regional figures for Kolpino, Krasnoe Selo, Kronstadt, Lomonosov, Metallostroy, Pargolovo, Petrodvorets, Pushkin, Sestroretsk, Shushary, St Petersburg, Strals and Zelenogorsk

**Employment change 1995-2001
Annual average rate**



Germany & Latvia: 1997-2001
Lithuania: 2000-2003
Poland: 1996-2001

Employment change in BSR cities and rural areas



Employment rate in BSR cities and rural areas.

osed to a mere 3.9% of the population), constitutes the single largest concentration of scientists in the BSR. Although steadily declining throughout the 1990s they still numbered nearly 100 000 persons in 2002, which is over twice as many as in e.g. the whole of Sweden. Much of the research currently carried out in St Petersburg is however not market-driven.

Economic polarisation

Despite the varying points of departure, economic growth has been exceptionally good across the BSR. During the ten-year period 1995-2004 almost all BSR economies, on average, experienced faster economic growth than the European Union, with the BSR parts of

Germany and Russia being the only significant exceptions. Not taking into account the last three years, developments in Denmark have been similar to those of the EU as a whole.

The key driver in the economic development of the BSR varies from country to country, but some common patterns and trends are discernible. The relative prosperity of the BSR stems primarily from a high level of labour utilisation, i.e. substantial proportions of the working age population are actually employed and work comparatively long hours. The eastern parts of the region have correspondingly high rates in comparison with other CEE countries, especially when considering the hours worked per employee. Contrary to popular belief,

labour productivity in the BSR is not particularly high. Only Norway and Finland have a higher Gross Domestic Product per employed person than the average rate for the old EU15 Member States. This gap may not however exist for long as labour productivity in the eastern countries of the BSR is rising, whereas it is, in relative terms at least, decreasing in all western BSR countries save for Denmark.

Spatial polarisation however remains strong as the BSR hosts many of the wealthiest EU regions as well as most of the poorest ones. Among those one hundred (NUTS₃) regions in the EU with the lowest GDP per capita in 2002 no less than 56 were within the BSR. Additionally all seven Russian BSR regions qualify in the same category as in all likelihood would those from Belarus – were comparable data to be available. The relative disparity between the regions of a country is clearly largest in BSR Germany, as the east-west distinction remains sharp. Overall regional polarisation is also substantial in Latvia, Estonia and BSR Russia, while it is marginal in Sweden and Denmark and also small in Norway. Even more alarming however are the most recent development trends. Comparing the total regional disparities between 1995 and 2002 (Norway and the Russian BSR 1995-00) they have increased in all countries save for the Russian parts of the region.

Similar concentration patterns are also discernible with regard to employment although in traditional Polish manufacturing cities in particular the decline in the number of jobs has been colossal. Disregarding the obvious national differences, city size then remains an important factor in explaining new job creation (Figure 1). In general, the larger the city, the more favourable has been the development of its employment, the Silesian conurbation(s) constituting the major BSR exception. The only main exceptions to this “size-of-city” pattern in the BSR are a number of smaller cities surrounding metropolitan areas, but even here development is highly selective, dividing these commuting cities into winners and losers alike.

In the BSR as a whole, rural areas have in general performed slightly worse than the cities they surround with regard to

In Norway and Denmark again the opposite situation prevails as both urban and rural areas exhibit rapid growth rates. In Norway, which contrary to Denmark is still in its urbanisation phase, growth has been substantially faster in cities than in rural areas, whereas Denmark shows a more balanced growth.

Finland and Sweden, and to a lesser extent also Belarus, display the textbook urbanisation pattern with rapid urban growth and equally rapid rural decline. In Belarus the rural “exodus” is admittedly substantial, but it is completely overshadowed by the highly negative natural population balance in these areas. In some rural areas of eastern Belarus this decline has exceeded the rate of 2 % on average every year. Finally, in Poland and in the German parts of the BSR, the contrary situation prevails – as rural areas are gaining and urban areas are losing population. In the German parts of the BSR, natural population change is negative in all rural areas apart from Lüneburg.

The Nordic countries and Belarus display a further “classic” development clearly tied to city size, i.e. the larger the city, the better, on average, the performance with regard to population growth.

Amongst all 521 BSR cities where the population has declined between 1995 and 2001, nearly 80%, or 406 cities, are located in the eastern BSR. This is a substantially higher share than the share of eastern BSR cities from the BSR as a whole.

The leading role played by migration is evident for the cities of the Baltic Sea Region, where migration accounts for approximately two thirds of all urban population change in the region. However, low nativity and/or high mortality provide the primary engine behind the course of demographic changes in the cities of BSR Russia, and to a lesser extent, Latvia.

The single largest absolute decline in BSR urban population has taken place in St Petersburg, as the city’s population decreased by approximately 140 000 persons over the period in question, solely due to an excess of deaths over births. Increased mortality combined with declining birth rates is the primary cause.

Smaller cities in commuting distance from large metropolises are the largest winners in the BSR. This holds true for all BSR metropolitan areas apart from those in the Baltic States and Belarus.

The pattern for the non-urban areas of the BSR varies. The region’s rural areas are divided by a hypothetical loop encircling the three northernmost counties of Norway, covering Sweden, Finland and BSR Russia, through the Baltic States and ending in Belarus. In these countries – apart from Stockholm county, the urbanised triangle in southern Finland, Murmansk oblast and St Petersburg, the capital regions of Estonia and Latvia as well as a handful of other regions in the Baltic States – rural inhabitants are decreasing at a, for the most part, alarming rate. The situation is similar albeit not as critical, for the rural population in three other Norwegian counties, the Danish Sønderjylland and five Polish voivodships.

The current pattern concerning the balance between different age groups remains polarised. A relatively high number of young persons can generally be found in smaller settlements surrounding the large metropolises of the BSR. The reason for this is obvious: families with children of this age have chosen to settle in the surrounding areas of the metropolises because they have children, hence generally obtaining more spacious housing at a lower cost than would have been the case had they settled in the cities themselves. The gulf between the core metropolitan city and its’ surroundings is, with regard to the young population, evident in virtually all of the metropolitan and large city areas and particularly wide around the largest cities of Poland. Moving beyond the metropolitan areas, the pattern in the BSR is almost exclusively such that the smaller the city, the higher the share of children. Adding further momentum to the disparity, the highest young age dependency rates are in rural areas.

When it comes to the share of elderly persons the distribution with regard to the urban structure is not as clear-cut as is the case with the younger age groups. Rather, in this case each country displays its own structure. Some common patterns are nevertheless apparent. In half of the BSR countries, large cities have

disproportionately higher shares of elderly population in comparison with the rest of their countries. However, the remaining metropolitan cities are either somewhat on a par with their respective countries or have significantly lower rates. Most satellite towns around the large cities have lower shares of elderly population. One commonality that most BSR countries share is having substantially lower rates of older persons in rural areas and very small towns.

“Actors” and “reactors”

To conclude, spatial polarisation in the BSR increasingly predominates across virtually all fields of society as globalisation and structural change have taken a firm grip of both its eastern and western areas alike. The international business centres in the BSR are, with few exceptions, primarily metropolitan areas. This is not to imply however that more peripheral locations remain untouched by economic globalisation, though empirical evidence suggests that its effects do differ, dividing the regions and cities of the BSR into “actors” and “reactors”. Small and peripherally located settlements lacking the necessary levers to actively take part in the international division of labour often suffer most in this respect. Many of the BSR countries are relatively small in economic terms and are thus often simply unable to compete on a par with the major European economies, let alone globally. As such then the concentration of effort into the promotion of a select few urban centres seems rational. The question however remains whether this type of concentration is sustainable in the long run, indeed, is it even sustainable now?

The article is based on the recently published Nordregio report “Cities of the Baltic Sea Region – Development Trends at the Turn of the Millennium”. All images can be downloaded from www.nordregio.se

IN SHORT...



New Municipal Names Confirmed

In the Journal of Nordregio 2005:2 the preliminary names for the new Danish municipalities following the structural reform were presented. Some names were then bracketed due to the actual discussion then taking place. The official new names of the then bracketed municipalities are as follows:

- Assens (Assens)
- Faxe (Ny Haslev)
- Fredensborg (Fredensborg)
- Frederiksværk-Hundested (Frederiksværk-Hundested)
- Gribskov (Ny Græsted-Gilleleje)
- Jammerbugt (Jammerbugt)
- Lolland (Ny Nakskov)
- Thisted (Ny Thisted)
- Vejen (Ny Vejen)
- Vordingborg (Ny Vordingborg)



Fight over Municipality Size

A heated discussion has broken out following a decision by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities to endorse the demand for larger municipalities. The representatives of the Swedish-speaking minority are the main opponents of this measure, fearing that their territorial bases in the coastal areas of Ostrobothnia and Southern Finland would be further eroded were such a municipal reform to become operational. The main Swedish-language newspaper, Hufvudstadsbladet, recently published an editorial attacking the Association's decision.



EU Opens up on Policy Measures

The never-ending discussion between the Norwegian government and the EU on the nature of geographical state aid regulation, have taken a new turn. In its draft on new regional policy regulations,

dated 15 July 2005, the EU commission opened the way for a reintroduction of regionally differentiated social security contribution in Northern Norway. The Norwegian government expressed its hope that the Commission would extend this position to also encompass selected regions in Southern Norway. The draft further uses the term 'flexibility' in discussing the geographical aspects of state aid regulations, which is interpreted by the Government as a signal that the Commission may be softening its position on the question of national control over the specific geographies of state aid regimes.



Growth Agreements on Track

In a report on the ongoing processes for growth agreements for the period 2004 – 2007, The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, NUTEK, concludes that these processes have now been properly embedded. Though several points in respect of the goals, sectoral involvement and actual achievement remain unclear, the agency points to the agreements as important platforms for mutual learning and influence. The agency further presents a list of improvements to be implemented in the years ahead, giving first priority to an approved commitment by national sectoral authorities within the framework of the regional agreements. (See editorial for comment.)

Failing Regional Growth Policy

In a report on the scope and results of Swedish regional growth policy from the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies, written by Bjarne Lindström, Swedish policy for regional growth is more or less classified as being a failure. Too broad in scope and too ready to please any policy need, the policy field has, the report suggests, become an arena for divergent interests and general dialogue, while the more targeted policy initiatives remain unaddressed. The reason for this seems to reside in the systemic faults of Swedish politics more than in a deliberate unwillingness to create a functioning policy regime. (See Bjarne Lindström in "Right Now" for comment.)

Amendments Proposed on Literal Zoning Legislation

The Ministry of Sustainable Development has proposed amendments to the regulations prohibiting general building in the literal zone. The new regulations seek to differentiate the regime according to regional preconditions. This will make the regime more liberal in regions rich in shore areas and sparse in population like the Interior North, North West Svealand and Småland, whereas the regime will be significantly tightened in other parts of Sweden. The Ministry will, in addition, authorise the County Administrative Boards to overrule decisions taken by the municipalities within its field of competence, a proposition that has attracted much opposition from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions.



Innovative Indicators

October 19-21
Roskilde, Denmark

A three day course from Nordregio Academy for all who must use, interpret and understand indicators as a part of their ongoing work. Included topics are: Understanding indicators, a critique of commonly used indicators, innovative ways to generate and use indicators, the use of indicators in monitoring and communicating one's own projects.

The deadline is 19 September (the course is over half full at September 1) but we will accept registrants so long as there is room: so go to <http://www.nordregio.se/academy2005.htm> for more information and for registration forms.

Rhetoric and Substance in Sweden's New Regional Policy



By Bjärne Lindström, Director
Statistics and Research Åland

The mid-1990s saw Swedish economic policy in a perilous state. Since 1991, economic growth had dwindled to zero or below, and unemployment had soared to levels unheard of in Sweden since the beginning of the 1930s. The economic crisis impacted upon all parts of Sweden - including metropolitan regions such as Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenbourg. The crisis severely challenged the precepts of traditional Swedish regional policy, focused on state support for the country's most sparsely populated and geographically peripheral regions. A new policy was needed - a policy that addressed growth problems not only in traditional "support regions", but also in urban regions in the more central parts of the country.

The result was the introduction of a new regional policy aimed at the enhancement of growth across the whole Swedish territory, peripheral and central regions alike. The credo of the new approach was the promotion of growth in every region through the better coordination of state policies within various

sectors, and potent policy implementation via the so called "growth agreements" between all relevant stakeholders - including the private sector.

Four years have now passed since this new growth-oriented regional development policy was introduced in the Riksdag. Since then, several attempts have been made to generate an overview of the new policy, including its connection to the European Union's regional policy interventions in Sweden. Due to the complexity of the regional policy field this has however proved rather difficult. Most efforts have therefore been restricted to evaluations of specific parts of the regional policy field. This inspired the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies (ITPS) to commission a comprehensive analysis of the new regional policy approach. The result was presented in connection with the annual gathering of national politicians in Visby in June 2005.

The ITPS-study highlights the existence of a number of problems and ambiguities within the new Swedish regional development policy. First, the overall problem that the policy is supposed to address is not solely - as its rhetoric

implies - related to economic growth, but relates also to the problem of regional disparities and national cohesion. This dual and thus rather unclear policy objective leads to a number of conflicting targets and priorities being set. Secondly, the main strategy behind the policy is to ensure that partners join forces around the needs of enhanced regional growth. Moreover, with such a wide array of problems and tasks to resolve this becomes very difficult, while the rallying cry to joint forces often merely throws together a blurred collection of disparate interests. Thirdly, the partnerships, which are highlighted as the main agents for implementing the policy, have rarely become operative. They lack the necessary power to pursue their role as the agents of structural change and economic growth. And finally, the geographical arena chosen for implementation of the policy - the regional level - is characterized by an unstructured multitude of agents and authorities, which often lack resources and clear policy responsibilities.

The result is a regional policy characterized by experimentation and uncertainty over means, strategies, objectives, policy responsibilities and implementing actors. There are two main reasons for what we may term the unstable status of Sweden's new regional development policy: (1) The difficulties of dealing with the relation between function and territory, and (2) the handling of conflicts between tackling regional disparities and stimulating economic growth.

The first problem concerns shortcomings in the basic policy approach. There is a significant difference between policy interventions in areas characterized by a high degree of functionally based social needs (e.g. the education and welfare sectors) and policy fields in which needs and goals are defined in terms of territorial development (e.g. regional policy). Sweden has never developed a political tradition or administrative praxis to handle this critical difference. Instead, the Swedish model is

based on a complex web of state-controlled sector policy in combination with varying degrees of territorial delegation. As such, the stakeholders' overlapping roles often lead to unclear responsibilities and difficulties in handling conflicts between sector-based interests and territorial interests.

The second problem is related to ambiguities in the basic objective of regional development policy. Working on multiple objectives within a policy field is not easy, especially if some of the objectives are contradictory. Since economic growth and decreasing geographic disparities rarely go hand in hand, this is a well-known problem within regional policy. It is difficult, not to say impossible, to completely overcome conflicting policy targets. However, as long as such conflicts are openly addressed, they are possible to handle. The difference between success and failure is having clearly elaborated priorities between the conflicting objectives. Unfortunately, clear-cut and well-prioritized objectives are not a prominent feature of Swedish regional policy. On the contrary, the policy is characterized by a tendency to down play or even neglect conflicting policy targets.

The overall conclusion of the ITPS-study is thus that there is an urgent need to re-think the main goals and operational set-up of Swedish regional development policy. Moreover, this review should include a clearly stated position on the important issue of economic growth versus regional cohesion. Furthermore, it should aim at building a policy that can handle the tricky relationship between territorial and sector interests. The study suggests a number of important steps that could be taken to pave the way towards such a re-formulation, thus making possible a Swedish policy that would be capable of delivering real 'value added' in terms of fostering regional growth. Among these propositions the following three are of fundamental importance:

- Making it absolutely clear that regional growth is the top-priority objective
- Limiting the number of responsible policy actors and creating a clear-cut division of responsibilities between the national and the regional levels
- Removing regional state aid in its present form

Nordregio is an institute for applied research and development. Our fields of study include regional development, urban policy and spatial planning, as well as the cross cutting aspects of spatial and regional policies. Sustainable development and territorial cohesion are among the most important policy issues in this respect. The geographical focus of the Institute is on the Nordic countries, the Baltic Sea Region and the European institutional dimension. Our main clients are the Nordic Council of Ministers, the European Union, and the governments and regions of the Nordic countries. The institute is located in attractive surroundings in the City of Stockholm, Sweden.

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We further expect that you are experienced in the various aspects of project development and project management.

You must have an extensive international network of research contacts and a good knowledge of the more practical and administrative elements of planning at different administrative levels.

Fluency in English and in a Scandinavian language is essential for all applicants. Other European languages are an additional advantage. As dissemination is central to our role, you should also enjoy lecturing and other dissemination activities and have a proven track record in this area.

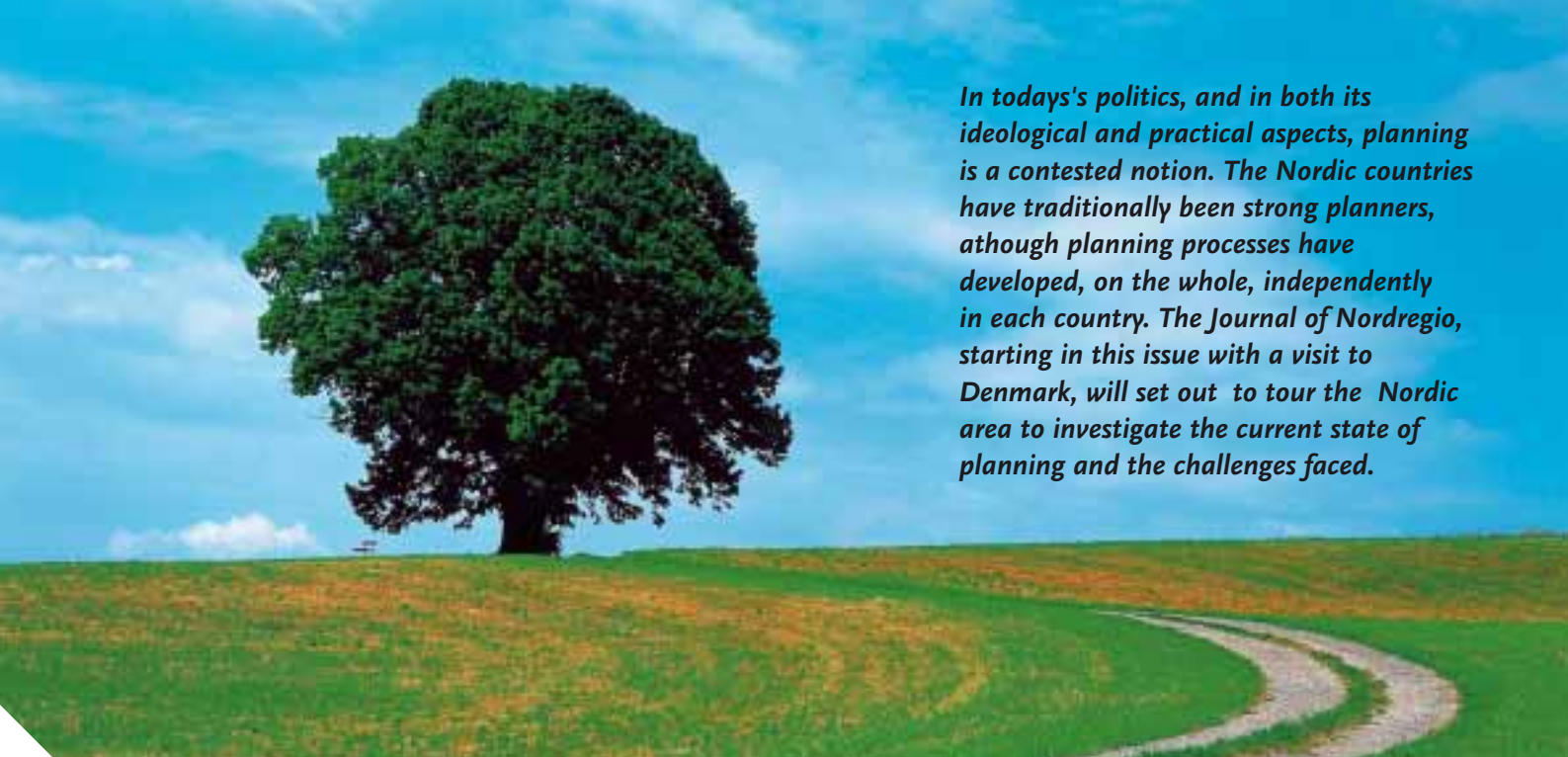
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NORDREGIO
Nordic Centre for Spatial Development



In today's politics, and in both its ideological and practical aspects, planning is a contested notion. The Nordic countries have traditionally been strong planners, although planning processes have developed, on the whole, independently in each country. The Journal of Nordregio, starting in this issue with a visit to Denmark, will set out to tour the Nordic area to investigate the current state of planning and the challenges faced.

Intending to Change Danish Geography

An interview with Danish minister of planning, Connie Hedegaard

By Jon P. Knudsen

- Being minister for planning, how would you describe the Government's overall goals and ambitions in respect of Danish planning?

- It is a fundamental goal of my Government to recast Denmark into a leading participant in the global information society. It is the task of national planning to contribute to realise that goal. This will demand changes of the way we use our territory. Our land use is in many ways still reflecting our industrial past. We really need to adjust the territorial structure of our country to new times of competition from an ever more globalised production. It will of course take years to do so. But it is my intention to promote this change of Danish geography. The coming National Planning Report will take a crucial step here.

- Some advocate that planning, both as a concept and as an instrument of social change, has been the legacy of post-war socialist or social-democratic rule. Do you subscribe to such a view?

- It is a common misunderstanding to equate planning with socialism. Physical planning is not patented by anyone. It is the content and purpose of planning dispositions that matters.

And I would like to stress that an adequate physical planning is in the interest of business. Without physical planning, the daily landscape will soon turn into a mess, for instance environmentally and traffically, reducing possibilities for profit for everyone. Physical and spatial planning must respect a balance between market and state and avoid going into extremes in either direction - at the least this argument is important in a very small country.

- Following the ascent to power of the first liberal-conservative coalition in 2001, the national planning section of the Ministry of the environment was removed from the central ministerial organisation and subsumed under the Danish Forest and Nature Agency. For many, this action was a deliberate attempt to reduce the political role of planning. Is this a correct observation of the Government's intention?

- Your question reflects another misunderstanding. The restructuring of the administration was caused by trivial practical reasons. After the restructuring, the same people are administering the same legislation as they did before. Also practice in relation to other planning authorities has continued unchanged. Do not over-estimate the importance of administrative structures!

- Much discussion has taken place on the role of planning following the recent administrative reform. Many commentators have advocated a stronger role for the new regions in physical planning as many of the municipalities, especially in the Copenhagen region, will still be too small to cover anything like a functional region. What are the main reasons for the Government's advocated position in this discussion?

- Fundamentally, we in the Government have the intention to bring decisions as close as possible to the citizens. The new municipalities are large enough to deal with the planning issues for which they are going to be responsible. I know the opposition parties say that our nature and environment will be destroyed when municipalities become responsible for planning in the countryside. This is really nonsense, only reflecting these parties' warped attitudes to municipal decision-rights.

Concerning the Metropolitan area of Greater Copenhagen, the special regulations in the new Planning Act will secure that planning will be co-ordinated where necessary. Land use in the metropolitan area will be regulated through a National Planning Directive giving general principles for urban development, recreational areas etc.

- Denmark is the only Nordic country to employ national physical planning. What are the advantages and problems of this approach to planning?

- To begin, let us get things right: Denmark does not possess a physical plan for the whole country. On national level, we have policies, strategies, intentions. The Government publishes a National Planning Report stipulating its policies in relation to territorial development. We have in the Planning Act restrictions on the location in coastal areas and on the size of shopping malls which local and regional authorities must respect. And in cases where local planning is going against vital national interests, we also have the possibility to ban or change local planning proposals. And, of course, local and regional planning must respect our legislation, for instance concerning natural values.

In the National Planning Report, the Government sends signals concerning physical planning to the local planning authorities. Experience tells that municipalities and regions generally make their plans in accordance to these signals. Also, the picture of Denmark described in the National Planning Report makes it possible for locals to see themselves in relation to others and in a larger context. This seems to be highly appreciated. Of course, it could be a problem if national planning and Government policies become too detailed. It is our task to deal with national interests but not to poke our noses into local affairs. This is a balance which, I think, we are able to manage.

- Merging physical, economic and social planning is a great challenge, both as planning encounters other modes of political steering, and as the various sector policies may respond differently to planning impetuses. In the Danish context what are the main challenges in this respect?

- The policy and intentions of national spatial planning must of course be in accordance with the economic policy and other policies of the Government as well. But we are far from a merging. I also think, merging all these fields into a combined and comprehensive plan would result in a system that would be too centralised and too inflexible and rigid when meeting the challenges of

real life. The coming regions will, however, be involved in that type of exercise, partly: The regions are going to combine strategies for regional business development made by "Growth Fora" and policies for regional development of educations, employment, culture, environment and other relevant themes into a joint "Regional Development Plan". Growth Fora are bodies where regional businesses and labour market institutions are represented together with local and regional authorities and institutions of education. The Regional Development Plan is not a traditional physical plan locating different activities, however, but a more strategic tool and thus a challenge for planners. I'm confidently looking forward to see how the result will be.

- Different countries obviously have different planning styles and traditions. Is Denmark currently seeking international inspiration in order to refresh its current planning styles and procedures?

- We are always trying to learn from other countries' experience. In relation to the new Planning Act, the way regional planning is organised in England and in France has influenced our thinking about regional development planning. We are, however, far from copying those countries. But making our planning according to our own needs and traditions.

- Various EU schemes and programmes have over the years produced enormous amounts of planning visions and documents. Many of these can be found under the labels of ESDP and ESPON. How, if at all, have these initiatives inspired Danish planning?

- The ESDP contains some guiding principles for spatial planning: Seek territorial cohesion and a balanced development, improve accessibility using transport modes as sustainable as possible, be careful when dealing with natural and cultural heritage etc. These principles have been developed in a dialogue between EU member countries including their planning departments. The principles express a mutual understanding, developed through the process of co-operation. In this process, Denmark contributed to the formulation of the principles of ESDP. Already in 1997, our National Planning Report focused on



Connie Hedegaard.

some of the major principles that later were incorporated into the ESDP.

ESPON, as I understand it, is a research programme delivering descriptions of territorial trends in Europe for instance in relation to globalisation and demography. These trends rise challenges to spatial planning also in Denmark and ESPON gives inspiration when we try to understand and cope with these trends. We are in the coming National Planning Report going to describe some of the trends and give an adequate response.

- EU regional programmes as well as historical cross-border co-operation have created a new foundation for regional planning across national borders. The Øresund region and the Danish-German border offer two cases in point here. How are such challenges dealt with in Danish planning policy?

- We consider the growing cross-border co-operation really important and we support and promote the contacts in many ways. In our new Planning Act we have stated that the new Regional Development Plan must include a description of the co-operation on planning and development issues between the region and regions in other countries. But let me be realistic: Even if there is and indeed should be co-operation across our national borders, the adjacent regions still are regions of their own. We have not reached the point where regions on either side of the border have grown together, economically, culturally or administratively. So regional planning remains within the national realm. None-the-less it might be a good idea already now to start working on common master plans for cross-border areas in order to manage physically the growing functional connections.

No Whips in the Toolbox



Jes Vestergaard

Lars Berg Møller

When the new Danish regions succeed the old counties in 2007, the style and scope of planning will change accordingly. The regions will no longer be responsible for physical planning. Instead they will be trusted with strategic development planning.

By Jon P. Knudsen

Jes Vestergaard, head of the North Jutland planning department, and Lars Berg Møller, planning project manager, are at the epicentre of planning in Northern Jutland, and they have a reputation as good planners. In a recent Nordic comparison of regional strategic economic planning, Northern Jutland, together with Finnish Northern Ostrobothnia, was ranked as an obvious success in meeting the needs of this type of planning, especially through the coining of the Digital North Jutland concept. The future, though, seems uncertain.

- There are no whips in the planning toolbox any longer, nor grenades, Vestergaard says. „Future planning activities will have to use carrots as their main tool of operation. The old type of regional plans that we are used to seeing will disappear. Instead we will have to rely on dialogue and discussions within the region to spur on cooperation between municipalities and across the various sectors encompassing the new regional arena. Crucial to our success will be the ability to present viable strategies and visions.

- *Will there be a general acceptance of this in the region?*

- (JV:) I think so. Northern Jutland has some advantages in this regard. We have a homogenous culture and an urban structure with Ålborg being a natural centre for the region. The old rivalry between Hjørring and Ålborg following the previous county revision process has thus now been overcome.

There is far more turbulence in other regions such as Mid-Jutland and the Copenhagen capital region.

- (LM:) Let me add to this that now more than ever we need to form new mental images of the region. If we succeed in doing that, the new regional plan will become even more important than the present plan.

- *Is the ambition still that North-Jutland should be the best student in the regional planning class?*

- (JV:) Yes, and I think we have a good point of departure given the cultural and structural reasons that I just mentioned. I would also like to point to our University as an important contribution in this respect. Contrary to the university in Århus with its rather classical academic style, our University has proven its ability to interact with the regional business community in a very fruitful way. The result is that we can point to



software electronics, biotechnical hardware, and nanotechnology as promising fields of further business development. In addition let me also mention the traditional business sectors and industries that weigh heavily in this region. If we were able to contribute to even a small relative development in these businesses this would have a very significant impact on the regional economy and on the employment situation as a whole.

- *How do you view the loss of physical planning to the municipal level?*

- (JV:) The government has spoken of the need for a strengthening of national physical planning to compensate for the demise of regional physical planning. I subscribe to such an intention because I think that the municipalities are prone in the main to very heterogeneous and politically short-sited dispositions. Indeed such a change was needed, as much of the coordinating planning effort hitherto had been driven by the counties

- *In terms of the municipalities, will national planning support be coordinating in scope, or will it take the form of uncoordinated sectoral influence?*

- (JV:) This is an important question. As you know, planning is not this governments' ideological cup of tea, and if we look at it historically, govern-

mental coordinating ability is not that impressive either. It is the counties that have been responsible for much of the coordination actually performed in planning. What we actually experience is that the various national sectors take great interest in making their voices heard in the debate over the last regional planning documents now being prepared, as these documents will lay the foundation for the coming round of municipal planning. If there is to be a national coordinator it is more likely to be the Ministry of Finance than the Ministry for the Environment.

- *Will the new type of regional planning being undertaken from 2007 onwards have sufficient authority to make itself heard?*

- (JV:) If it is of a sufficient quality from a professional point of view, then yes it will.

- (LM:) And this will be more likely if it manages to build upon the images and concepts that carry the relevant regional messages to the national arenas. The council of municipal mayors within the new region will constitute an important forum for processing ideas and viewpoints, though mayors will continue to rely on the Chairman of the Region to smooth their way into national politics. Thus new roles follow with the new regional organisation.

- *Concerning roles and organisation, what will become of the present partnership structures?*

- (JV:) There is a remarkable interest being taken by our present partners in debating and coining the regional strategies, and I hope it will be possible to capitalise on this interest in the years ahead.

- (LM:) We have to realise that contributors, whether we talk about organisations or individuals in the regional set-up, are much the same as hitherto. While the national framework for regional planning changes, the regional partnership alliances remain more or less unchanged.

- *Practically. How will the transition from one planning regime to the next take place?*

- (JV:) This autumn the county will finalize an interim regional plan that will serve as a binding base for the new municipal plans. Given this special arrangement we have experienced significant interest from various sectors and segments who would like to have their say in this process, as this plan will become an important instrument for further regional and local development.

Municipal Joy Ahead



From 2007 on the municipalities will take over much of what have hitherto been regional planning tasks. Lars Overgaard Jørgensen is a lecturer in planning at the University of Ålborg, and he has read all of Denmark's municipal plans. Now he sees municipal joy ahead.

By Jon P. Knudsen

- Of course the municipalities look forward to the shift in planning responsibilities. Their role in planning is becoming more important, Jørgensen says.

- Are they prepared for it?

- There are different answers to this. On a general level there have been no preparations as such. Everything concerning the structural reform has happened too fast for anyone to really make preparations for a new planning situation. If we consider the new municipalities they will vary greatly with regard to staff and competence. Although the level of professionalism in general will rise, some municipalities will still lack staff with the necessary qualifications.

- What are the most immediate consequences if, for example, we take a region like North Jutland?

- Let us take a function that today demands three specialists at the county level. When this task is decentralised to the municipal level, it goes without saying that even when reducing the number of municipalities to only eleven, not all of them can be experts in the same field, and thus that not all of them will be able to employ an expert within this field. This type of issue has not been adequately dealt with. One consequence could be that the largest municipality, Ålborg, effectively re-assumes some of the functions that previously resided with the county.

- Do you see a more diversified planning praxis ahead?

- Yes. One reason for this is that the counties' present role as a regional corrective to local planning activities will be abolished. The second reason is that the national prerequisites and guidelines are rather bleak, meaning that the municipal planning position will be somewhat free, at least in the beginning.

- Will new roles, in terms of cooperation, also have to be developed between the various levels of planning?

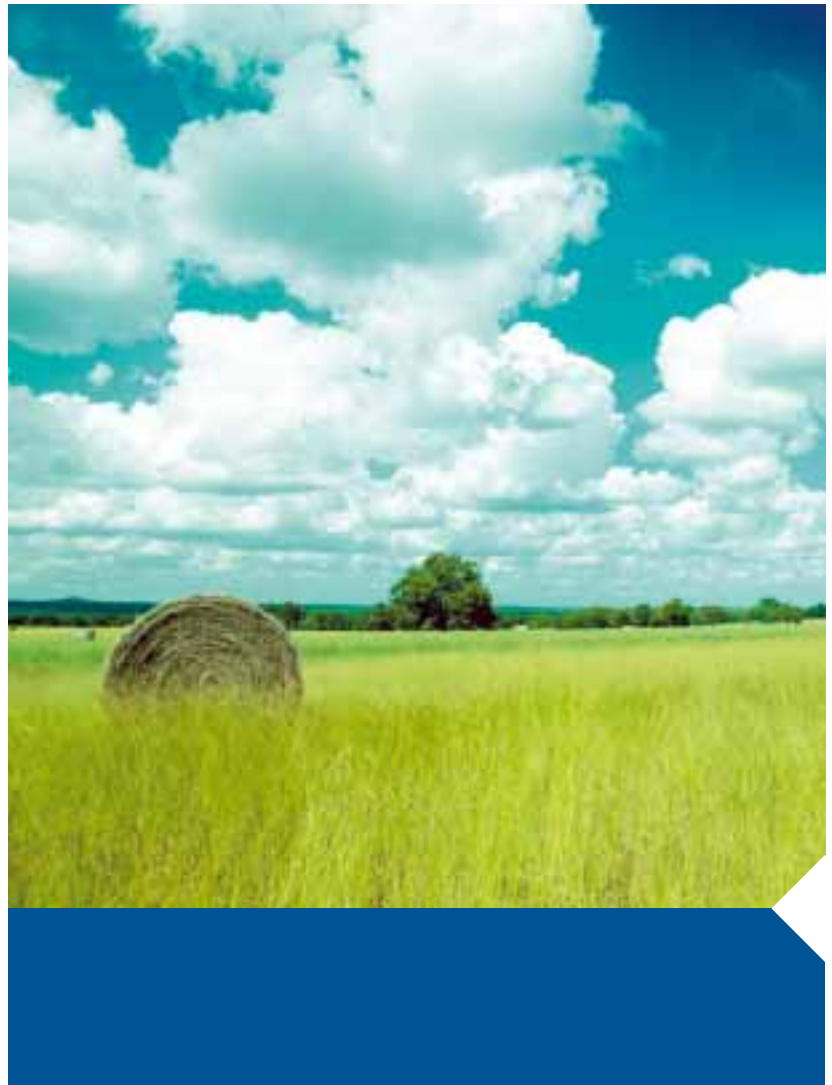
- I am concerned about the level of municipal enthusiasm in this regard. I do not see problems emerging in terms of a new relationship between the regions and the municipalities. I do however think that the latter will have a tough time when entering into important discussions with the state. The state will have to reconsider its various interests, and I fear that the important sectoral interests will then have the upper hand. We often forget that the state struggles to harmonise its own interests, and what is now going to happen is that all three levels, namely, the state, the regions and the municipalities are going to make new plans simultaneously. This fact alone will definitely place its mark on the work actually done. As such, it is likely that the various new regional state offices will endeavour to make themselves heard in the municipal planning processes.

- Will the ideological content of planning change along with the change in roles and actors?

- I see strong planning activity continuing, albeit in a rather different form. There will be less emphasis on the old master plans and more focus on a problem oriented planning style where the interaction between economic and physical planning comes to the forefront.

- What will happen to planning when, or if, a Social Democratic government comes to power, will this precipitate a return to the old planning positions?

- The recent changes in the Social Democratic Party have given few signals as to how these questions will be dealt with. My personal guess is that



the national planning office within the Ministry for the Environment will not be brought back in its previous form. The spirit of Svend Auken that guided it is forever gone.

- To a foreigner it seems peculiar that a reform aiming at the local level retains so many small municipalities in the capital region of Copenhagen. What are the reasons for this, and what are the consequences for future planning?

- The reason for this phenomenon is that the criteria for the new entities were set by the number of inhabitants and not by the size of their area. The

consequences of this for the capital region remain to be seen, but they are clearly important though not easy to judge. Moreover, it is sad that the wider trans-national planning challenges in the Øresund-region have not been discussed within a planning framework. The Øresund case is to my knowledge a success, it deserved to have its own planning perspective.



The Hanseatic themed town of Jakriborg, Skåne

PHOTO: AXEL NELSON

The Theming of Urban Landscapes



By Karin Bradley, *Urban Studies,*
Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

Today, it has become increasingly common to theme new housing areas or even entire towns. A recurrent theme is the 'traditional' European small town, sometimes with nationalistic overtones. This article explores the phenomena of theming and discusses what the demand for nostalgic small town life stands for.

From Las Vegas to Celebration to themed towns in contemporary Europe

Las Vegas might be the most prominent and well known example of theming, with ancient roman style in Caesar's Palace, Manhattan-atmosphere with a miniature of Central Park and Little Italy in the New York, New York complex, Egyptian-themed Luxor with the pyramids, Paris, Venice, etc. In "Learning from Las Vegas" (1972) Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown note that the sign has become the building – architecture is used more as advertising than shop, hotel or home.

These grandiose 'in-your-face' themes may be predominantly associated with casinos, shopping and entertainment

parks, however, today we can see themed housing areas and even entire themed towns. In these areas, the themes of ancient Rome or Egypt are not as common as those of the 'traditional' small town. A well-known example of this is the New Urbanism model community of Celebration in Florida, developed by the Walt Disney Company. It houses around 10 000 inhabitants and is based on the theme of pre-war small-town America. Leonie Sandercock describes the rules that enable the neatness and orderliness of Celebration:

"All houses must have a front porch, to promote neighbourliness, and all will be within walking distance of the school and 'downtown' area. Those who are currently moving in fully expect that other new residents will have a similar outlook on life. 'It



The Paris-themed town of Val d'Europe on the outskirts of Paris. PHOTO: ANNA CHAVEPAYRE

seems to me that it will attract people with the same values', says one new resident (quoted in Katz, 1997). And if it does not, there is no shortage of rules to ensure conformity. All curtains visible from the street must be white, or off-white. Residents may not work on cars or boats in the street. All visible shrubbery must be 'appropriate' and approved by Disney. Neighbourliness, you might say, is mandatory." (Sandercock, 1998: 194)

Celebration means living in a theme park. It is a form of hyper-simulation of a 'better reality.' A similar phenomenon, though perhaps more twisted, can be seen in the recently launched German reality TV-show "Big Brother: Das Dorf" (Big Brother: The Village). Here, the theme is ordinary life in a 'real town' – being the postman, the shopkeeper, the policeman, the teacher, etc – rather than Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island or some other exotic and historic theme as in the early years of documentary soap operas. Perhaps this reinvention of the 'ordinary traditional town' becomes desirable when the real 'real' urban areas are sprawling, dissolving and becoming corporate and impersonal?

The traditional European town as theme

The theming of urban spaces might at first glance appear to be some American phenomena, not applicable to Europe. However, such a statement needs to be modified. In the Nordic countries as well as all over Europe, there are several examples of new themed urban areas and more are likely on the way.

In between Malmö and Lund, in southern Sweden, the newly built town of Jakriborg has a Hanseatic theme with

winding medieval streets. The town has been developed by the company JAKRI AB, founded by the brothers Jan and Krister Berggren, whose names have given the town its name. In Stockholm, Skanska has recently completed Tullinge Trädgårdsstad, which is described as a "real garden city" and having a "genuine Swedish small town feeling" (Skanska Nya Hem, 2004:7).

On the outskirts of Paris, the Walt Disney company has developed a new town on an old potato field: Val d'Europe. The town has four "life style districts" with different themes: one is the 'Paris' of the Haussmann plan of the mid 1800s, though with the buildings in a slightly smaller scale than in the 'real' Haussmann Paris. Another district has the theme of a traditional regional village securely planned with a moat, protecting it from intruders as well as from urban sprawl (Allerholm, 2005).

In the UK we have Prince Charles' town and the New Urbanist project of Poundbury – themed as an old English village. Even in the Netherlands, otherwise known for its contemporary architecture, neo-traditional building styles are becoming common. Christoph Grafe makes a vivid description of the new 'countryside' and castle-community of Haverleij, south of Utrecht:

"In the semi-rural countryside of Brabant, in the south of the Netherlands, the brand new castles of Haverleij offer a highly secured residential environment which, ironically, displays a new kind of collective symbolism, that of the nouveaux-riches. Haverleij is sold as an environment for 'luxurious dwelling in a twenty-first century castle, complete with the amenities of a contemporary countryside. Wonderful

gardens, water landscapes, a forest for walks and reeds softly moved by the air, ... but also a golf course at close hand.' (...)The architectural appearance of the realised castles varies from picturesque modernism to straight pastiche (by Michael Graves and Sjoerd Soeters). These stylistic references may be instrumental in addressing a market of buyers who spend most of their time in office parks and in traffic jams; a sort of Classic FM in which one can live." (Grafe, forthcoming)

Moreover, the traditional European town has even become an export product. Swedish building company SWECO FFNS has recently completed a new satellite town for Shanghai, modelled after the medieval Swedish town of Sigtuna. The town which is planned for 30 000 people is marketed as a "traditional Scandinavian town", complete with Nordic street and Lake Mälaren. New projects, modelled after the "traditional European inner-city", are also underway in other areas in China.²

What is not themed?

The projects described above can clearly be termed 'themed'. However, are other urban areas – as the 'modern' waterfront housing in Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm or Gräsviken/Västra hamnen in Helsinki – not themed? You could argue that they are, that the themes are just different: neo-functionalism and successful water-

¹ www.Haverleij.nl, consulted on 14 March 2005

² Luodian Town Shanghai – att bygga en ny stad för 25 000 invånare. SWECO FFNS, http://www.sweco.se/templates/Project_____2736.asp



Scandinavian themed Luodian Town, Shanghai. PHOTO: SWECO FFNS

front living and strolling. Moreover, extraordinary projects, as the Norman Foster's Swiss Re Tower in London, the Sony Centre in Potsdamer Platz, Berlin, Turning Torso in Malmö, could be described as being themed. In Moore's words these types of projects are:

"...a form of advertising, where buildings perform the role of three-dimensional, international permanent advertisements for a city. It is also a form of theming, in which politicians deploy well-known symbols to create an image of themselves as an enlightened, forward-looking city." (1999: 44)

Furthermore, the Jugend or national romantic architecture, the Sittean planning of the late 1800s, the neo-classicism of the 1920s, etc could also be said to be themed. However, the Modernist movement is often described as seeking a 'style-free purity', for privileging function over form. This statement can however be challenged. A postmodern-inclined person would ask if there is such a thing as 'style-free purity' or pure function. It might be that the modernist architects and planners were seeking this, but as Söderqvist (1999) has pointed out, the pre-fab concrete look of buildings, as in the Sweden's million homes programmes, was also a desired aesthetic at that time. In other words, perhaps the Swedish 1960s and 1970s areas of Bergsjön, Rosengård and Tensta could be said to be themed as well. They

simply had a different theme than those of today; their theme was functionality, modernisation, progress and social equality.

The theming of urban areas could be dismissed as tacky, but why is it actually problematic to theme or copy something you deem to be good? Is this not just about creating better lives and greater choice for people – meeting the demand for nostalgic life or small town dreams? What however indeed could be deemed problematic is, on the one hand, the lack of progressive forward looking and alternative 'themes', and on the other, the claim of 'timeless' tradition or 'true' cities. Ironically, there are New Urbanists who claim that their neo-traditional plans are based on 'timeless' and 'natural principles' (see for instance Hasic, 2004). Such absolutist claims conceal the underlying moral judgments and risk suppressing difference. In other words, a clear and playful theming such as that of Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas is fairer than a concealed New Urbanist theming.

Escaping commodifying themes

The historically themed urban projects described above might be alien to many architects and planners. As Moore points out:

"For most of this century architects have argued that buildings should be 'true to materials' – that they should look like whatever they're made of – but the guiding principle of the vast majority of new development is the opposite: that neutral materials like plasterboard and glass reinforced plastic should be made to look like stone, rocks, wood or whatever else is desired. Architects want to reveal the structure of their buildings; themed space demands that it be covered up." (Moore, 1999: 12)

Perhaps the theming of urban spaces today is unavoidable, particularly as niche building for different consumer groups (and hence life style towns) and city marketing are becoming more widespread. There are however architects and planners who seek to avoid the commodification of urban areas through theming. By constantly seeking new forms, materials, combinations and characteristics, the projects of these architects can become explorative and leave room for unpredictable activities and avoid being easily identified as commodities. Here one can mention Dutch MVRDV architects who, for instance, have designed a new area in Ypenburg, the Netherlands, British FOA (Foreign Office Architects) known for their experimental ferry terminal in Yokohama and French Jean Nouvel among others (Moore, 1999).



New housing area in Ypenburg, the Netherlands. Hageneiland project by MVRDV architects
PHOTO: WWW.ROB-THART.NL

Crisis in the transition to multicultural metropolis

Obviously, there seems to be a demand for 'traditional' small town life, often also with 'nationalistic' overtones, traditional 'Swedish' garden city in Sweden, mini-Paris in France, etc. It is not however the self-sufficient garden city that Ebenezer Howard envisioned in the 1890s. Rather it is the image of the safe, controlled and pleasant small town life but with the goods and amenities of a twenty-first century life style – with products and services produced in third world sweat shops (or in poorer suburban homes right in the same city). Leonie Sandercock writes, regarding the American New Urbanism movement:

"This is the flight from metropolis to 'community', an attempt to turn away from the challenges of the present, and return to an imagined pre-industrial golden age of extended families living in small villages, engaged in face-to-face relations. But this ideal fails to acknowledge that pre-industrial life was in fact embedded in a highly unequal, feudal, patriarchal, and imperialist society. That there is clearly a demand for such nostalgia as a way of life indicates a crisis in the transition from modern metropolis to postmodern cosmopolis." (1998: 194, author's emphasis)

Perhaps this longing for "traditional life" and past times becomes stronger in an increasingly confusing and globally dependent time. And in a time when the large urban areas are sprawling into an uncontrolled mess, filled with foreign newcomers. Perhaps it is convenient not to see the storage spaces, the waste, the highways, and the guest workers, which our increasing consumption and travel requires. If we did, it might be too painful. As J. M. Coetzee writes in the story of his childhood in Apartheid-South Africa, when he is celebrating his birthday in an ice-cream parlour with ragged coloured children staring at him through the window:

"...what would he say? 'They are spoiling my birthday, it is not fair, it hurts my heart to see them'? Whatever happens, whether they are chased away or not, it is too late, his heart is already hurt. ... He thinks of the English as people who have not fallen into a rage because they live behind walls and guard their hearts well." (1997: 73)

But maybe we need to have our hearts hurt and become angry – at least if we have hope for a more just urban development.

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Självstyrelse på lokal och regional nivå. Perspektiv på det lokala och regionala ansvaret för framtidsfrågorna.

Region Skåne och Västra Götalandsregionen, 2005. p.149

Reviewed by:
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This book contains a number of articles which all focus on regions. The focus of the individual articles does however differ. While some of the authors (Petersson, Gustafsson etc) describe and summarize such phenomena as the impact of Europe on the regions, or the historical development, and the rise of multi-level government, others put forward a more argumentative type of article. All however share an interest in surveying the regional perspective in addition to serving the current committee work on the future institutional arrangements in Sweden (Ansvarskommittée). In reading this

book one learns a lot more about the background of, and the challenges to the regional level of administration. Regionalization is not an automatic process proceeding in a linear fashion, but is instead characterized rather more by political ups and downs. Although almost all the European states have ratified the principles of self-government (the Convention of the Council of Europe), this does not necessarily mean that these principles have been fully implemented. The book also offers a brief insight into the systems of Spain and Canada, which, contrary to the Scandinavian systems are based much more on federal principles (Spain de facto).

In addition to laying out the development of regional administration and the basic concepts associated with it, the

book also offers up some interesting analytic articles. **Anders Lidström** from the University of Umeå first constructs a comparative framework and thereafter presents some empirical findings on how sub-national arrangements differ across Europe. His point is that all political systems have to define a number of institutional relationships, such as the one between the national state and the regions, including the tasks and the responsibilities of the sub-level organizations, and secondly, that these definitions tend to differ, even within the EU. On the basis of the variation one can go further and try to explain the differences, which is not however an easy task. Only in this way can we learn which of the solutions are transferable and which are historically and/or culturally determined. **Henry Bäck** from the University of Gothenburg in his article shows how

Självstyrelse på lokal och regional nivå. Perspektiv på det lokala och regionala ansvaret för framtidsfrågorna.



regional co-operation is based on the rational action of the actors involved. Expectations, interests and calculations of benefits are important determinants of the interplay, and this argument also finds empirical support. **Siv Sandberg** from the Åbo Akademi in Finland uses an opportunity to relate the current trends of development to an earlier study. In so doing, she is thus able to highlight certain changes in the nature of political discourse and political practice in respect of the focus on regions. While the findings from the late 1990's indicated a relatively strong regionalization process, recent developments have not followed suit. Although the available empirical evidence from the current set of developments remains patchy, it is possible to discern to some extent the emergence of a revised role for the state as well as a certain congruence taking place across Scandinavia, as Sweden and Norway move towards a position that envisages a stronger role for the state, while Finland moves towards increasing decentralization. But, the regional hype that characterised the late 1990's is no longer on the political agenda. The analysis of these three authors thus suggests that regionalization is not proceeding automatically but rather that it is embedded in the network of interests.

For a professional or enthusiast working with regional affairs, the message of the book may be frustrating. The

winds have to a certain extent turned, with support, from above and below, for regional empowerment on the wane. Some of the writers in the book also discuss the difficult dilemma between autonomy (självstyrelse) and democracy (folkstyrelse), which at times emerges in the political rhetoric of the wider debate, and creates policies that aim to protect citizens from the arbitrary power of the municipalities. The crucial question here relates to the need to balance autonomy, i.e. which collective issues should be left to the grass-roots communities, and equality, i.e. which elements of collective life should be regulated by the upper level? Another line of argumentation in the book concerns the fragmentation of the public sphere. At present it makes less sense to talk about the state-region-municipality relationships when the reality is much more complex. The question thus essentially becomes, what is the proper role of the regions in the multi-layer structure of public-private government and governance? Secondly, is it realistic to aim at coordinated institutional solutions or is the reality necessarily composed of policy-specific solutions changing over time?

This kind of normative perspective, i.e. what should be the role of the regions in relation to both the upper level and the lower (municipal) level is not however particularly well addressed in the book. This is the sort of discussion that would give those working at the regional level

more power in their arguments, and help them to participate in the often interest-based wider discussion of the development of society. In many respects this is a tricky challenge, and it may be more prone to the politicians than the research community. The basis for this is crystal clear: citizens should have autonomy in relation to their personal issues. But to go beyond that, to argue that the interests and will of the regions ought to form the basis of all policy making, is a more sensitive type of argument. Similar debates are going on in respect of such issues as the ideal size of local government, and the vices and virtues of direct democracy, to name but a few. At the end of the day however, researchers should also provide input into these kinds of discussions. In the book's epilogue **Tomas Ekberg** argues that the role of the regions is becoming stronger. This bold assertion stands however in stark contrast to the findings in the book itself, though it is supported by the finding that the work related area of individual people often exceeds municipal boards, even in Sweden where the average size of local government areas is relatively large. Perhaps then global competition and the other current challenges now faced requires that the pendulum has once again to move in the direction of stronger regions.

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