



## Hybrid steering cultures in the governance of public transport: A successful way to meet demands?

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### ABSTRACT

This paper concerns steering aspects in the governance context of public transport. Various theoretical views of steering have been presented over the years, and it has been argued that a multiple-principal context often leads to fragmented steering. The paper aims to identify steering culture models found among principals operating in the same public transport context, and to explain how a successful procurement outcome is possible, despite the hybrid of steering cultures. The paper is based on an empirical analysis of a Swedish county's planning process that resulted in a very successful procurement outcome that met high environmental and safety standards at a relatively low cost. This procurement was seen as a triumph by principals. The findings presents the existence of various steering cultures among the principals, leading to the conclusion that a "metagovernor," in this case the PTA, is central to achieving successful outcomes. The metagovernor designed the planning process and formulated a procurement document that satisfied the principals. In this process, the metagovernor negotiated separately with each principal, focusing on the particular characteristics of each principal.

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### 1. Introduction: multiple organizations and fragmented steering

In many countries, the governance of public transport involves a mixture of organizations belonging to various institutional settings (van de Velde, 1999). For example, in Sweden, four institutions are often involved in a county's public transport governance; the county council, regional cooperation body, and municipalities, has a more strategic role and are in this context often referred to as principals. The fourth organization, i.e., the county public transport authority (PTA), is responsible for carrying out the tenders, and is often referred to as the agent (a more detailed description of these organizations is found in Section 4).<sup>1</sup>

Various theoretical views of steering have been presented over the years, and it has been argued that a multiple-principal context often leads to fragmented steering, leaving a governance gap between principals and agent (see, e.g., Hansson, 2010; Longva & Osland, 2010; O'Sullivan & Patel, 2004). Fragmented steering is often seen as a problem and, because of this, debate has emerged as to what steering model is the most successful (see Sørensen & Torfing, 2009,

for a good overview of the debate). This paper aims to identify steering cultures found among principals operating in the same public transport context, and to explain how a successful procurement outcome is possible, despite the hybrid of steering cultures.

The paper makes an important contribution to the public transport research, both empirically and theoretically. It contributes new findings regarding the steering models found in public transport governance, e.g. showing that several models exist within the same public transport governance context. It also shows the role of a metagovernor and how metagovernance tools are efficiently applied to a transport governance context.

#### 1.1. Organization of the paper

The paper is organized as follows. First the theoretical framework is described. The framework is focusing on how steering cultures can be defined within a network and the relevance of a metagovernor. The next section describes the design of the empirical study and the methodological choices that was made. In the following section, the empirical example is presented and the theoretical concepts are applied. This section demonstrates that principals can be categorized according to their steering cultures and explains how a network consisting of hybrid steering cultures may be effective, due to the actions taken by the metagovernor. The last part of the paper summarize the overall conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> According to law, each county can decide how to organize its public transport; the description given here concerns the most common organization of responsibility in Sweden (Trivector, 2009).

## 2. Theoretical point of departure

In this paper, public transport governance refers to the context in which public authorities seek to coordinate resources to enhance the collective goals of public transport. Governance is an emerging theoretical perspective in public transport research (Hansson, 2011a). Although the body of relevant research is growing, the issue of the political values (i.e., traditions, norms, and practices) that shape or constrain political behaviour (Pierre, 1999) among the public transport authorities in this governance context need more attention (Eerdmans, van Kooij, van de Velde, & Westerink, 2010; Hansson, 2011a; Longva & Osland, 2010). A great amount of studies has focusing on the relations between the public transport authorities and the operators (Gwilliam, 2008). However the relationship between the organizations on the authority side has not been as central. Longva and Osland (2010) have studied the establishment of separate procuring and planning organizations in the context of local bus services and are discussing the outcome of such establishing using both principal-agent theory and new public management theory. This article establishes that the steering might become fragmented when the new procuring body are established. Hansson (2011b) has shown there are power resource exchanges among the political authorities and the public transport authority, making the public transport authority a dominant coalition and in this sense also constraining the political behaviour. Macario (2001) have addressed the question of an effectiveness regulatory regime and are arguing that it success strongly depends on the effectiveness of the relationship between authorities and operators. She addresses that the public transport is regulated and governed differently, and arguing that institutional and external contextual variables differ making public transport systems context specific (Macario, 2001). All articles have in common that the context is important for understanding governance of public transport and that institutional variables matters for the outcome. They also stress the fact that besides vertical interactions also horizontal relationships exist within the networks. This article belongs to the same research tradition and will complement the existing studies by binging in models that can explain the different institutional factors within each organization in a network as well as complementing the understanding of effective governance, this by introducing the term meta-governance. Each organization has its own values, norms and ideas which that influence how it acts. Formal rules make up a small part of the sum of constraints that shape choices; the governing structure is also defined by codes of conduct, norms of behaviour and conventions (North, 1990). It is impossible to fully understand the governance of public transport unless new institutional variables are further brought into the analysis. The new institutional variables help us to capture the diversity of principals that exist in a multi-principal setting and to explain why different principals within the same governance context may act differently towards an agent. The fact that different principals possess different values, norms and ideas is central to this paper, and it is essential to take account of these if we are to understand public transport governance.

### 2.1. Different steering cultures in the governance network

Steering cultures is in this paper defined to the values, norms, rules actions are shaping the principals way of acting. To understand the steering cultures a verified version of Pierre's (1999) models of urban governance is used. Pierre argues for the existence of various governance objectives, described as various systems of values, norms, beliefs, and practices. Pierre reduces the variety of urban governance objectives to four general models, i.e., the managerial, corporatist, pro-growth, and welfare governance models, each deploying its own type of governance with regard to participants, objectives, instruments, and outcomes (Pierre, 1999: 373).

A detailed description of the models is found in Pierre (1999). In the present paper, I have chosen to modify Pierre's models somewhat. First, the models were originally constructed for the analysis of urban governance. Pierre has demonstrated that these models can be found within an urban governance system, and that involved sectors (e.g., social, eldercare, health, and educational) in an urban governance system may possess different governance models. In this paper, the models are used in analysing one sector, i.e., public transport, being applied to various organizations in this sector. Second, the characteristics of public transport also mean that the models are applied in a context involving organizations from several administrative levels. Multi-tier systems are becoming more common in Western Europe, and are dominant in public transport. To clarify that the models are applied to one sector/governance system (i.e., public transport), I call them "steering culture" models instead of "governance" models. Third, not all characteristics of Pierre's models are described in this paper, for example, some characteristics are integrated into a single variable.

Despite the modifications to the original models, the benefit of introducing and using Pierre's (1999) framework is that it provides tools that let us identify and explain the variety of steering models found in public transport governance. Each model is described using five variables: main objectives, instruments for achieving main objectives, steering focus, participation, and key evaluative criterion; see Table 1 for an overview of the models.

The managerial model emphasizes professional participation over elite political involvement, the key players being the managers of organizations producing and delivering public services. The model assumes a consensus approach in the political exchange, since it assumes that elected officials' main role is defining long-term objectives for service production, which is conducted at a distance from politics. Its main objective is to enhance the efficiency of public service production and delivery and its key evaluation criterion is output efficiency. The managerial model attains the goal of efficiency by introducing and addressing various private-sector management strategies into public service production and delivery, for example, increased use of contracting, promoting public sector managerial positions, increasing the discretion available to these positions, and redefining the role of elected officials. The managerial model could be described as purpose driven because of its focus on outcomes, the process itself being of little interest (Pierre, 1999). Compared with the managerial model, the corporatist model is clearly process driven, focusing on

**Table 1**  
Four models of steering culture and their defining characteristics; source: Pierre (1999).

|                          | Managerial model | Corporatist model    | Pro-growth model                         | Welfare model              |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Policy objectives        | Efficiency       | Distribution         | Growth                                   | Redistribution             |
| Key instruments          | Contracts        | Deliberations        | Partnerships                             | Networks                   |
| Steering focus           | Outcome          | Process              | Outcome                                  | Process                    |
| Participation            | Professionals    | Intra-organizational | Local elite and senior elected officials | Local government officials |
| Key evaluative criterion | Efficiency       | Participation        | Growth                                   | Equity                     |

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