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*Neighbours with
Similarities and
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Revolutionary change or business as usual?



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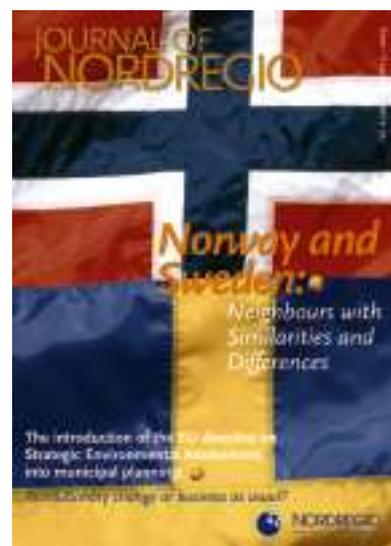
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JOURNAL OF NORDREGIO

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BUILDING NATIONS, BUILDING REGIONS

This month marks the centennial for the peaceful secession of Norway from Sweden, and as such, this reminds us of one of the more important strains of Western European 20th century political history, namely, the history of nation building. Finland, Iceland and Norway all had to wait for the 20th century to (re)gain their full national independence. No wonder Nordic scholars were at the forefront of the research tradition that in the immediate post war decades developed the discipline of comparative political studies, and in particular focussing on the nation building processes.

In the new European political order of the twenty-first century we should not forget that the process of nation building remains a continuing one. As European integration deepened the development of new nation states parallels the process of integration as witnessed by the Baltic cases and by the discussions talking place on the future of the Nordic self-governing areas of the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands.

The European political agenda has to address several geographical levels simultaneously. Since the mid 1980s EU institutions have generally addressed the needs of the regional level through a vast body of regionally targeted programmes and schemes in addition to using the concomitant rhetoric of the Europe of regions idea.

This has led to an expanding and general interest in regional institutions and a more specific interest in

their role in bringing about European economic and political integration. Whereas the notion of nation building to some sounds somewhat obsolete, the project of building regions seems to be more in line with current thinking.

However, the links between the nature of nation building and that of the building of regions should not be neglected. Mapping and analyzing regional cleavages and preconditions in national politics played a substantial role in the academic nation building tradition because geography and politics happened to be so strongly interwoven in political practice.

Considering the principles it is hard to separate the processes of regional and institutional awareness in such regions as Catalonia, The Basque Country and the Sami Country from

put it diplomatically, not been eager to strengthen the country's elected county councils, or to cater for a new and stronger regional level. While the Danish government has even attracted negative response from the Council of Europe concerning the enforcement of the recent structural reform designed to transform the country's regional and municipal level.

For these countries, it appears that they have had more success in building strong national democracies than in fostering a climate for strong, democratically institutionalised regions. There may be several reasons for this. One point in particular is that the Nordic countries after all present themselves as strongly centralised in political style and thinking, another point may be that the Nordic municipalities have a strong position

Between a strong state and powerful municipalities there is not much space left for strong regions

those processes that eventually led to the formation of the current nation states. The most striking difference seems to be that some national projects were accorded the sufficient amount of historical luck to finalise their institutional quests while others for some reason or another failed.

Most European regions do not however harbour a national ambition in their struggle for more self-determination. For most regions their ambitions can fully be catered for within the realm of the present nation states set up. With regard to the present state of affairs in the Nordic countries, it should be noted, though, that the national scope for the further devolution of political power to the regional level is not altogether as favourable as could be expected.

The initially far-reaching ambitions of the Västra Götaland and Skåne experiments have been somewhat curtailed by the Swedish government. The Norwegian government has, to

politically and economically compared to other European countries.

Between a strong state and powerful municipalities there is not much space left for strong regions. Paradoxically then, the Nordic countries may eventually find themselves outpaced in the international drive for stronger regions as the success of nation building paralyses their ability to build regions for tomorrow.



The New Map OF DENMARK

By John Jørgensen
Senior Researcher, PhD
Nordregio

The reform of Denmark's local authorities structure is advancing in leaps and bounds, with the main features of the new map of Denmark now discernable.

The pace of the reform process has been remarkable indeed. Within a year and a half a series of events have paved the way for reform:

- Recommendations of the Commission on Administrative Structure (January 2004),
- The New Denmark (the Government's proposal for an administrative reform, April 2004)
- Agreement on a Structural Reform (between the Government and the

Danish People's Party – who together form a majority in Parliament, June 2004)

- Plan for implementation of agreement (between the Government and the Danish People's Party, September 2004)
- Package of 49 proposals presented to the Parliament (February 2005)
- Agreement on the new map of Denmark (between the Government, the Danish People's Party, the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals, March 2005)

According to the Government's plan, the 49 proposals for legislation that will reform the structure of the local authorities and establish a new division of labour between administrative tiers will be approved by the Parliament before the summer break. If this does not occur however the elections for the new municipal and regional councils, due to be held in November of this year, will be hampered.

The reform process has basically been launched with a view to ensuring that, at its conclusion, Denmark has fewer local administrative units. Ever since

| | Old Municipalities | New municipalities | Counties (amter) * | Regions (regioner) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Number | 271 | 98 | 13+1 | 5 |
| Inhabitants | | | | |
| - average | 20,000 | 55,200 | 344,100 | 1,082,300 |
| - median | 10,500 | 43,200 | 289,700 | 1,182,300 |
| Area (km ²) | | | | |
| - average | 159 | 440 | 3,072 | 8,620 |
| - median | 143 | 361 | 3,265 | 8,020 |

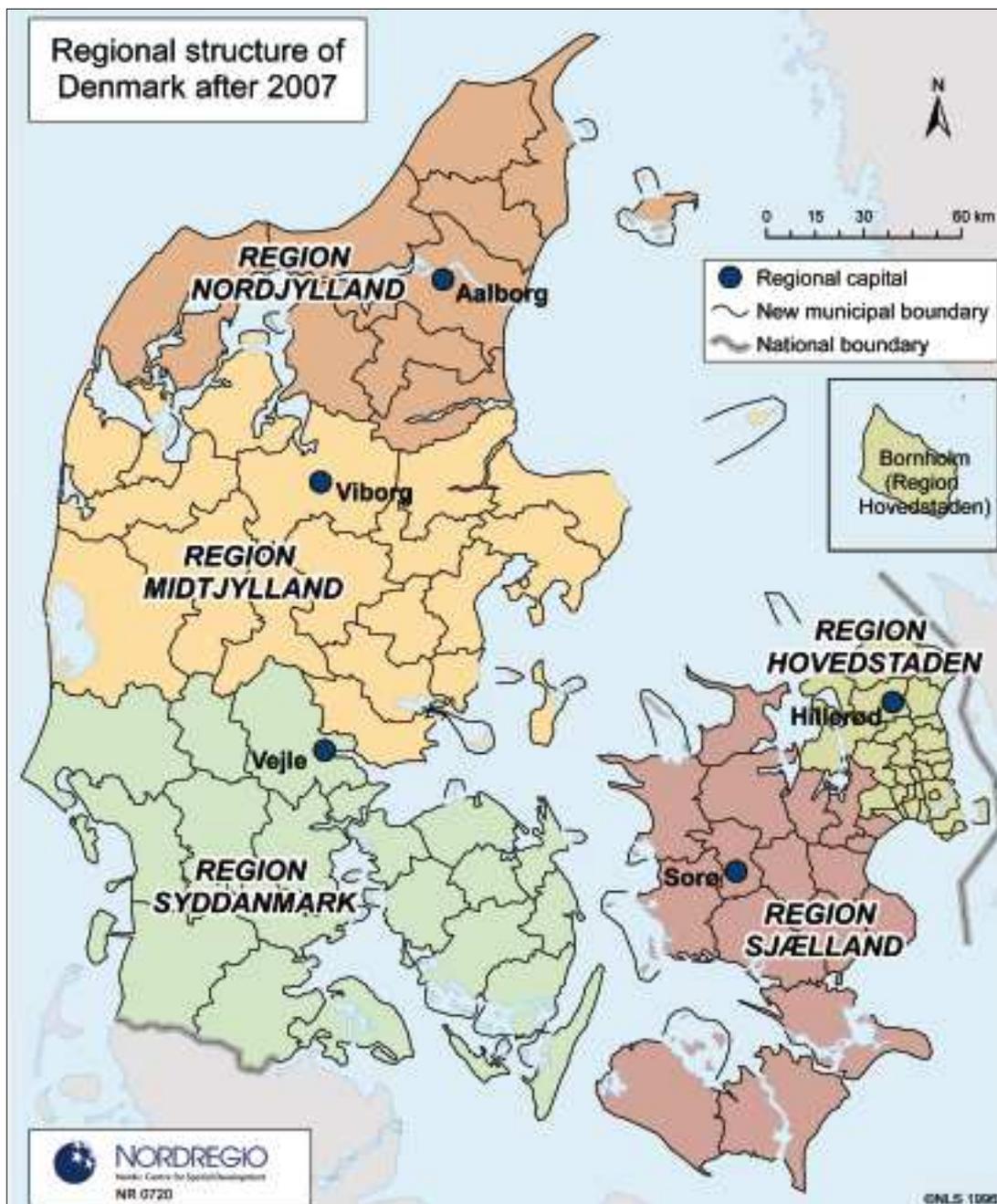
Source: Statistics Denmark: Statbank Denmark (own calculations). Calculations are based on the old municipalities.

*) The cities of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg are not included

2005 it became clear that the local authority structural reform was not only a reform of relations between the state and the local authorities, and a reform of relations between the public and private sectors, but also a reform of the organization and management of the local authorities per se. Contrary to the White Paper from the Commission of the Administrative Structure, where questions such as centralization versus

decentralization, regional coordination and governance, and the circumstances under which larger administrative units might oversee the privatisation of tasks were hardly touched upon, these issues have now emerged onto the political agenda with a vengeance. It is as yet however a little premature to make a conclusion as to whether those discussions will influence the reform in any perceptible fashion, as it remains unc-

lear whether the government would consent to the arguments of the Social Democrats who (headed by the newly elected Party Leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt) are opting for regional coordination rather than further centralization, and continuing public provision of services rather than the prospect of more privatization.





VÄRMLAND AND ITS NORWEGIAN RELATIONS

Värmland is a well-established regional trademark in Sweden. The region remains however in a problematic position in the Swedish semi-periphery. So what then about strengthening its ties with Norway.

For a border region like Värmland, proximity to Norway's fast growing Greater Oslo Region provides an opportunity to rethink strategies and alliances. At the Centre for Regional Development (CERUT) at Karlstad University three reports have recently investigated the patterns and potential for cross-border cooperation between Värmland and Norway.

Leena Hagsmo has mapped the scope and content of current cross-border cooperation efforts. She portrays a history of intense cooperation between Värmland and the related Norwegian regions since the mid 1960s. From this, two initiatives stand out as being of lasting significance, the ARKO-cooperation created as a forum for the mutual interest of the communities centred around the towns of Arvika and Kongsvinger and the thematic effort to improve the standard of cross-border communications, notably the standard of the E18 running from Oslo to Stockholm.

With the advent of the EU Interreg programmes, a number of more specific projects emerged under the umbrella of the Interreg IIIA Inner Scandinavia programme. Concern for the future of the E18 has also been encompassed in the European Trans European Network (TEN) agenda, where this link plays a pivotal role in bringing about the so-called Nordic Triangle, i.e. the transport network connecting Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm.

Åsa Rydin writes on Värmland and in particular on the emerging reorganisation of the Swedish economic and political landscape. Her main thesis is that with the increased weight being put on regional enlargement and the functional aspects of a region, Värmland now has the choice between several options. Finding itself at the crossroads between an eastern link to Örebro and Stockholm, a southern link to Gothenburg, a northern link to Dalarna and an eastern link to Oslo, Värmland has to consider the changing options for each of these axes.

Concerning the Oslo axis, it leads to the closest located large city region and to one of Europe's leading economic hot spots. This is perceived as an asset both by the regional business community and by politicians, though practical integration is to some extent hampered by differences in political practices and regulations. The policy fields of communications and health care in particular offer examples in this respect. On

the positive side, the fact that several cross-border initiatives seeking to solve these problems have been put in place should also be mentioned.

Gunnar Skomsøy delves into the different practices and cognitive styles of actors on both sides of the border. Starting from the assumption that people in Värmland and the Eastern part of Norway know each other well and have rather similar cognitive styles and values, his conclusions however illicit a somewhat polarised picture of the populations on each side of the border.

Firstly, Norwegians conceive their position in rosy terms. They are currently experiencing an all time high as regards their quality of life and hence are reluctant to change. Their rational thus becomes one of preserving their present social organisations and practices. On the Swedish side however there is a widespread feeling that life could be better, and that change eventually is for the good.

Secondly firms and public organisations behave quite differently in the two countries. Skomsøy argues that a more market driven Swedish business tradition and a stronger benchmark leaning in the municipal sector leads to different business climates. While the public sector in Värmland, both on the regional and the local level, makes significant efforts to serve business development and economic renewal, their Norwegian counterparts cling to more traditional bureaucratic styles of administration and tend to be more concerned with their own organisational matters than with the competitive strength of their local communities.

By Jon P. Knudsen

Further information:

Hagsmo, L.: Kartläggning av ett gränsregionalt samarbete. Arbetsrapport 2004:14

Rydin, Å.: Värmland i ett storregionalt sammanhang. Arbetsrapport 2004:15

Skomsøy, G.: Värmland midt mellom Stockholm og Oslo. Arbetsrapport 2004:16

IN SHORT...



Municipal Visions for Environment Policy

Following the blueprint for the ongoing structural reform of the municipalities and regions, the municipal sector will be given responsibility for environmental affairs previously allocated to the county councils. This has spurred the municipal umbrella organization, Local Government Denmark (LGDK), to publish its visions for how the municipalities are going to set their mark on this policy field. LGDK sites five visions:

- Local planning should take a stronger grip on the integration of the urban and rural interface.
- The municipalities should see themselves as the guardians of public access to the nature.
- The municipalities should take a cohesive grip of the issue of water management.
- The municipalities should, through the transfer of responsibilities in the environmental policy field, be better able to present a more holistic solution to any case with which they are charged, and hence also offer the citizens more comprehensive solutions to their requests.
- Municipal policy will gain a better foundation for policy coordination on a regional level.

Regional Policy Report 2005

The annual government Regional Policy Report was presented to the Folketinget in April. As is usually the case, the report states the overall regional impact of government policy for the previous years, and presents the relevant sector policies illustrating their regional impacts. Much of the report is of course devoted to the regional effects of the present economic and to struc-

tural reform in the making. The report also presents some of the governmental initiatives for the future. Two such initiatives deserve special attention. Firstly the government cites its intention to conduct a swift analysis of the total regional impacts of its policies in order to improve, target and simplify the regional policy dimension. Secondly the government proclaims the establishing of a ministerial working group charged with regionally relevant policy affairs.



Governmental White Paper on Future Structural Reform Needs

On 7 April, the Government presented a white paper to the Suomen Eduskunta (Parliament) on the future need for structural reform in the country's political and administrative system. The paper outlines the need for a complete overhaul of the central, regional and local political and administrative systems by the year 2010, and pinpoints some specific concerns:

In particular, the need for greater attention to be given to specialized needs relating to questions over local services and the size and competence of the present municipal structure. Whereas the special Finnish arrangements in respect of joint municipality boards and the copying of best practice solutions can offer some guidance for the future development of local services, the government has intimated that a revised law on municipal borders may be prepared before the end of 2008. This is expected to reinforce the national debate on municipal mergers. The government also envisages, by the beginning of 2005, undertaking a process of strengthening local democracy. Concerning the various local state services such as the police, courts etc, binding goals for their geographical distribution are to be established.

For the regional level, the paper highlights distinct trajectories for future institutional development. Tasks related to revision, legality and general administration should be linked to the State Provincial Offices whereas regional development and service provision should be placed with the regional councils. The paper, however, is open as to the future number of regional entities.

Green Paper on Local Democracy

The Ministry of the Interior recently published a Green Paper describing the present structure of local government, encompassing also the related challenges to local democracy. The report identifies four thematic headings. For further elaboration:

- Problems relating to the legal regulations of the municipal sector
- The internal and external structural challenges
- Renewal of existing municipal practices
- Attitudes within local politics and municipal management.

Interesting, the report highlights some specific problems related to the Finnish model of governance, namely what the report cites as "the growing inter-municipal and regional cooperation and the confusing regulations and governance practices stemming from these arrangements." The report also claims that growing inter-municipal cooperation has mainly negative effects as regards municipal self-government.

The report forms a part of a national project on the development of local democracy, while a follow up is also being prepared to suggest more specific policy alternatives for further consideration.



Referendums on Municipal Amalgamations to take place on 8th October

The Ministry of Social Affairs has decided that referendums on municipal amalgamations will take place in 66 Icelandic municipalities on the 8th of October. People in these 66 municipalities will vote on 17 different proposals. Currently there are 101 municipalities in Iceland, but in three recent referendums people in 12 municipalities voted for mergers, resulting in these 12 municipalities being reduced to three in the following year. A yes to amalgamation in all 66 municipalities would therefore mean a reduction from 101 to a total of 43. However, according to the prevalence of negative opinions in some of the smaller municipalities, a comprehensive across-the-board yes vote is very unlikely.

Fading Centralization?

In its economic outlook for the period 2005 – 2010 the Ministry of Finance notes that the 2004 net immigration balance between the Reykjavik area and the rest of the country was, for the fourth consecutive year, lower than in previous years. The report does not however offer any opinion as to whether this marks a new pattern of fading centralization. The report also notes that housing prices in the Reykjavik area rose sharply in 2004, pointing to an underlying increase in the demand for dwellings. This in turn suggests that the attraction of the capital region remains strong.



New Report on Regional Policy

In line with its regular four-year cycle the Government has recently produced a report on regional policy to the Storting. The report is characterized by being less preoccupied with marginal regions than its predecessors, and by being more open to discussing the emerging challenges for city regions. The report makes a further plea for stronger differentiation to be given to policy measures in accordance with local and regional needs, without being very specific on the nature of these policy variations.

Commission Reports on Local Democracy

In its preliminary report to the Government submitted on 1 April, the commission, charged with investigating the conditions of local democracy, proposes a complete overhaul of the governmental relationship with the municipal sector. The commission expresses its concern over an increasing tendency for various ministries to deal with local politics according to strictly sectoral needs without seeing these in relation to each other, the result being that the municipal sector has to deal with a multitude of uncoordinated national policies and tasks. The commission raises the issue of the need to strengthen the coordinating role of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development versus the various sectoral ministries and a similar strengthening of the Storting Standing Committee on Local Government.

The commission also proposes that the self-governing status of the municipalities be written into the Constitution and that the process of deciding on the growth and composition of the municipal sector economy be regulated through negotiations between the state and the municipal sector.

Strengthening of EIA in Planning

Following an EU directive, the Government has decided to widen the scope of environmental impact assessment to encompass all relevant planning procedures within the municipal and county council sector.

Government Announces Expansion of Transport Aid

The long-disputed struggle between the Norwegian Government and the EU over the nature and scope of the country's regional transport aid regime has taken a new direction. In a letter to the EFTA surveillance agency ESA, the government has announced its intention to include a substantial number of peripheral municipalities in Southern Norway in the transport aid regime. In 2004, ESA opposed the governmental intention to include four island municipalities into the same policy regime.



Council of Europe Warns against the Weakening of Swedish Local Government

The politically independent role of Swedish local government is being eroded according to a report presented by the Council of Europe. The report raises several prospective measures as possible ways to implement the restoration of a strengthened municipal sector. Municipalities and county councils should be accorded a wider range on policy development. As such, the report explicitly urges that the pilot experiments with enlarged county council competences in Västra Götaland and Skåne become permanent. Concerning the economic framework, the report suggests that the local and regional competence to regulate tax levels should be widened. Simultaneously the report asks that the national financing to municipalities and county councils be less earmarked and more general in form. Furthermore, the report voices

concern over the number of reforms with which local government has been charged without the financing of these reforms having been sufficiently evaluated. Finally the report asks for a strengthening of the municipal self-governing principle in the constitutional reform under way.

New Advisory Board on Sustainable Development

Following the recent reorganization of the Swedish governmental system, an advisory board on sustainable development has been established under the Ministry of Sustainable Development to advise the Government on the further implementation of the Johannesburg summit agenda, as well as the following up of more traditional tasks such as Local Agenda 21, regional growth agreements and wider planning concerns related to climate policies, investment policies and public health. The council's administration is to be located in the city of Umeå.

Gotland to Get New Institutes?

A national committee charged with advising the Government on the localization of public activities has made a recent proposal to locate two new national institutes to Gotland, one on the role of twinning municipalities and the other on sustainable development.

Road Tolls to Surround Stockholm

After a long and heated debate involving politicians as well as a substantial number of concerned citizens, the Government has finally decided to implement road tolls for all vehicles entering central Stockholm between 6.30 a.m. and 18.29 p.m. The tolls will be levied for environmental reasons and only for a test period of seven months to see what impact this regulation has on traffic patterns and the environment. A trip to inner Stockholm will cost from SEK 10 to SEK 20, with the maximum payment for peak hours, whereas no charges will be made for evening and night passes.



By Susan Brockett
Research Fellow
Nordregio

At Nordregio, we have the rewarding task of organising and conducting many seminars, courses and workshops for practitioners, policy-makers and researchers. In addition, we have many opportunities to participate in activities sponsored by other agencies, both in the Nordic countries and in the EU. Over the last couple of years, I have noticed something that disturbs me. Of course, my observations are extremely anecdotal, and as a member of a research institute, perhaps I should wait until I have more of an empirical basis for my reactions before I say anything. But although I may be wrong, I would like to share my thoughts with the readers of the Journal of Nordregio. Perhaps some of you have had similar reactions.

The new policies of both the EU and the Nordic Council of Ministers emphasise the importance of creating a robust region around the Baltic Sea. This means that the new EU members are important partners in future developments in our region. We want and need more interaction, common events, co-operative efforts and shared experiences if we are to achieve our goals. And here is where my observations come in.

It seems to me, when we offer an event that also targets our neighbours on the other side of the Baltic, that the Nordic participation dwindles. That is, when it is obvious that our neighbours to the east are going to be a major group in attendance, potential participants from the Nordic countries lose

SMALL SAMPLE ERROR?

interest, even though a similar event, without obvious Baltic participation, engenders interest. At Nordregio we have even received questions such as “Is this for the Baltic countries? Who else from my country is registered...No one? Oh, well then I don’t think I’ll register either”.

I have a few interpretations of this, and they are equally disturbing to me.

One is that potential participants need the support of their countrymen or others with similar backgrounds in order to feel comfortable in an international setting. But I would hate to believe that we are so provincial and uncertain. And although it is an advantage to be able to discuss in generic Scandinavian, most are competent enough in English to make language a poor excuse.

Another is that participants think they need Nordic discussion partners in order to learn from an event. But I would like to think that we are more curious than that, and have understood that we learn as much from differences as we do from similarities. Exploring how differing systems and traditions address similar types of questions gives us a rich opportunity to discover both universal truths and the specifics of contingency.

And still another interpretation is that Nordic participants don’t want to participate because they assume that the level of sophistication will be reduced because “they” are so far behind “us”. The attitude seems to be, “I have nothing to learn from ‘them’, only from other Nordic countries that are equally ‘advanced’ as we are.” I certainly hope

that this interpretation is wrong, because it comes from a world view that is sadly mistaken.

Firstly, although the Nordic countries have achieved much, and have much to be proud of, in this globalised era new ideas and approaches to both old and new problems are being created everywhere. Past success is no guarantee of a rosy future, and we can learn from all our neighbours, as well as from critical reflection over our own track record. Secondly, our colleagues to the east have been subjected to a repressive system that has stymied development for generations. But believe me, they as individuals and professionals are NOT dumb. Their competency is impressive and their rapid acquisition and critical assessment of what the world offers makes intellectual exchange a challenge and a joy. In comparison, we in the Nordic countries can seem complacent and self-satisfied.

So, I hope that all of the above are wrong, and that I am making the common small-sample-error, where I make incorrect inferences from too few observations. I look forward to many more events with Nordic, Baltic and wider European participation that will make me feel foolish, and force me to write another small piece here, where I apologise to you all for even thinking such thoughts.

Norway and Sweden: Neighbours with Similarities and Differences

June 2005 marks the centennial of the final political separation of Norway and Sweden. The *Journal of Nordregio* asked Orvar Löfgren and Gunnar Skomsøy to reflect on some aspects of the relationship between the two countries today.



— *Bridging Norway and Sweden at Svinesund is more low key than bridging Sweden and Denmark across the Sound, says Orvar Löfgren*

Orvar Löfgren is professor in ethnology at Lund University. For several years he has been studying the process of symbols and integration related to bridging Denmark and Sweden across the Öresund. The opening of the new motorway bridge between Norway and Sweden at Svinesund this summer presents rather different challenges, he says.

— A bridge between different countries and cultures symbolizes an awful lot of energy. To take the Öresund project, the whole concept of the Öresund integration relied on the bridge project. Therefore, the power of the bridge image was enormous, especially beforehand. The Svinesund case is different. There was a bridge there already, while practical integration between the regions on both sides has already taken place for decades, as Norwegians have scoured the Swedish border regions for alcohol, cheap consumer goods and summer dwellings.

— *Is there also a political difference?*

— Certainly. The Öresund project was so politically driven, it was an elite project and strongly embedded in EU rhetoric. The Svinesund project has of course been linked with the 2005 centennial, but is more practical in scope. It was driven by a continuous need for practical interaction, and not planned in a top down manner in the manner of the Öresund bridge project.

Bridging cultures

— *What can be said about the nature of integration in the two cases?*

— The Svinesund integration project is mainly driven by two forces, Norwegian consumer behaviour, and the Norwegian desire for summer dwellings, both of which affect the Swedish border area. In return, there is also a notable level of Swedish labour migration to Norway, but this is mostly directed towards the Oslo region. We should note, however, that those who go to Sweden to buy cheap goods are very different people from those who buy summerhouses on the Bohuslän coast. The latter group consists predominantly of well off Oslo citizens, whereas those seeking low price food and other items are often depicted, at least in their home country, by the pejorative notion of being bargain hunting “harry” consumers. The balance between the two countries is therefore somewhat biased, with Sweden now having the image of being some kind of banana republic and a place “south of the border”. There is a slight parallel here with Denmark, where Helsingør takes the role of Strömstad, but the integration process in this part of Norden is clearly more driven by other forces such as the density of universities in Öresund region.

— *Is there a difference in attitude as well?*

— Certainly, the Swedish-Norwegian integration process is rather low-key in that it comes about as a practical more than a planned process. There are also few points of irritation concerning the way in which the two national systems operate, leaving aside some problems relating to how to terminate the Gothenburg – Oslo motorway connection. The high integration expectations in the Öresund region prior to the bridge project may have given rise to more fuss later on regarding variations in bureaucratic and political styles and procedures, but it should also be menti-

oned that the cultural gap between Denmark and Sweden is somewhat larger than the gap between Norway and Sweden, though the differences here should not be exaggerated. A kind of initial narcissism often operates at such times, emphasising national stereotypes beyond reason. This was definitely the case when the Öresund bridge opened, and so it will probably be with the new Svinesund bridge as well.

— *Will increased physical integration in itself eventually pave the way for deepened social and cultural integration across the borders?*

The idea that all contact leads to integration is fundamentally wrong. Just to cross a border for cheap alcohol does not accomplish anything in integrational terms. In the same vein, though Norwegians have come to dominate the market for summer houses in Bohuslän have an immediate effect on the local economy there, the likelihood of more lasting effects, in terms of integration, implies that they spend more than a few weeks holiday there. There also has to be some kind of balance across a border. We clearly see this in southern Denmark where the process of integration across the German border does not run very well despite good physical conditions for transport and communication.

— *The old idea of Nordism and a Nordic identity, will it revive with the bridges?*

— The classical notion of Nordism must now be understood to be somewhat obsolete. But this was a notion that thrived when travelling to a neighbouring country was still an event in itself. Hence it was an ideology that was more rhetorical than practical. Today's Nordism is more practical, but less rhetorical.

By Jon P. Knudsen



Cognitive Styles Constitute Enormous Differences

We like to think of Norwegians and Swedes as fairly equal in terms of the way they think and do things. *Gunnar Skomsøy* tells us that we in fact differ substantially in the way we think an act

Skomsøy works as a business consultant in Oslo and has several links with international universities, notably with Karlstad University where he is involved in studying variations in systems and behaviour across the border between Norway and Sweden. One of his observations is that the attitude towards regional development is very different from one country to the other.

– To take an example, the Swedish municipality of Årjäng with its 9 790 inhabitants has a staff of eight persons working full time with business development issues. I will be hard pressed to find a Norwegian municipality devoting anything like as much to business development. Norwegian municipalities tend, primarily, to be oriented to their core welfare services and to organisational matters. It is evident that, as a general pattern, this makes a substantial difference to their ability to cater for future economic activities.

– *What explains these differences?*

Firstly, such things often relate to differences in business traditions and business structure. Norway has a long and continuous tradition of exporting raw materials, which is a good business

to be in when business cycles are good. Sweden also has a strong raw material base, but has over a long period of time developed a much more market oriented business structure. This means that the understanding of creating and maintaining external relations and alliances is much more important even to Swedish municipalities and regional authorities than to their Norwegian counterparts.

On a deeper level we must consider that different cultures have different cognitive styles fostering different behaviours. These styles are rather persistent for centuries, but may change somewhat when exposed to shocks and crises. The Second World War presented such a shock experience, and on a minor scale the 1992 economic crisis exhibited a shock to the Finnish and the Swedish economies, though not in the same way to the Norwegian economy. We should not therefore be surprised to find that consciousness of the need to work proactively towards regional development varies among the Nordic countries.

– *How can we detect these variations in consciousness?*

– I have been working on an initial project mapping the awareness of municipal leaders in three countries, namely, Italy, Norway and Sweden, as to their surroundings. I asked questions like, who are your customers, who are your competitors, with whom can you make alliances, what is your strategy etc. These are seemingly simple and straightforward questions to put to anyone heading an organisation of some size. Interestingly, the Italian and Swedish leaders had ready answers to most of these questions, whereas their Norwegian homologues had problems

in coming up with good answers. This suggests that the importance of coping with their surroundings has not yet become manifest in the same way in Norway as in other European countries.

– *Does this imply that the Norwegian way of coping is inferior to the Swedish system?*

Not necessarily. We do things differently, because our preconditions vary. I am very reluctant to classify some systems as bad and others as good. As long as Norway maintains its strong raw material basis, the system of according capital, manpower and other resources is probably logical. But to improve, Norway should learn from countries with a more market driven economy. Take Denmark as an example. Almost devoid of raw materials, the country's industries and firms have to put 'value added' into their production processes, and make it sell at the market. This creates a kind of competence that has great value in itself.

– *What can the neighbouring countries learn from Norway?*

– Several things can be learned. There is still a lot to be said for the Norwegian work ethic, while our ability to handle and coordinate large projects should be also noted. The offshore oil projects and installations offer a clear example of this. Another good example is the handling of the 1994 Winter Olympics. All of these examples demand vast organisational skill and competence.

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DIVERGING AND CONVERGING: *A Comparative Analysis of Norwegian and Swedish Regional Policies*

Introduction

Since the peaceful dissolution of the union in 1905, Norway and Sweden have proceeded on different paths in many areas, but continue to share many features in common. This combination of distinctiveness and commonality applies to regional policy in the two countries, a policy field where they have common challenges of peripherality but have developed policy responses in different ways. This article provides a comparative analysis of regional policy in Norway and Sweden, with the aim of discussing the common and distinct features of the two countries' policy approaches. Starting with a discussion of the origins of regional policy and reviewing the core policy instruments in the post-war years, the underlying changes in policy development are examined.

The current form and foundations of policy can best be described, according to recent policy documents, as showing a clear shift in paradigm. This shift is evident in the evolution of the aims and objectives of regional policy. Inducing these changes are several factors, most notably globalisation and a new economic situation for the regions. Key words in the current regional policy landscape are decentralisation, in terms of policy administration and implementation, competitiveness, and a whole-country approach. Regional policy instruments are becoming less selective and increasingly 'horizontal' in order to support the general business environment. However, at the end of the day, it is safe to conclude that Norway and

Sweden are still taking into account traditional regional policy issues, albeit with a modern twist, and they are inherently adopting different policy thinking despite their seemingly overt common traits.

Origins of regional policy

The underlying foundations of regional policy in both countries stem from their geographical situation and the Scandinavian welfare state rationale. The northern parts of Norway and Sweden constitute the most dispersed and sparsely populated areas in Europe. The disadvantages of their peripherality have been associated with low economic activity compared to national averages, evident in terms of high unemployment rates, relative lack of infrastructure, and a weak business/industrial climate. Strong centralisation trends in both countries show an ever-increasing population in core areas, most notably in Oslo and Stockholm. Wealth creation has been concentrated in a few regional centres at the cost of welfare and economic growth in the peripheral areas. This explains the strong historical commitment to an equity-based regional policy in both Norway and Sweden during the post-war years, emphasising the spreading of wealth more equally across both countries.

The origins of regional policy are different in Norway and Sweden. In Norway, immediately after World War 2, regional policy was specifically deve-

loped and aimed at re-building and re-populating North Norway, which suffered from the drastic consequences of Nazi occupation. Thus, Norwegian regional policy was very much based on the preservation of the settlement pattern. The policy was called 'district' or 'peripheral' policy because of its primary focus on developing the districts with sparse population.

Regional policy in Sweden had less of an imperative than in Norway and did not emerge as a major area of policy until almost a decade later. As in Norway, Swedish regional policy was focused on the northern parts of the country but (in contrast) was a response to the increasing out-migration from Norrland which weakened the basis for the provision of both private and public services drastically. Regional policy was, therefore, connected to active labour market policy by seeking to improve local job opportunities and provide more regional balance in employment.

Traditional objectives and instruments of regional policy

Equity considerations were dominant during the post-war years in Norway and Sweden. This was clearly reflected in how the core objectives and aims of regional policies in both countries were formulated. The main objectives of Norwegian regional policy were to re-build and re-populate North Norway, to spread the wealth being created in the major cities, and to counteract centrali-

sation trends. Eventually, the core objectives of Norwegian regional policy became the preservation of the settlement pattern and the creation of equal living conditions. In Sweden, on the other hand, the initial regional policy goals were to create and localise new jobs in Norrland as a response to out-migration. In this context, regional balance was the core objective of regional policy while also providing opportunities to settle in any part of the country.

In the post-war years, regional policy instruments were very selective and focused primarily on designated target areas in the northern parts of the two countries suffering from peripheral disadvantages. With clear spatial targeting, such policy instruments constituted what became known as 'narrow' regional policy. This has as its primary aim, compensation for problems and difficulties arising from the regions' disadvantageous geographical position. It can be seen as a reactive policy that is demanded or required to solve regional problems in the districts. The instruments were also highly centralised with the national government being responsible for both their design and implementation. The spatial coverage of the policy instruments was very much oriented towards the peripheral northern parts of Norway and Sweden, and also included areas in which there was a weak industrial base.

Policy instruments included localisation grants, grants to sparsely populated areas, transport and employment grants, and social security concession schemes. In Sweden, for example, localisation grants for firms were actively used to promote employment in Norrland from the beginning of the 1950s when the Swedish Parliament and Government saw the need for an active localisation policy to create opportunities for new jobs and enterprises. A similar development can be seen in Norway with the creation of the Regional Development Fund (*Distriktenes utbyggingsfond*) with the main purpose of promoting industrial development and employment. This applied not only in the peripheral north but also in industrially weak regions. Both countries also operated social security concessions as a means of pro-

viding an ongoing subsidy for employment costs in the peripheral or problem areas.

In recent years the importance and scope of these types of policy instruments have diminished in both countries, reflected in the significant decline of their financial allocations. In part, this has reflected changes in policy thinking (discussed below), but EU competition policy rules on the control of State aid have had an influence. For example, EU regulations have forced the social security concession schemes to be discontinued in their traditional forms, first in Sweden and then in Norway, with a revised form of the aids remaining in the northern counties of Sweden and Norway.

Paradigm shift in regional policy

In recent years, regional policy has evolved in both Norway and Sweden but the underlying foundations of regional policy have remained much the same. Settlement patterns and regional balance are still the main emphases of policy-making. Nevertheless, external influences and the changing socio-economic situation in each country have resulted in a paradigm shift in regional policy. Contemporary regional policies now more and more emphasise efficiency considerations as opposed to equity. The underlying context in this situation is now globalisation and the internationalisation of domestic markets. With the increasing openness of both countries' economies, regions are now facing an entirely different economic context that requires a completely different set of policy interventions. In addition, the decline of traditional industrial sectors and continuous centralisation trends have impacted on the policy context.

These factors and trends have resulted in a change in policy direction for both countries with an emphasis now on growth and competitiveness, reflected in the prioritisation of growth poles and regional innovation and R&D. If traditional regional policy was directed specifically at certain areas, especially in the northern parts of the countries, modern regional policy is now increasingly adopting a national approach with the aim of helping all regions being able to

contribute to national growth and competitiveness. Nonetheless, these overt dramatic changes did not happen overnight; in fact the shift in regional policy can be best characterised as small but constant waves of change since the 1970s.

In Norway, the changes can be traced back to the mid-1970s with the end of central planning optimism, accompanied by emerging deregulation and market orientation. Ideas of self-reliance and self-development began to surface, and regional resources were mobilised to promote growth poles in which industrial bases could locate and thrive. There was also an emerging focus on the services sector and entrepreneurship as part of regional development. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the reliance on endogenous growth and innovation to promote regional development has increased. This was related to the recognition that the country's oil sector production was reaching its peak with the accompanying decrease in oil revenues. This has been evident in recent White Papers which (St.meld.nr.31 1996-97 – Om distrikts- og regionalpolitikken and St.meld.nr.34 2000-01 – Om distrikts- og regionalpolitikken) focussed on "robust regions" and entrepreneurship. The importance of technology and innovation were also acknowledged. An earlier White Paper on regional policy in 1992/93 (St.meld.nr.33 1992-93 – By og land hand I hand. Om regionalutvikling) was the first indication that regional policy was starting to adapt a whole country approach. This long-term change in priorities underpinned the Norwegian Government's most recent White Paper on regional policy (St.meld. nr. 25 (2004-2005) Om regionalpolitikken) in April 2005 which made clear that a marked shift in policy thinking has taken place, with the title only being "regional policy" and not "regional and district policy". A statement to Parliament by the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Erna Solberg, on April 2002 (*Vekst i hele landet – Kommunal- og regionalminister Erna Solbergs redegjørelse i Stortinget – 30.april 2002*) signalled the main "new" elements of the 2005 White Paper.

Changes to regional policy thinking also occurred in Sweden in the 1980s. Regional balance was still the main issue but, from the late 1970s, the Keynesian policy model was increasingly being replaced with a neo-classical policy that focused on human capital development. Both in the regional policy report (SOU 1984: 74 - Regional utveckling och mellanregional utjämning) and the Government Bill of 1984/85 (Regeringens proposition 1984/85:115 - Om regional utveckling och utjämning) initial signs of a growth oriented policy could be seen. This period was followed by a severe economic recession in the early 1990s with high unemployment rates across the entire country. As a result, the Government Bill of 1993/1994 (Regeringens proposition 1993/94: 140 - Bygder och regioner i utveckling) acknowledged that regional policy should be seen as part of a national growth policy. Subsequently, Swedish regional policy shifted its focus to contribution of the regional level to national growth. Key words also include entrepreneurship and strengthening the business climate. This was preceded by a report (SOU 1989:87) from a Parliamentary Commission, set up in 1987 to review regional policy, which recognised for the first time the potential of a "broad" regional policy. The process of changing the focus of regional policy became most explicit in the 1998 regional policy review (SOU 2000:87 - Regionalpolitisk utredning) which formally marked the shift in regional policy thinking and resulted in the Government Bill of September 2001 (Regeringens proposition 2001/02:4 - En politik för tillväxt och livskraft i hela landet). Traditional regional policy was merged with newer regional industrial policy into a policy area called "regional development policy".

Current regional policy objectives and aims

A significant change in the objectives and aims of regional policy is the horizontal and broad approach being adopted in new policy documents. Although the peripheral and sparsely populated areas are still a priority in regional policy, the overall objective of national economic growth presupposes that the policy must be broad in nature.

The Norwegian 2005 White Paper explicitly states that the objectives of regional policy are "to maintain the main characteristics of the population settlement and release the wealth creating potential in all parts of the country". The Swedish 2001 Government Bill states that the goal of regional policy is "well functioning and sustainable local labour market regions with an acceptable level of service in all parts of the country". Thus, from being an explicitly spatially targeted policy, regional policy in both countries now applies to all parts of the country. All regions should have the opportunity to exploit their growth potential. The logic is that the sum of regional growth equals national growth. This is the most important change in regional policy rhetoric that has occurred in Norway and Sweden.

However, some traces of the traditional objectives of regional policy can still be seen. The new policy objectives contain the words "population settlement" (Norway) and "labour market regions" (Sweden). The summary of the Swedish Government Bill acknowledges both the changing focus of policy and more traditional policy objectives. It makes the point that "Swedish regional policy has changed from including primarily prioritised areas to being a policy that in practice covers all parts of the country, although the main focus will remain on prioritised areas." In the Norwegian White Paper, the traditional district policy still retains its priority status; it is stated that district policy constitutes a special regional policy intervention area, and the objective is for this policy area to participate in strengthening the foundation for population settlement and wealth creation in regions with specific challenges related to low population, weak business climate, and long distances to larger centres and markets both for inhabitants and the business sector.

Consequences of the paradigm shift in policy

Regionalisation and decentralisation

The change in the objectives of regional policy has brought with it the regionalisation of policy, i.e. a bottom-up approach in policy making. The rationale for this is that every region must

have the opportunity to exploit its resources to contribute towards national growth. If every region has the goal of producing economic growth, then the policy must have a regional perspective to enable it to take account of the unique conditions in each region with respect to releasing growth potential. Norwegian regional policy is clearly bottom-up in that it is recognised that growth comes from the lowest level - the individual firm or entrepreneur - and therefore has to accommodate itself to the conditions experienced locally. The challenges vary between different regions of various sizes, which also have different functions in a larger regional and national context. Thus, regional policy in the broad sense must be differentiated and adapted to the challenges of all types of region. This is also the case in Sweden where it is recognised that regional variation is necessary; because the conditions for development are different in every region so it is necessary for the intensity and implementation of policy to be varied as well.

With the increased focus on regional conditions and opportunities for growth, recent decentralisation trends have occurred both in terms of devolving responsibility and regional budgets. The argument is that if the regions are to have the best opportunity to exploit their growth potential, then they should also have the freedom to decide what strategies to implement and how to allocate their budget.

These changes can be seen in the following examples. For several years, Norwegian regional policy has been characterised by increasing regionalisation through the transfer of more policy autonomy to the county level. The 2001 White Paper on regional governance allowed the counties to decide how to spend a newly-amalgamated regional policy budget. At the same time, the scale of central government resources allocated to the counties has grown. In 2003, regional policy resources were transferred to the counties in expenditure blocks, over which the central government has very little control. The previous approach, which involved the regions entering into forms of contract with the central government, specifying county spending and operating within

centrally-determined regulations has been superseded.

This type of highly-decentralised policy action has not however been duplicated in Sweden but the country has gone through some changes in terms of decentralisation of power to the regional level. For example the recently introduced Regional Growth Programmes (RGPs) are based on a bottom up philosophy and the fact that regional actors are best placed to resolve regional problems. Since they are closest to the regional situation, they also have the most understanding of how to react to regional challenges. Therefore, in the past couple of years, the Government has decentralised more responsibility to the regional level to develop appropriate strategies.

In both Norway and Sweden, the changes taking place to regional policy administration are part of a wider agenda of recasting central-regional relations. In 2003, the Norwegian Government initiated the so-called "Responsibility Reform" (Ansvarsreformen) which is still being implemented. One of the main principles underpinning the reforms is the delegation and decentralisation of responsibility and authority to the regional level. Following on from a 2001 White Paper on the role of the different levels of government and a 2002 White Paper on local level democracy, the County Council has become the main policy actor at the sub-national level. While the reform process entails greater freedom of action and independence for both municipalities and counties, it has been the role of the county authorities as regional development stakeholders that, in particular, has been renewed and strengthened. The County Councils are required to take the lead in developing Regional Development Plans and the necessary initiative to develop regional partnerships. The changes to the responsibilities of the County Councils are now being evaluated and a further expected in 2007. This development has to be seen in context of the current debate in Norway about the future of the regional geographical division, which is moving towards the direction of establishing larger units than the current counties.

In a similar vein, there is a Parliamentary Committee (Ansvarsutredningen) which is looking at administrative structures in Sweden. The aim of the Committee is to propose changes to make the system more efficient and more adapted to the current decentralised regional policy approach. The Committee submitted its interim report in December 2003 (Utvecklingskraft för hållbar välfärd SOU 2003: 123) proposing to the Government that its work should be seen as being based on an ambition to realise equal public service provision while at the same time achieving a high level of democratic legitimacy and subsidiarity. The Committee will consider the structure and division of tasks within the public sector, the primary questions being the relationship between government and national authorities and agencies, and the division of responsibility between state and municipality. Depending on how the relationship between state and municipality is dealt with, the issue of whether there should be one or two municipality levels will then be considered (as well as how these should be organised and divided). The final report of this committee is expected in February 2007.

Policy co-ordination and partnership

With more focus on a national and broad approach to regional policy, co-ordination between different policy sectors is increasingly regarded as a valuable component of policy. Policy co-ordination in Norway is promoted through the development of the Regional Development Plans and is encouraged through the general activities of sectoral policies. In Sweden, it is explicitly mentioned in the 2001 Government Bill that eight policy sectors are of key importance to regional development. This is in line with the broad regional policy logic that different sectors' strategies and objectives have direct and indirect regional impacts and when taken together (i.e. co-ordinated) can have a major influence on regional development.

Another aspect of the regional policy landscape is the increasing use of regional partnerships and programming elements in the implementation and development of policy strategies. Relatively speaking the principles of

programming and partnership are taken more into account in Sweden than in Norway. This is a direct consequence of Sweden's participation in the EU Structural Funds programmes. Clearly, Swedish EU membership impacts on how Swedish policy-making evolves. The stress put on regional partnerships and the programming principle are good examples of policy influences from the EU. The use of programmes in regional development is the most important element of regional policy in Sweden. Programming now lies at the very core of policy implementation. The Regional Development Programme (RDP) is a single document that forms the basis for the development of the RGPs, county plans, and national programmes. The operational document is the RGP which is based on the partnership principle. The RGP also clarifies and sets out policy instruments and measures. The RGPs have to coincide with the objectives set out in the RDP and is key to the implementation of the programming strategy. The EU Structural Funds adopt a similar approach, with the development of Single Programming Documents and Programme Complements.

New policy instruments

As noted previously, the shift in the paradigm of regional policy has meant a move away from the use of specific policy instruments that target certain prioritised regions towards broader strategies or programmes encompassing groups of interventions addressing competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and innovation and R&D. The types of policy instrument now being employed could be characterised as the 'broad' regional policy i.e. policies that do not have specific regional objectives but affect regional development indirectly and include areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, labour market, education, defence, and welfare.

In Norway, counties are required to set out their expenditure intentions in four-year Regional Development Programmes (RDP), which are revised on a yearly basis with more precise spending plans. The RDP is based on a partnership in each county, which consists (ideally) of the county, Innovation Norway, higher education institutions

and the private/business sector. As in Sweden, the focus is on partnership and policy co-ordination. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development can indicate development priorities which it would like to see taken up in the regional strategies; these include job creation, entrepreneurship, innovation and early phase investment support and it can set out a menu of expenditure options from which the regions can select and weigh their budget priorities. However, its proposals are not prescriptive: regional partnerships are encouraged to show how their annual spending relates to central government priorities, but they do not have to do so, nor does the central government have any veto powers.

Unlike in Norway, the Swedish 2001 Government Bill explicitly states that at the regional level the RGP from 2004 is the main regional policy instrument. Each programme contains analyses, objectives, regional priorities, and a plan for the implementation, financing, and evaluation of the programme. These programmes stress the importance of realising policy co-ordination and partnership. The County Administration Boards and the municipal co-ordinating bodies are responsible for drawing up these programmes. In addition, RDPs exist in Sweden with a focus mainly on sustainable development and the business sector. The RDP is a policy document, which does not have any specific allocated budget but does specify overarching objectives for the region that must be taken into account by the RGPs, county plans, and national programmes.

Innovation and R&D

Crucial aspects of policy instruments now are innovation and R&D, and their role in promoting regional competitiveness and sustainable growth. Central government policy documents published recently clearly demonstrate the importance accorded to innovation and the knowledge economy in regional development. This is clear in the Norwegian 2005 White Paper and the Swedish 2001 Government Bill. In addition, both countries have made significant changes in the apparatus for policy delivery with the establishment of new organisations specifically for

innovation related purposes. Innovation Norway and VINNOVA (Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems) are the main organisations in delivery and implementing key policy measures to promote innovation, R&D, commercialisation of business ideas from academic institutions, and entrepreneurship. The Lisbon agenda's main objectives are also taken into account in policy-making in both countries.

In Norway, the Government published a document called "From Idea to Value" (Nærings- og handelsdepartementet - Fra idé til verdi. Regjeringens plan for en helhetlig innovasjonspolitik) in 2003, which highlights a holistic approach to innovation policy. The overall objective is to provide for increased wealth creation in the entire country that will provide the resources needed to achieve welfare policy goals. The vision is for Norway to become one of the world's most creative countries. One of the main reasons in Norway for emphasising the role of innovation in promoting sustainable economic growth is the fact that the petroleum sector's economic and social contribution will eventually run its course. This is in addition to the expected demographic challenges of pensions and other related issues. Thus, the economy in the future will have to rely on other income sources; hence the stress placed on innovation and R&D.

Furthermore, it is mentioned in the 2005 White Paper that the Government will continue to promote incubators and also encourage the commercialisation of business ideas from higher education institutions. The new element is the notion of a "Centres of Expertise" programme (based on a similar Finnish model), which is directed at regional clusters of specialised and internationally oriented business and knowledge milieux. This programme will be the corner-stone of promoting regional innovation, and reflects a collective and integrated approach to innovation, business internationalisation and regional development. The programme is expected to be launched in 2006 pending results from three pilot projects. Its objective is for regional business clusters with international potential to receive support to develop closer co-operation with other actors and carry out

demanding innovation projects.

In Sweden, the Government published a strategy document called "Innovative Sweden. A Growth Strategy through Renewal" (Näringsdepartementet och Utbildningsdepartementet – Innovativa Sverige. En strategi för tillväxt genom förnyelse - Ds 2004:36) with the main purpose of establishing a pro-active agenda that points out some prioritised areas in which Sweden can improve the conditions for innovation. The overall vision is for Sweden to be Europe's most competitive, dynamic, and knowledge-based economy.

The difference between the two countries in this respect is that, whilst Norway emphasises "Centres of Expertise", Sweden focuses relatively on innovation systems. An innovation system is defined as "the network of organisations, individuals and institutions which determine and shape the generation, diffusion and use of technology and other knowledge, which, in turn, explain the pattern, pace and rate of innovation and the economic success of innovation". The importance of innovation systems is clearly seen in the activities of VINNOVA, which are directed at developing innovation systems from a national, sectoral, and regional perspective. The first of VINNOVA's programmes with a regional perspective was VINNVÄXT, which is about regional growth through dynamic innovation systems. The programme contributes to stimulating innovation systems by supporting expert environments for research and development (R&D), and by building competitive and dynamic regional networks. The concept behind the programme is the promotion of effective cooperation between companies, R&D organisations and political institutions, the so-called Triple Helix within each region. In this way, long-lasting innovation systems will be put in place that allow regions to be internationally competitive within specific areas of growth.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that there has been a shift in how regional policy is formulated in Norway and Sweden. At the same time, the traditi-

onal considerations of policy, which are based on the peripheral disadvantages of the two countries, are still retained. A whole-country approach is now being implemented, and policy instruments are becoming more neutral in nature. Innovation has also taken on an important role in promoting regional economic development. Decentralisation and regionalisation are also key current trends in policy implementation.

In an international context, similar developments are taking place in many other European countries. Here too there is evidence of more emphasis on national and regional growth and also on policy decentralisation. Notwithstanding the similarities with other European countries, however, the unique features of Norway and Sweden remain visible in particular, the stressed placed on the challenges facing the peripheral north. This is seen in how regional policy originated and also in how it was developed. With respect to policy delivery, the principles of programming and partnership are relatively more emphasised in Sweden as a direct consequence of EU membership. Differences between the two countries can also be seen in how policy is delivered and in the instruments employed. This combination of commonality and contrast will continue to provide scope for interesting policy experimentation and learning as both countries face the challenging times ahead.

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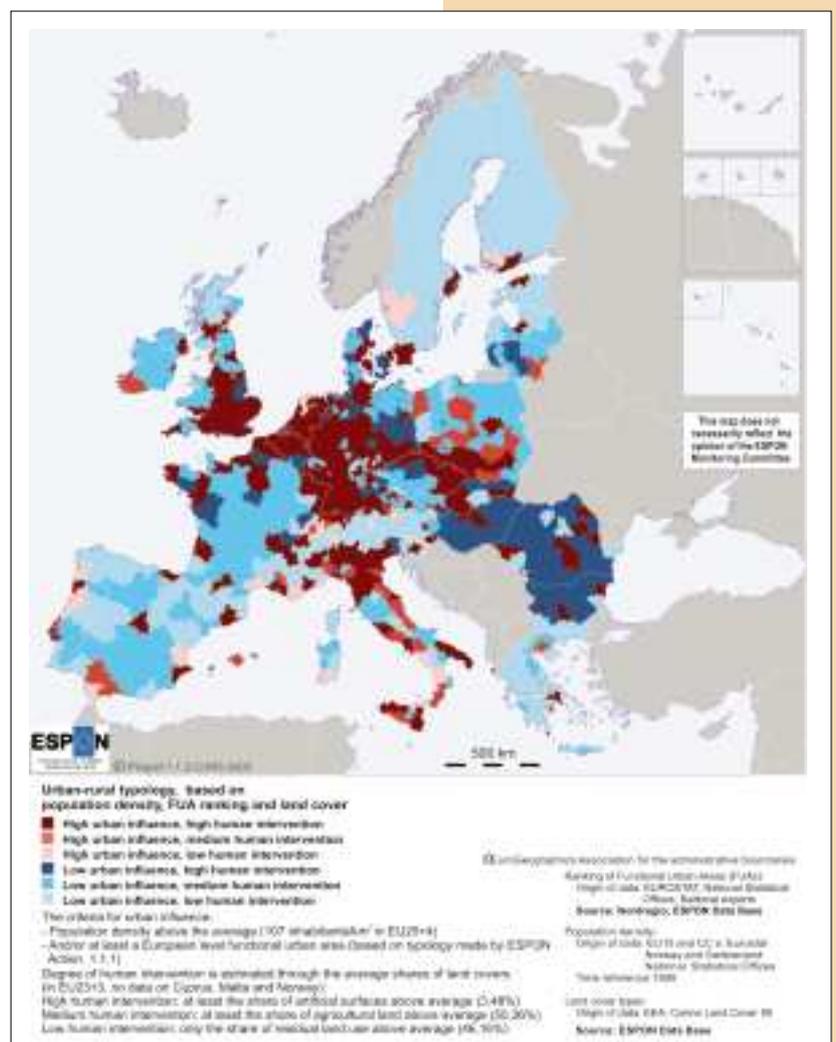
Corrections

Book review by Hólmfríður Bjarnadóttir

In the April edition of the Journal of Nordregio the review of Trausti Valssons book, *Planning in Iceland – From Settlement to Present Times*, was written by Hólmfríður Bjarnadóttir, research fellow at Nordregio. We apologize for the fact that her name was inadvertently omitted from the manuscript.

Map for Christer Beng's article

Also in the April edition of the Journal of Nordregio, Christer Beng's article, *Urban-rural relations in Europe* should have been accompanied by the map included below. Again we apologize for this regrettable omission:



The introduction of the EU directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment into municipal planning:

Revolutionary change or business as usual?



By Hólmfríður Bjarnadóttir

By the 21st July 2004 all the EU member states, as well as those also subject to the Agreement of the European Economic Area¹, had to fulfil the requirements of the EU directive 2001/42/EC: On the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. The so-called 'SEA directive' applies to plans and programmes that are subject to preparation and adoption by the authorities at national, regional or local levels.

Hólmfríður Bjarnadóttir at Nordregio is currently researching the potential effects of the directive on municipal planning in various European countries as a part of a PhD study. This study is also included in the interdisciplinary research programme MiSt, funded by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency.

SEA, past and present

The international discussion on the need to implement an Environmental Assessment for plans dates back to the 1980s. Such notions were later expanded to encompass the additional areas of policies and programmes (PPPs) with the term Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) subsequently being introduced with reference to impact assessment for so called 'strategic level planning' and decision-making (Hilding-Rydevik, 2003).

Prior to the introduction of the directive on the assessment of the effects of plans and programmes, requirements for the environmental impact assessment of projects (EIA) have been in place in the Nordic countries' legislation since 1987, and by 1994 all the Nordic countries were subject to an EU directive "On the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment"².

On the one hand it can be claimed that the rationale and the design of Strategic Environmental Assessment builds upon a discourse developed in the context of Environmental Impact Assessment of projects, and the processes bear many resemblances. However, SEA shall be carried out earlier in the decision making process and is essentially assumed to apply to more strategic planning contexts. Whereas EIA applies to projects, usually defined as physical investments, such as a road, a bridge, or a power plant, SEA applies to programmes, plans, and policies. On the other hand, the development of SEA can be said to have taken inspiration from the field of policy appraisal. SEA is essentially intended to identify and assess the likely significant effects of a policy, plan or programme on the environment, the results of which are then taken into account in the decision-making process.

High expectations of SEA:

The level of expectations surrounding SEA has over the last twenty years been developed and explored by researchers and officials in a large amount of books, scientific articles and official reports (e.g. Therivel and Partidario, 1996, Verheem, 2000 and Lawrence, 2000). Among the expectations illu-

strated in the last decade's SEA discourse, is that SEA is regarded as an important tool for integrating the environment into decision-making (Sadler and Verheem, 1996) and as such, it is expected to contribute to the implementation of planning practices that are in line with Sustainable Development (Therivel, and Partidario, 1996). This recognition of the importance of SEA is confirmed by the call for its implementation at both the international and European levels such as Agenda 21, the Biodiversity Convention, the Habitats Directive and the Structural Funds and the EU SEA Directive (Sheate, 2001).

However, despite the high expectations attached to the SEA directive, there remains a perceptible lack of systematic evaluation and empirical investigation of the actual experiences of SEA application; the obstacles and actual effects on planning processes and plan preparations.

What does SEA mean in practice?

By the introduction of the EU directive on SEA, the preparation process of certain plans and programmes that fall under the directive must include an environmental assessment. The introduction of these requirements means that the European countries need to make legal adjustments to implement the directive, as well as that the directive must be implemented at the different operational planning levels. According to the directive, environmental assessment means the preparations of an environmental report, publication consultation, taking the report and the outcomes of consultation into account by the decision-makers, and the provision of information on the decision (See table 1).

¹ Includes Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

² For an overview of the Nordic countries' EIA systems see (Bjarnadóttir, 2001).

In so doing, the objective of the directive: “[...] to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development” (Directive 2001/42/EC) shall be fulfilled.

However, many of the attributes of the SEA-process are already included in existing planning processes, such as the collection of baseline information, public participation etc. Furthermore, many of the countries have already put in place their own SEA processes. The expectations connected with the introduction of the SEA directive are often illustrated at the general level, with spatial planning viewed as a rational planning process, where the directive will lead to the revision and improvement of current planning practice. The sceptics, as regards the influence of the directive, argue that it merely presents ‘good planning practice’ noting also that the contents of the directive are already to be found in existing planning discourse.

Table 1: The ingredients of SEA

The ingredients of SEA: “According to the EU Directive and the prevailing SEA literature, SEA is composed of the following elements and components”:

- Screening of which plans are likely to have significant environmental effects and do therefore need to undergo SEA.
- Deciding on the scope of the assessment, i.e. what policy objectives and policy options need to be assessed and what methods and information will be applied in the assessment.
- Collection and analysis of baseline information, both on the current state of the environment, environmental characteristics and the environmental problems of the plan area.
- Identification, analysis and assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the plan in question.
- Preparation and publication of an environmental report, where the assessment is documented.

- Information to, and consultation with, environmental authorities and the public at certain moments in the process.

- Taking into account the environmental report and the results of consultation process in the final decision - making.

- Provision of information on the planning decision, and, in particular, how the environmental report and consultation processes have been taken into consideration.

- Monitoring of the significant environmental effects associated with the implementation of the plan.

(Based upon Theodórsdóttir, 2004)

THE INTRODUCTION OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

The discussion of the implementation of SEA in the Nordic countries goes further back than the SEA directive, while requirements on strategic assessment can be found in the Nordic countries’ legislation as early as 1994. By the year 2000, all the Nordic countries had some form of requirement for strategic assessment included in their legislation, although the form and context differed between countries (Hilding-Rydevik, 2003).

The experience of applying SEA has been addressed in Nordic research projects, workshops and conferences and the outcomes published by e.g., the Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordregio. Furthermore, the collective experiences of the Nordic countries’ application of SEA has also raised attention to this issue in the international literature, such as the Danish requirement for the assessment of governmental bills; Swedish examples of developing and applying SEA methods in local comprehensive land use planning; as well as numerous other examples from policymaking and sector planning in the other Nordic countries.

Implementation of the SEA directive

As regards the implementation of the SEA directive in the Nordic countries, all of the countries apart from Iceland, have introduced the requirements of

the SEA directive into their national legislations, while, in addition, all have, or are in the process of, producing guidelines for the implementation of SEA in their national context.

Table 2: Implementation of the SEA directive in the Nordic countries

In Denmark, a separate piece of legislation was introduced in May 2004 (Lov om miljøvurdering af planer og programmer L nr 316), and this applies to state, regional and municipal authorities that produce plans and programmes that may have significant environmental impacts according to the legislation. (A number of sectors will be affected by the legislation.)

In Finland requirements on SEA will be fully implemented from the 1st of June 2005 in the new legislation introducing SEA requirements as well as revisions in the Land use and building act. The plans and programmes subject to an SEA include land use plans, water conservation plans, waste treatment plans and some traffic system plans.

Iceland has yet not implemented the SEA directive, but an inter-ministerial committee was appointed by the Minister for the Environment in 2002 to prepare the transposition of the EU SEA-directive. The committee presented a proposal for a bill on SEA to the Minister for the Environment this winter. The Minister has presented a bill on SEA to the Government and the bill is expected to be submitted to the Parliament in the autumn.

In Norway new requirements on impact assessment were included in the planning- and building Act on 24th May 2004. These measures mostly apply to planning pursuant to the Planning and Building Act, with just a few other plans specified to be covered. Land use county plans, the land-use part of the municipal master plan, and local development plans with significant impacts, are subject to environmental assessment. The assessment shall include a planning programme phase early on, which is not mandatory in the SEA-directive.

In Sweden the Directive came into effect on the 21st of July 2004 (SFS 2004:606) with the inclusion in the

Environmental Code with the decision of environmental assessment of plans. These requirements are included in the planning- and building act regarding detailed and municipal plans (SFS 2004:603). Furthermore, the requirements are included in the Planning and Building Act and in several sector plans. A legal review of the proposed ordinance is in progress. There are no mandatory national or regional planning levels in Sweden, and hence no requirement for an SEA at the national or regional levels. An SEA is however required as one of the first steps in the EIA procedure of the Swedish Road Act and the Swedish Railroad Act.

RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SEA AS A PLANNING TOOL

As can be seen from the discussion above, the directive will have to be introduced to, and integrated into, the existing planning framework at the national, regional and local levels across Europe. Subsequently the practice of implementation raises substantial challenges for plan-makers at different governmental levels. The need for more research in the field has been recognised by numerous different bodies, among them the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, which has granted funding of 20 million SEK for a trans-disciplinary research programme; “Tools for Environmental Assessment in Strategic Decision Making” (MiSt), coordinated by Lars Emmelin at the Blekinge Institute of Technology³. The focus of the MiSt-programme is the empirical study of the effectiveness of the tools of environmental assessment as aids to strategic decision-making. The object of the research is to study the function and effectiveness of tools that aid environmental assessment as a key component in strategic decision-making. In total, nine projects are included in the programme, studying different elements of SEA, including projects on cumulative SEA, public participatory aspects, evaluation and follow-up, the application of scenario methods in SEA etc. The programme period is 2003 – 2008.

³ For more information see the MiSt programme's homepage: www.sea-mist.se.

Among the projects included in the MiSt programme is that on “Strategic Environmental Assessment as an intervention – effects of the EU directive 2001/42/EC on the integration of environmental aspects in planning”. The project is being carried out by Hólfrídur Bjarnadóttir and its overall objective is to draw conclusions on the potential impacts of the directive in respect of existing planning practice; analysed with regard to the institutional structures, existing planning practice and attempts to apply SEA. The project will be based upon a comparative approach; including a review of the national planning contexts and case studies at the municipal level in Sweden, Iceland and England.

The main empirical studies will provide an overview of current practice and experience with SEA in municipal land use planning, as well as a review of the existing legal requirements for land use planning and SEA nationally.

The point of departure for the project is that when introduced to land-use planning, it can be argued that the international SEA methodology is essentially based upon the assumption that comprehensive planning is an instrumental rational decision-making process, and the actual experiences of the decision making context are often overlooked (Lawrence, 2000). The basic practical problem addressed in this project is the perceived lack of systematic evaluations and empirical investigations of the experiences of SEA as already developed and applied to the municipal planning process. In order to prognosticate the effect of the implementation of the EU directive 2001/42/EC, an improved level of knowledge is needed on the context that SEA is being introduced to. This includes systematic knowledge of the existing SEA practice and of environmental integration in land use planning in the municipalities, as well as the legal and institutional framework that needs to be established.

The following questions form the basis for the research:

- What are the existing demands in the various national legislations as regards Environmental Assessment?
- What similarities and differences in the national implementation of the SEA legislation are to be found, and how do

these relate to the national planning context?

- What municipal experiences exist on the integration of environmental issues and use of impact assessment?
- What are the national and municipal expectations concerning the role of comprehensive planning, and how do these match the assumed potential of planning as a strategic tool, illustrated in the SEA discourse?
- What kind of potential intervention, innovations or retrogression, in relation to the above issues, does the EU SEA directive introduce in the countries studied at the national and municipal levels?

The planning context to which SEA is being introduced

It can be easily seen that the planning environment, to which SEA is being introduced and shall become an integral part of, is currently undergoing a period of fundamental change. While many European countries are facing new requirements regarding the process and the contents of plans and programmes, new modes of planning are surfacing in the form of strategies, visions, partnership and other non-binding measures as the guiding principles for municipal development. The changes facing statutory land use planning are thus not only emerging through institutional measures, but also via basic changes in practice, and a move towards non-statutory initiatives, i.e. a shift from an administrative regulatory practice to a more ‘negotiative’ one, or as put by Healey (1997): “In many of Europe’s planning systems, the formal machinery for articulating strategies has become discredited and formal systems have ceased to be the key arenas and procedures for spatial strategy-making. This new impulse towards strategic planning has however been taking place rather informally, beyond the formal arenas provided by the planning system itself”.

In all of the Nordic countries, the planning legislation has either recently been revised or is currently under revision. In the study, the national context to which the directive is introduced is studied, as well as actual implementation at the municipal level.

Looking at the two Nordic countries included in the study, namely, Sweden and Iceland, similarities but also fundamental differences can be seen in terms of the attention and expectations attached to the implementation of the directive. Both countries are currently undergoing revisions to their planning legislation that will be finalised later this year.

In Iceland the SEA-directive has not yet been implemented into national legislation, but a proposal for a bill for a separate SEA Act awaits adoption by the Parliament. In Sweden the SEA directive was transposed into national legislation in the summer of 2004. The main regulations on the SEA procedures and documentation are given by the Swedish Environmental Code, but will be supplemented with specific regulations in the separate sector legislations and for spatial planning.

In both countries the municipal planning level is strong. The Swedish spatial planning system is in essentially un-tiered, with a local planning monopoly and no statutory national or regional planning levels, although some efforts have taken place in the preparation of regional plans. In Iceland there is currently only statutory land use planning at the municipal level, but in the revised Planning Act, inter alia, a new national planning level will be presented with the preparation of a National Planning Policy. At a Nordic Environmental Assessment conference in Reykjavík in 2003, Halldór Thorgeirsson, director at the Ministry of the Environment stressed the evolving legal context to which the SEA directive will be introduced in Iceland, as well as the limited use of plans and programmes as policy tools. Simultaneously, high expectations are attached to the implementation of the directive as a support for the modernization of the planning system (Thors, 2004).

Both countries already have legal provisions for Environmental Assessment of spatial plans at the municipal level. However, studies of the actual achievements of SEA application are limited, and studies from Sweden have furthermore shown that the development and application of SEA in spa-

tial planning and in comprehensive planning have thus far occurred in only a small number of municipalities (Bjarnadóttir and Åkerskog, 2003) while in general, experience of EA in municipal spatial planning occurs mostly at the detailed level (Emmelin and Lerman, 2004). Furthermore, the scope of strategic assessment in Swedish municipal plans has been substantially broader than exclusively environmental aspects, often addressing both economic and social aspects on an equal basis.

Having established the importance of the national context in understanding the possible outcomes of the directive, the empirical evidence from municipalities in three European countries will provide not only insights on the potential effect of the SEA directive in the different planning contexts, but also the status and development of the municipal planning system and the integration of environmental considerations in the system.

In the light of the ongoing "rethink" of current planning practice, with attempts to streamline the planning process and limit administrative "red-tape" through the use of non-statutory planning initiatives, the question remains, what are the effects of the environmental requirements attached to legislation or regulations?

The effects (including both successes and failures) of the introduction of the SEA directive relate essentially to the underlying expectations in respect of the directive, and its relation to the existing context – whether SEA shall be adapted to the prevailing planning practice, or whether the introduction of SEA is expected to contribute to a change in the paradigm of both planning practice and planning discourse at the municipal level.

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DIALOGUES IN URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING (VOL. 1)

Dialogues in urban & regional planning
(vol. 1)

Editors: Bruce Stiftel and Vanessa Watson
(2004)

Published by Routledge, in association
with the Global Planning Education
Association Network (GPEAN)

By Ásdís Hlökk Theodórsdóttir, National
Planning Agency, Iceland

Dialogues in urban and regional planning offers a collection of twelve papers, where both established planning academics and less well known authors write about the various urban and regional planning issues currently on the agenda internationally.

The book stems from the relatively newly established co-operation between regional associations of planning schools around the world, and is presented as the first in a biennial series where prize winning papers from the world's planning school associations will be presented.

In an introduction to the book, the editors, Bruce Stiftel and Vanessa Watson, describe what they call the process of "building global integration in planning scholarship", where they tell the story of how planning academics have increasingly been getting together and forming associations and forums for dialogue all over the world, leading up to the first world planning schools congress in Shanghai in 2001, and the birth of the global planning education association network (GPEAN) and hence, to the publication of this book.

The twelve papers presented in the book cover a wide range of topics, representing the broad subject area of urban and regional planning. The papers can be roughly categorised into three groups. The first three papers deal with planning and the economy; tou-

ching on as diverse issues as mixed land use in Canada, partnership developments of Olympic stadiums in Sydney, Australia and an analysis of the shaping of urban space in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area in Argentina. The three following papers deal with planning and environmental issues in one way or another; from a discussion on the ecological and socio-economic aspects of "whole landscape planning" in Oxfordshire, UK, and the development of methodology and the analysis of case studies on urban regeneration and conservation in China, to a discussion on ecological-economic zoning in the Brazilian Amazon region. The final six papers deal with the planning process itself, and with theories on planning processes and decision-making. The papers discuss various aspects of planning in a multicultural setting (or cultural settings other than that of the Western world) and how communicative planning theory is, or is not, sufficiently able to deal with that reality and the accommodation of such ethnic and cultural differences; as well as discussing the importance of stories and storytelling in planning practice.

It is rightly pointed out by the editors how important it is for a relatively small profession, like urban and regional planning, to form networks – not just nationally and regionally, but also globally, thus producing richer debates informed by a variety of perspectives and many active research projects. This is not only important for the academic arena as such, but also for planning practice, as the academic arena serves it both as a platform for critique and for the development of new ideas – to be applied in policy-making and planning practice.

The birth of this biennial series is a welcome addition to the international planning literature – for planning students and academics as well as for planning practitioners. This particular collection of papers has been carefully chosen to represent what is currently going on at the top of current planning dialogue worldwide, echoing what issues are seen as relevant in the current planning debate around the globe.

As noted previously, the papers cover a wide spectrum of issues, as indeed does the field of urban and regional

planning itself. Naturally, some of the papers deal with particular cases or national contexts, with a varying level of direct relevance for other contexts or circumstances, but they do all provide a worthwhile and valuable read as important subjects for planners and policy-makers in the real world. Indeed, this point is also made by the editors who note that:

"As a profession with widely disparate traditions and broad interdisciplinary connections, we have significant differences across national boundaries. International comparisons force us to re-evaluate our national decisions about the structure and nature of our discipline and to understand better why we choose to do what we do, and the way we do it." (p. 8)

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