

The efficacy of multi-stakeholder processes for fostering regional planning for sustainable transportation: A case study of HUR 2050

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Abstract

The way in which problems relating to sustainable mobility are constructed through discourse and the resultant impact on policy and practice is fundamental to how sustainable transportation systems will be reached in Sweden, as well as the world. Given that sustainable transportation is a political and societal goal, its construction *in situ* is an important influence upon how such problems are configured and consequently solved. It is assumed that the ways in which sustainable transportation is formulated as a political goal, how this is interpreted and applied, and the solutions that are consequent upon such interpretations at the regional and local levels, are foundational to the success of reaching sustainability. This paper emphasizes the roll of practitioners in the construction of the sustainable transportation discourse. The research question is: Do multi-stakeholder processes increase the capacity of political/administrative organizations for attaining sustainable solutions to transport related problems? Are such processes conducive for reaching the national and global goals regarding sustainable mobility? The analysis includes a description and analysis of both the objectives and the methodology that was applied in an on-going multi-stakeholder collaboration, HUR2050, by way of participatory observation, interviews and text analysis. This paper discusses the strengths, weaknesses and lessons that can be learned surrounding the construction of sustainable transportation in a multi-stakeholder regional planning process. The most important conclusions are that multi-stakeholder processes do indeed increase the capacity of regional planning for achieving long-term sustainability goals. Some of the most important factors are the innovative capability to create an open forum or agenda for social learning as well as an open and efficient platform for strategic planning. The ability to promote consensus among the stakeholders is also decisive for the success of the process. The main identified weakness is a lack of a coherent methodology that is able to adequately encompass such a complex societal goal as long-term sustainable transportation and the needs of ecological modernization. There is a great need for the development of a new methodology that can incorporate strategic proficiency, innovative capability and consensus ability to better increase the ecological modernization capacity of multi-stakeholder planning processes for sustainable transportation.

Keywords: Sustainable transportation, multi-stakeholder processes, ecological modernization capacity

1. Introduction

This paper is part of a *TransportMistra* program that analyzes the factors that affect the attainment of sustainable transportation in Sweden.¹ More specifically, it is the first part of an on-going research project with the overall goal of evaluating the efficacy of current methodologies used in consensus building in multi-stakeholder processes, in order to judge the usefulness of such methods for achieving the ends which they espouse, and to design recommendations for improvements in new method development. The overall research question of this project is: What processes, structures, methods or other types of factors can increase the strategic proficiency of regional policy and planning to attain sustainable transportation solutions? The ways in which problems relating to sustainable transport are constructed or defined is a fundamental part of the knowledge that is needed for reaching this goal. Given that constructions of sustainable transportation are by no means coherent, special emphasis will be placed upon how such constructions are generated and how they create very different platforms for practice such as goal definitions, agenda setting and implementation plans. This project analyzes constructions of sustainable transport from the perspective of regional and local planners and practitioners. The focus is on how regional and municipal planning dealing with sustainable transport build consensus around problem and solution formulations in on-going practice. Creating knowledge that can contribute to attaining a sustainable transportation system with environmentally manageable levels of CO₂ emissions, while at the same time fostering economic growth and social equity, is the overall goal of this research project.

This paper presents the first part of this project in an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of current transport planning practice with regard to ecological modernization. The research question is: Do multi-stakeholder processes increase the capacity of political/administrative organizations to attain sustainable solutions to transport problems? This paper is based on a case study of a multi-stakeholder transport planning initiative in the Gothenburg region, called HUR2050.² HUR2050 can be seen as both a network of transport-related organizations, and as a regional planning process in the Göteborg region. It is based on the use of participatory methods to facilitate stakeholder collaboration with the goal of attaining a sustainable transportation system for the Göteborg region in 2050. Such an endeavor is part of a growing tradition of political and administrative efforts to incorporate sustainability and environmentally related goals into municipal and regional transport planning and decision-making in the Scandinavian countries (Flyvbjerg 1999, Hansen 2002, Trivector 1998). The above research question will be contextualized in the context of HUR2050 by analyzing if the capacity of political-administrative stakeholders for long-term planning for sustainability in the region has been increased through the HUR2050 process. What lessons can be learned to strengthen future multi-stakeholder initiatives for sustainability in the transport sector?

¹ *TransportMistra* is a newly started 3-7 year MISTRA funded research program on sustainable transportation. This paper is part of INFORM, one of three program components, which deals with socio-cultural constructions of sustainable transport. See TransportMistra.org for further details of the program.

² HUR 2050 stands for: Sustainable Development Regional (Hållbar Utveckling Region). It also means *how* in Swedish.

2. Research framework and method

The overall theoretical orientation of this paper is based on the social construction of public policy and will focus on how sustainable transportation issues have been defined and integrated in policy, planning and implementation processes (Flyvbjerg, 1998, Hill 1993). One fruitful approach to analyzing the integration of sustainability issues in transport policy includes the concept of *ecological modernization* which is an umbrella concept that is used to denote different types of societal processes that aim at incorporating environmental values and goals into social organizations and practice. Ecological modernization capacity (EMC) is a concept that has been used to analyze different capacities or stages of ecological modernization. This has been specifically applied to transport policy and planning in four stages: economic performance, strategic proficiency, innovative capability and consensus ability (Tengström 1999). EMC is framed in the transport setting as predominantly a political capacity that must be generated by decision-makers through environmental policy making and implementation (*strategic proficiency*) given a certain level of acceptable *economic performance*. *Strategic proficiency* refers to both policy-making and implementation capacity (ibid p.135). *Innovative capability* refers to ‘an ability to understand the causes of environmental problems, their scope, complexity, resource requirements and social consequences’ and is divided up into ‘(1) the ability to develop well-defined intermediate objectives in order to reach the overall goals of transport policy, (2) the ability to identify new policy/planning instruments and new concrete possibilities for obtaining the intermediate objectives and time tabled targets of the policy, and (3) the ability to develop new principles and methods of implementations’ (ibid, p. 137). The final stage, *consensus building*, refers to the ways in which consensus is reached in policy and planning processes. The concepts strategic proficiency, innovative capability and consensus building will be used to form the core of the following analysis.

The main methodological approach in this paper is based on a combination of discourse and stakeholder analysis with a focus on EMC development through participatory methods which foster social learning and the identification of story-lines and discourse coalitions and through organizational components such as network building and strategic collaboration between diverse stakeholders. The methods used are participatory observation of the HUR 2050 process, interviews with participants, and text analysis of the documentation of the process. In this paper a preliminary analysis of the EMC of the overall approach will be described using documentation from the HUR 2050 process.

3. The case study: HUR2050

HUR2050 is collaborative effort between 14 different political and administrative stakeholders who are active participants in transportation related issues in the Göteborg region. The four governmental departments that deal with road, rail, air, and water transportation are represented as well as the municipal councils of Göteborg and a number of the surrounding counties, metropolitan planning organizations and publicly owned transport operators.³ The group spans from representatives of the local municipal council to

³ West Götalands Region, the Göteborg Region’s Association of Local Authorities, Business Region Göteborg, Göteborg’s City Planning Office,

representatives for all of the different modes, traffic operators and business community. This includes water, air, rail, and the entire span of road related modes such as cars, trams, busses, and walking and biking. Three researchers have also participated.

Göteborg has a rather short history of such multi-stakeholder planning initiatives. In 1996 the Göteborg Regional Association of Local Authorities (GR) initiated cooperation with the four transport authorities regarding the background material needed for decision-making in future investments in infrastructure. A report was written which was the basis for decision-making in Western Sweden for a number of years.⁴ In 2002, the Swedish Road Administration, Region West, (VVWest) initiated another collaborative effort with a wider number of organizations that were active in transport planning with the goal of developing strategies for attaining a sustainable regional transport system in 2050, and that as well encompassed the 6 national transport political goals.⁵ This process or network, as it was originally envisioned, goes under the name of *HUR2050, Future challenges together develop a sustainable region*. The overall aim of HUR2050 is to inspire and promote long term regional planning by showing the possibilities for long term sustainability. The specific objectives that were agreed upon in the group at the beginning of the process are:

- to develop a dialogue between stakeholders, from practitioners to politicians;
- to achieve a common understanding regarding how infrastructure in the Göteborg region can be planned to achieve long term sustainability;
- to create a platform for collaboration between politicians and civil servants (administrators) who are active in the formation of infrastructure, a platform where different transport modes are seen as links in an integrated whole;
- to compile high quality data for political decision making in the region; and
- to develop a strategy for the realization of the agreed upon goals in the respective organizations.

HUR2050 started in 2002 and ran through 2005 when a final report was presented to the Göteborg Regional Association of Local Authorities (GR). Each of the four years consisted of approximately 8 meetings. In 2005 four workshops were held to gain consensus around the goals, resources, strategies, and plans for action. A number of meetings were also held with two working groups where the workshop material was developed, simplified and/or elaborated upon depending on the topic at hand. A second phase is now in progress in 2006 where the results of the multi-stakeholder process will form the basis for a restructuring of the involved political and administrative stakeholders into a number of new task groups who will take responsibility for the strategies and measures that were formulated by the HUR2050 process. A parallel process of informing and gaining political support with the municipal city council has also been underway since the beginning of the process.

4. Multi-stakeholder processes in practice: How was HUR2050 carried out?

As noted by way of introduction, HUR2050 is a collaborative effort of municipal, administrative and business interests in the Göteborg region. Two main methods were used to create consensus surrounding how sustainability could be implemented in regional transport planning. These were back-casting and a consultant led method that can be categorized as a

⁴ This report was called: "This is what we want", (Så ska vi ha't).

⁵ These are a transport system which is: accessibility, safe, of high quality, gender equal and promotes a good environment and regional development (Prop. 2001/2:20)

combination of SWOT and a strategic choice approach.⁶ The process took place over four years and is summarized in the following.

The overall aim of the back-casting method is to identify a vision for a desired future that fulfills the demands of sustainability and then to analyze how this future can be reached in practice (Steen et al 1997). The method occurs in a number of steps, including: Step 1, *Present conditions*; Step 2, *Dimensions and conditions for sustainable development*; Step 3, *The vision*; and Step 4, *Strategies and plans to reach the vision*. Step 1 was undertaken in 2002 when a report on overall conditions in the region was compiled by the HUR group. Step 2 worked with identifying the necessary components of sustainability starting with the Bruntland report. A sustainable society was as defined as having three dimensions: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability. Environmental sustainability was seen as the framework within which economic sustainability was the means, and social sustainability the goal. Three background reports were commissioned to better understand and clarify what these three dimensions entail in practice.

Steps 3 and 4 were based on a combination of participatory methods, such as SWOT and strategic choice, and were carried out with the help of a facilitating consultant firm. This second method can also be divided up into a number of steps or stages. Overall, this method was used to identify: (1) the historical and present context of the problem complex, (2) the strengths and weaknesses of the participating organizations, (3) the vision for the future, (4) strategies and priorities for the future, and (5) concrete action plans for attaining the identified goals. The consultant facilitated method, was undertaken during 2005 and consisted mainly of 4 workshops, with a number of intervening meetings. Each workshop dealt with one or more of the topics above. They were held from 12.00 noon one day to the following noon, at a variety of locations in the Göteborg region.

Each workshop followed a somewhat similar identifying, sorting, summarizing and prioritizing process. Following the topic or question at hand, the group was divided into 6 small groups of approximately 5 members each. Each group started the meeting with an open brainstorming session on the topic or in response to a specific question. The results were collected and prioritized along different axes and time perspectives depending of the characteristics of the topic/question at hand. After this identifying, sorting and prioritizing was complete, the six groups were re-grouped into 3, and then into 2 and then into one, where each group of results was sorted and prioritized through consensual participation until a final list of results is achieved for the entire group. The HUR2050 participants have also been divided up into two groups, a leadership and a working group, which discussed and re-worked the results from the 4 workshops. Thus each workshop dealing with a particular topic was discussed and re-worked on at least two further occasions. These results were then summarized in power point files and presented to the group at the following workshop or meeting.

⁶ The facilitation consultant responsible for this part of the process called it: TAIDOS. It is a conglomeration of a number of different methods that were designed by the consulting firm. SWOT is a well-known participatory method that originated in the business world to increase productivity and sales. It stands for: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

5. The ecological modernization capacity of the HUR2050 process

Overall, the HUR2050 process can be seen as increasing ecological modernization capacity towards planning a sustainable transportation system in the Göteborg region. To start with, the consensus ability of the group, as exemplified in the participatory methods used regarding the different tasks that were undertaken, were carried out in an open and constructive atmosphere which fostered the participation of all of the representatives. Given the number of times that the results were re-worked by the group, there was a great deal of opportunity to give input the entire process. A great deal of effort was also given to both using the expertise of the group and to commissioning any necessary help from outside of the group resulting in a broad and complex understanding of the issue at hand. Some of the important strengths of the method are that it was clearly able to cultivate social learning between participants from a diverse array of professional backgrounds from within the sector through openness to crossing divisionary boundaries between the jurisdictions of the participants. Some of the different exercises within each workshop also showed a great deal of innovative capability by fostering new ideas and perspectives on old problems. There was also a clear structure from the beginning of the process as seen in the objectives.

The last criteria, strategic proficiency is impossible to judge at the present time as the actual affect of this process will be shown in concrete legislation and implementation plans. As has already been noted, the next phase or creating political support of HUR2050 is already underway and will be used to build a number of task groups that will work with

Some of the weaknesses of the methodology warrant note as well. One of the goals of participatory methodology is to simplify and cluster diverse issues to achieve more straightforward results. This approach systematically reduced both the complexity and the diversity of the identification of the topics that were covered such as strengths and weaknesses of the participating groups and strategies for solutions. The temporal and spatial complexity of the goal itself, sustainable transportation, and the diversity of the jurisdictions of the participating stakeholders are three of the main factors that made finding a coherent and applicable method difficult. There was a general lack of ability on the part of the methodology to deal flexibly with the complexity that is inherent in the topic at hand, namely planning for a sustainable transportation system. Though it is outside the scope of this paper to present an analysis of what was excluded through the consensus shaping of the group, it would be interesting to see if there was any clear bias towards a specific framing of the problem. This will be the topic of future analysis.

The most important conclusions are that multi-stakeholder processes do indeed increase the innovative capability of regional planning towards achieving long-term sustainability goals. Some of the most important factors are the creation of an open forum or agenda for social learning as well as an open and efficient platform for future strategic planning. The ability to promote consensus among the stakeholders is also decisive for the success of the process.

6. Lessons to be learned for future transport planning initiatives

The results of this analysis suggest that multi-stakeholder processes do indeed increase the capacity of regional planning for achieving the goal of sustainability. Such a collaboration of multi-stakeholders can even be seen as a necessary pre-condition for long term planning for

sustainable development. This is due to the fact that sustainable development demands a coordinated effort between a diverse array of stakeholders including politicians, administrators, planner as well as the business community. Even though there were difficulties relating to the lack of participatory tools to facilitate the collaboration process, all of the initial objectives in the group were successfully achieved. Some of the most important factors that underlie this success are the ability to create and maintain an open atmosphere for discussion. This includes fostering both consensus surrounding the goals of sustainability and an open forum or agenda for social learning as well as creating a platform for strategic planning. The main identified weakness was a lack of a coherent methodology that is able to adequately encompass such a complex societal goal as long-term sustainable transportation. There is a great need for the development of new techniques that can make the structural complexity within the sector commensurable with the temporal, conceptual and spatial complexity of long-term sustainability. This is an important topic for future research.

7. References

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