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## Making transport planning more collaborative? The case of Strategic Choice of Measures in Swedish transport planning

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### ABSTRACT

In 2013, a new preparatory study was established in the Swedish national transport planning process: Strategic Choice of Measures (SCM). It constitutes an arena for early dialogue between main actors and stakeholders at local, regional and national level to jointly assess transport related problems and develop solutions. This paper explores the collaborative elements of this planning method, analysing the extent to which the introduction of SCM implies fundamental steps towards a planning approach based on communicative rationality in Swedish national transport planning. The article departs from the government's recognition of the need for more and deeper collaboration between actors, new approaches and measures for transport problem, and increasing attention to demand management and modal shift to meet transport policy goals more efficiently, asking whether SCM makes national transport planning in Sweden more collaborative, in the sense of primarily relying on communicative rationality. The focus of the analysis lies on collaborative elements in the official SCM guidelines produced by the Swedish Transport Administration (STA) as an expression of an "ideal" SCM process, and a case study of an SCM process considered by the STA to be a good example of SCM in practice. The article concludes that although traces of communicative rationality are visible in both "ideal" and in practice, a more fundamental shift from instrumental to communicative rationality in Swedish national transport planning through the introduction of SCM has not occurred, since collaborative practices of SCM mainly are framed in a wider institutional framework of instrumental rationality.

### 1. Introduction

Since Willson (2001) proposed communicative rationality as a new paradigm for transportation planning in the early 2000s, there has been a growing interest in collaborative and communicative aspects of transport planning (Bertolini, 2017; Timms, 2008; Tornberg, 2011). This goes hand in hand with an acknowledgment of transport planning problems as "wicked" (Rittel and Webber, 1973) and the argument that collaborative approaches to planning constitute a fruitful strategy for working with wicked problems (Batty and Marshall, 2012; Innes and Booher, 2016). A paradigm shift remains to be seen, however, as mainstream transportation research and practice lingers within the furrow of instrumental rationality (Vigar, 2017). In a recent analysis of topics in 100 papers published in two leading transport policy journals, Marsden and Reardon (2017) conclude that a technical rational model persists in the transportation literature, resulting in "a science of applied policy making which is unlikely to be applied because of the distance between it and the realities on the ground" (p. 245).

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Despite this lingering reliance on instrumental rationality as “the espoused planning theory” (Willson, 2001) of the transport planning profession, there are several elements of a shift towards increased emphasis on alternative rationalities, new governance settings and collaborative approaches in transport planning practice. Internationally there are several different types of governance arrangement for transport planning, and related activities, within a collaborative context. This has reframed state led practices towards a matter of multi-level governance and coordination of space and activities (Kalliomäki, 2015), e.g. in the USA (Innes and Gruber, 2005), the UK (Rayner, 2004), Scotland (Docherty and Shaw, 2011), Norway (Samset and Volden, 2016), and Finland (Kalliomäki, 2015).

One recent example of an institutional transformation of transport planning is the establishment in 2013, of an arena for “early dialogues” (STA, 2014a) in Sweden through the introduction of Strategic Choice<sup>1</sup> of Measures (SCM), as a “new step for planning of transportation solutions” (STA, 2014a). SCM is an informal planning activity – connecting state led strategies with local based initiatives – in early stages of the transport planning process, intended to promote “the unbiased search for alternative solutions” (STA, 2014a, p 9) to transport related problems.

With its emphasis on inter-agency coordination, collaboration among key actors and stakeholders, the “unbiased” scrutiny of transport related problems, and openness to a wide range of alternative measures including infrastructure as well as non-physical measures, the SCM approach could be seen as an expression of a policy ambition to induce a stronger element of communicative rationality in transport planning.

### 1.1. Aim and structure of the paper

The introduction of SCM was a part of broader institutional reforms of national transport policy in Sweden, reforms that can be seen as a response to the acknowledgment of transport related problems as increasingly wicked. This paper adheres to the suggestion that wicked problems require significant elements of collaborative forms of planning (Innes and Booher, 2016) and zooms in on this reform with the aim to explore collaborative elements of national transport planning through the introduction of SCM as a new step in early stage transport planning. With collaborative planning theory providing a theoretical understanding of the new procedures, we consider communicative rationality in practice to be represented by identifiable collaborative elements and analyze the extent to which these elements are expressed in the SCM handbook (STA, 2014a) and in a case of an early example of SCM. In this paper, the use of the term “collaborative” therefore refers to practices characterized by communicative rationality. The main question of this article concerns whether or not the introduction of SCM implies fundamental steps towards a planning approach based on communicative rationality in Swedish national transport planning, or phrased more directly; does SCM make transport planning in Sweden more collaborative, in the sense of primarily relying on communicative rationality?

The paper is structured in the following way: An analytical framework is developed in Section 2, based on collaborative planning theory, in particular the work by Innes and Booher (2010) on collaborative rationality, and Willson (2001) on communicative rationality in the field of transports. Section 3 provides a background describing the institutional context in which SCM was introduced as a new step in Swedish national transport planning. Section 4 constitutes the main empirical part, where the SCM approach and its application in a practical case is presented. Section 5 includes an analysis of collaborative elements in SCM. This analysis is followed by a discussion in Section 6 about the conditions for a more profound shift in Swedish national transport planning towards a planning approach based on communicative rationality, focusing on wider organizational and institutional aspects such as the official SCM guidelines, the view on participation and the routines and procedures for handling the results of SCMs. The paper rounds off with some concluding remarks in Section 7 on the presence of communicative rationality in the introduction of SCM as a new planning activity in Swedish national transport planning.

### 1.2. Methods

Empirically, the inquiry in this paper is focused on two objects; the official STA guidelines for the SCM process (STA, 2014a), and a case study of an early example of an SCM process: “The traffic situation in Kivik” (STA, 2014b). The handbook’s guidelines, further analyzed and discussed by Odhage (2017), are considered to represent an official perspective on the “ideal” version of an SCM process, which makes these guidelines relevant as an empirical material for analysis of fundamental principles of SCM as a planning activity.

The Kivik case, further described in Cars and Tornberg (2014), depicts an SCM process concerned with traffic problems on a national road in the small town of Kivik in Southern Sweden. The interface between the national and local level, and between transportation and land use, makes it an illustrative example of a transport planning situation where problems and goals are multidimensional and cannot be reduced to single issues or merely questions of efficiency. The SCM in Kivik is disseminated as a good example of SCM in practice throughout the STA organization at internal seminars on SCM (see e.g. STA, 2014c) and is depicted in a short videoclip<sup>2</sup> which is used for inspiration at other SCM workshops. Promoted by the STA as a good example, the Kivik case is illustrative of the topic of SCM (Yin, 2003), not primarily as a representative case, but rather as a “paradigmatic case” (Flyvbjerg,

<sup>1</sup> “Strategic choice” was a concept developed by Friend and Jessop (1969) from a case study of local decision making in Coventry over a four-year period. Whether or not this concept has served as an inspiration to the label of SCM is unclear. However, they could be linked as expressions of a problem defining approach to planning (Khakee, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See “Vi är samhällsutvecklare – exemplet Kivik” on Youtube.

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