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Challenges for transportation planning and organization in the Stockholm region

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Abstract

The current model for regional infrastructure and urban planning in the Stockholm Region emerged over the early post-war decades. It is a model that proved to be inadequate already early on. That the model does not work is partly due to the conditions for regional planning over the past half century being fundamentally altered in several important respects. There is a need to search for new alternatives for how to organize and fund the regional community planning and the vital infrastructure systems in Stockholm. A discussion of these issues needs to address both the level that is to apply for the organization, from the local level to the regional/central level, and how funding should be solved, with taxes or fees. Four different models for the future organization are discussed in the article. They are not mutually exclusive but demonstrate how different developmental pathways can be pragmatically combined in order to create a regional governance model that is suited for future challenges rather than for since long-gone social conditions.

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1. Introduction

The Stockholm Region¹ has been growing considerably over several years in terms of number of residents. Economic growth is also above average in Sweden. It has become something of a given metaphor that in recent years “Stockholm is growing by two buses a day.” This gives an illustration of how many people the county is growing by as each day passes, if you put these people on buses. It is a useful and striking image. It has formed the basis for a series of discussions about what the requirements are in the region going forward, including infrastructure and housing construction.

Alongside this striking metaphor there are of course also a number of signs in everyday life that Stockholm is growing into a larger dimension of city. Congestion has become a hallmark of Stockholm life. This applies to public transport, it applies to road traffic and it applies to the housing market. Differences in status between residential areas are discussed in terms of segregation, both economic and ethnic. The differences between the city and the region’s extensive rural areas have risen. Life in Stockholm has become ever more complicated, while it is still attracting more and more people.

Apparently, the Stockholm Region is already experiencing a challenging situation in several respects. Looking ahead, several of the trends that we see at the present time will be accentuated. Moreover, the challenges that face the Stockholm Region are far more diverse and difficult to resolve than in previous decades. Despite this, policymakers are frequently looking for solutions to these challenges that are more rooted in the perception of society in the 1960s than the 2020s. The formation of the Greater Stockholm County Council (Stockholms Läns Landsting) in 1971, for example, was the result of a belief that a greater emphasis at a regional public sector level would address the problems, and many continue to state this as a fact. We believe it likely to be a fallacy. We cannot meet future challenges using past solutions.

In this paper we present four alternative routes towards modernised and streamlined regional planning. However, it seems unlikely that agreement could be reached in Stockholm about one of the proposed models for future development and organisation. We will likely see elements from all four models in the actual development. We therefore argue that the most fruitful way forward in terms of the continuing forward-looking community building process goes through a model where we take advantage of the best of the various models.

There is, perhaps needless to mention, an extensive previous literature on urban governance. Schematically, these studies can be divided into two main categories.

The first category comprises studies that focus on administrative boundaries within public sector. The perhaps most frequently analysed topic in these types of studies is the distribution of power and responsibility between different government levels (see, for example Lowery et al (1995) or Teske et al (1995)). A great deal of academic attention has also been paid to the coordination of governmental bodies on the same level (see, for example Hulst et al (2009) or Piemus (1999)). An area of research that combines these two dimensions of “intra public sector governance” is studies on administrative fragmentation (i.e. the discrepancy between the administrative and functional urban area) and its potential drawback regarding the creation of an efficient urban governance framework (see, for example Ahrend et al (2014) or Cheshire and Magrini (2008)).

The second category of studies on urban governance deals with the growing amount of models that involves private sector in the provision of public services. Public-Private partnerships (PPP), sometimes also referred to as new public management, covers a wide range of arrangements – from models similar to traditional public procurement to a profound transfer of financing, designing, implementing and operating to the private sector. Lately, a large number of ex post assessments of PPP-projects have been carried out. However, these studies are generally less than conclusive (see, for example Chen et al (2015)).

¹ The Stockholm Region refers primarily to the Stockholm County. The statistics and reasoning that follow later on in this report are based on the Stockholm County, i.e. the administrative region. However, the actual, functional region has a larger geographic distribution than this. According to Statistics Sweden’s classification of local labour markets, the Stockholm Region also consists of a number of municipalities in Uppsala and Södermanland Counties.

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