

Understanding innovative regional collaboration

Meta-governance and boundary objects as important mechanisms

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Introduction

In its regional context, a unique event occurred in May 2008. At this time, the Gothenburg Region Association of Local Authorities (GR) – including all thirteen municipalities – agreed to take joint responsibility for sustainable regional development. It was an output of a consultation process (“Rådslagsprocess”), which started in 2002 with all municipal councils in the region participating. The uniqueness of this event was that it symbolized a historic shift in the inter-municipal relations in the Gothenburg urban region. Until the late 1990s, when collaborations around some common regional problems and challenges seriously started, the region was marked by discord and mutual suspicion between these municipalities. The joint agreement has been focusing on an image of a new regional structure (housing, roads, transports, green areas etc), which is supposed to guide planning in each municipality: *“We agree to take joint responsibility for a sustainable regional structure. Each party takes local responsibility for their parts of the regional structure and supports other municipalities in developing their parts”* (GR 2008).

A year later, another unique event occurred. A task group called K2020 (“Public Transit 2020”), had been working on needs for infrastructural development in the region since 2003. The task force, consisting of some acclaimed civil servants from the region, had had a mandate to gather knowledge and collect ideas about how to increase the amount of public transportation in the region. The task force was transformed into an official GR project in 2006. The final K2020 public transit program, which achieved national acclaim with the ambitious goal of doubling public transit ridership by 2025, was approved by the GR Steering Board in April 2009 (GR 2009). K2020 has revolutionized the parameters of infrastructure planning in the region. According to an on-going analysis of K2020, it is suggested that it has created a *“paradigm shift in transport planning”* from prioritizing car-based travel to prioritizing public transit (Polk 2010).

There are great expectations throughout the EU that collaboration between actors at regional levels will facilitate sustainable growth. During the 1980s the EU commission turned its focus towards regional development; this has been referred to as “Europe of the regions”. During the following decades the perspective have been widened in the sense that regional economic growth should be integrated as one of three pillars within the frame of sustainable development, along with social and ecological dimensions (Sharma & Kearins 2011). According to EU regional policies and social cohesion policies, public authorities, political

parties, civil society organisations, private companies, universities and other relevant actors at regional scales should collaborate and deliberate for the best of all (Berger 2011). Based on research on the development of social capital (Putnam 1993), the importance of the “creative class” (Florida 2002), “triple helix” (Etzkowitz & Klofsten 2005) and “new regionalism” (MacKinnon, Cumbers & Chapman 2002), urban and regional policy-makers are supposed to do their best to make their region develop towards sustainability.

According to international research on changing modes of planning and governance, the overall idea of “cross-bounding collaboration”, “collaborative governance” “network governance” (which is here treated as concepts with similar meaning) is “*the dominant frame for public administration today*” (Morse 2011) or even “*a potent orthodoxy*” (Davis 2011). Within the policy field of urban and regional sustainable development there is a strong reference – a normative framework – saying that collaboration is desirable and decisive for equally dealing with economic, ecological and social dimensions, often regarded as “wicked issues” (cf. Innes & Booher 2010).

Hence, the empirical case here presented is present in a large family of similar efforts. In Sweden, as well as in other countries, government bodies have argued that consensus oriented collaboration between public and private actors is fundamental for successful implementation of plans heading towards economic, ecological and social sustainability (Hilding-Rydevik et al 2011). The mode of collaborative governance have been questioned and criticized from different theoretical and empirical points of view. Individuals in collaborative processes may or may not find a way to compromise between their organisational self-interest and the proposed collective interest. Participants might have too high expectations in regards to what can be accomplished, and the perception towards the collaboration as an effective mechanism for sustainability might be idealistic and perhaps overly simplistic (Sharma & Kearins 2011). This can be connected to a broader political perspective, from which it can be argued that collaborative governance is based on a post-political worldview and thus ignores that in real world there are fundamental different interests in collaboration processes, which have to be handled somehow. If these conflicts are covered by an imagined consensus it is likely that the collaboration halts and that development enters a status quo. Another possible scenario is that because there is usually no consensus on the meaning of the concept of sustainability, in practice it becomes equal to economic growth (Storbjörk et al 2009). This in turn can be linked to a general critical analysis of network governance arguing that horizontal

collaborations takes place in the shadow of hierarchies which means that whatever's done by participants, is circumscribed by structural "hard" and "soft" powers (Davis 2011).

This paper is about how public actors within the Gothenburg urban region managed to initiate and maintain a collaborative work, which so far has gained two strategies. One concerned with the doubling of public transport in the Gothenburg region and one concerned with municipal comprehensive planning. More precisely, we will provide three complimentary explanations to why these two collaborative processes managed to withhold the informal collaboration and produce two innovative political strategies.

Theoretically and methodologically, the study is based on a constructive and interpretive approach, which in simplified terms can be described as the analysis of a policy formation process, i.e. from discourse formation to discourse closure (cf. Hajer 1995: 22). During the processes, different actors are participating in the formation of how to frame the problem and suggest political and technical solutions for the problem framed. When the final strategy documents are decided in unanimity by the political leaders in the Gothenburg region (and thus in the participating municipalities), we regard the collaborative processes as having reached "the end of discussion", thus reaching a "discourse closure". Another way of describing this point of the processes is that some actions have become "boundary objects", i.e. have become ideas that are accepted to an extent that they have taken a more permanent shape (Wenger 1998). It has thus been widely agreed upon. Within such a theoretical framework we provide three interpretations of the collaborations and its outcome. The first interpretation is that the processes and the outcome are framed by different meta-governance measures. The second interpretation is that the collaboration is a learning process, where actors gradually increase the knowledge and understanding and thus take active part in the discourse formation. The third and final interpretation is that key civil servants informally meet at different arenas and construct narratives and symbols, which become important in the following discourse formation.

First, however, the regional and institutional context will be presented along with the two cases of innovative collaboration. In connection to this, the empirical data used in the analyses is presented. Secondly, our theoretical framework is discussed, after which the three interpretations are conducted. Closing the paper, the empirical findings will be summarised and some further research questions will be outlined.

Regional and institutional context

The two cases presented and analysed in the paper are parts of two but interrelated institutional contexts (cf. Polk 2010). The Gothenburg Region is geographically a part of the Västra Götaland Region (VGR) at the Swedish west coast. In all, the population in the thirteen municipalities in the Gothenburg Region is about 900 000, with the City of Gothenburg being the largest one with is half million inhabitants. Institutionally, the Gothenburg Region Association of Local Authorities (GR) is a co-operation of these thirteen municipalities. Every municipality is governed by a direct elected council, but they are daily political managed by a municipal board. Since 2001, GR is one of four associations of local authorities in VGR. The task of GR is to promote inter-municipal co-operation and provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences within the urban region. The association is focused on regional planning, environment, traffic, job market, welfare and social services and competence development. Although the association is a politically important actor, it is not formally a public authority in its own right. Its responsibilities and legitimacy is based on a federal principle, which means that the functions and responsibilities of GR are delegated from the member municipalities. The board of directors consist of 22 representatives and 11 deputies and the chairman and three vice chairmen constitute the presidium of the board. GR work closely with Business Region Gothenburg (BRG), which is a non-profit association that works to strengthen and develop trade and industry in the Gothenburg region. This is also referred to as promoting “sustainable growth”.

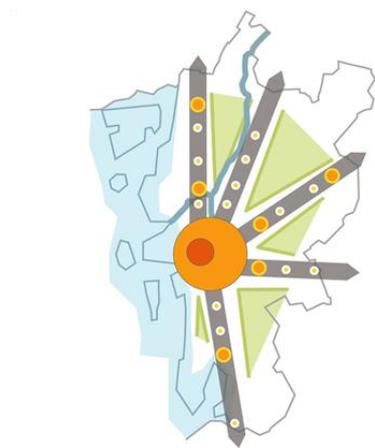
Two cases

Rådslagsprocessen

The Gothenburg region's consultation process (“Rådslagsprocessen”) was thus conducted during 2002-2008. The background for this consultation initiative was that when it was time for a new regional plan to be worked out, it was assessed by GR that previous plans (1944, 1963 and 1982) have had little impact on the actual regional development. In accordance to this experience, it was considered to be a waste of time to develop yet another regional plan. Instead it was thought that the council representatives should consult (deliberate) with each other on how reach a common idea of how to cooperate for the best of the region – and thus be more proactive.

Consultation in this is case defined as a planned and structured dialogue between stakeholders within a geographic area. At these consultations, the presidium of the GR visited all the

councils in the region's 13 municipalities in four “rounds”, i.e. at four different occasions during these years. The first consultation round lasted for eighteen months, the second for nine, the third for three and the fourth only for two months. The number of participants was on average about 50, with the most at a consultation in Gothenburg, bringing together some 125 participants. All in all, most of the 1100 councillors participated in the consultation process. During the consultation, after an introduction concerned with the current round-specific theme, the participants were organized for group discussions. The groups consisted of councillors from different political parties.



(Image 1: the “Structural Image” for the doubling of public transit in the Gothenburg urban region, GR)

In the first round it was agreed on policies that were important to rally around. These were the following six: (i) segregation and social inequalities, (ii) infrastructure, (iii) housing, (iv) public transport, (v) life-long learning with emphasis on the municipal adult education, and (vi) regional expansion. The second round was all about how local authorities could work together around these issues. Noticeable, the social dimension of sustainable development was put on top of the discussion agenda during the first two rounds. At the third round, more focus was put on infrastructure and economic development, referred to as “sustainable growth”. In the fourth and final round a similar theme was discussed, namely “sustainable regional structure”. Moving towards discussions concerned with how implementation of this vision should be managed, the physical structure was increasingly focused, leading up to a schematic and facilitated image of the regional infrastructure (see image 1). This structural image has, since it was constructed, been a focal point for several of the member municipalities in terms of comprehensive planning and above all planning for public transportation in the region (Polk 2011). Taken together, the content of the discussions at the

consultation changed from a broad range of issues, with a slight focus on the social dimension, towards a more attentive approach on economic growth and regional structure development.



(Image 2: Consultation process, Gothenburg urban region)

K2020

K2020 (Public Transit 2020) was a “task-force network” that came about as an outgrowth of another former large network of public managers and professional planners in the Gothenburg urban region (Polk 2010). It started in 2002 and became an official GR project in 2006. To begin with, the K2020 network had no formal political assignment. There was a widespread view among both politicians and officials at the time that there was too few in the region using public transportation. There was no clear picture of how this problem had appeared, let alone any clear suggestions as to how a solution could look like. Hence, the problem was characterized of great complexity and this became a reason to allow a cross-border network trying to harness this complexity. The network consisted of professional planners from various regional and local government organizations. Gradually, they shared knowledge, experiences and ideas. It was not as much to produce new knowledge, as to create insights and credibility around various possible solutions. During the process, informal talks between members of the network and the political leadership in GR took place, but there was no formal political calibration of the mission and there were no decision points during the first years where the work of the network could serve as a basis.

After about four years of collecting experiences and developing ideas it was considered in the network that it was time to bring it all up on the formal political agenda. In December 2006, the GR board decided on the “sustainable growth”-strategy, and this was teamed with an overarching goal that public transport would increase by 40 per cent in 2025. This "doubling" would be a raise of the about 20 per cent traveling by public transportation today. As this goal

was formally set, the board of GR appointed the K2020 “task-force network” with the formal assignment of formulating a "vision" and an action program for the development of the regional public transport. After a number of pilot studies and reports, it presented a proposal in 2008 that was adopted by the GR Steering Board as well as by all of the Municipal Councils and Municipal Boards within the GR in April 2009. K2020 has been identified as a flagship for the multi-level cross-border cooperation and reflects a "paradigm shift" in their outlook on public transport in relation to vehicle traffic (Polk 2010).



(Image 3: Strategies within the K2020 public transportation program to double the amount of public transit usage)

Data collection

The empirical data for this study consists of two parts. First; various documents produced within the two processes (pamphlets, target documents, communicative materials) and secondly; of transcripts from two separate focus group discussions, one concerned with each process. 20-25 key actors from each process were gathered for group discussions, arranged as part of *Multi-level governance*, a Mistra Urban Futures pilot project. Mistra Urban Futures is a trans-disciplinary research center for sustainable urban development, located in Gothenburg, Sweden. In the pilot project, a group consisting of three researchers and five persons from as many organizations in and around Gothenburg municipality, have been studying four different processes characterized by new and, not least for the regional setting, innovative regional management.¹ These focus groups were arranged as whole-day seminars, including also information about the new center and the pilot project in question. A questionnaire was developed by the pilot project group members and was used for all four focus group workshops. All of the group discussions, as well as both the whole-group discussions at the seminars and the subsequent analytical session in the work-group were transcribed to

¹ Besides the two processes discussed in this essay, the S2020 (“Social sustainability 2020) process within Gothenburg municipality and *Områdesprogrammen* (“Area programs”) in Malmö were studied.

constitute the main empirical data for understanding governance and cooperation processes in regional and municipal development. These discussions have, beside this paper, resulted in a jointly formulated policy report (Elias et al 2011), available through the center's website (www.mistraurbanfutures.com).

Theoretical framework: three interrelated perspectives

The common feature of the two process described above are that they can be characterized as creating "policy synergy" and innovations, meaning that different actors and perspectives are put together and thereby developing a new and joint approach. However, in order to understand what kinds of mechanisms are at work creating such a synergy, the dynamics of actors, ideas and institutions have to be unravelled (Hastings 1996). This can be done by making sense of the regularities and variations in what have been said and written during the process (Hajer 1995: 44). We thus analyse how different ideas are put together into a coherent set of certain ways of how to define the policy problem and its solution (Wenger 1998), which in this case is manifested in the *Public Transit Programme* and the *Structural image*.

Meta-governance

Although the participating actors within the two processes of change can be regarded as autonomous but also mutual inter-dependant, regional politicians coordinated the collaboration. Because it was a collaboration among regional public authorities and political bodies (municipal councils), the GR's Board of Directors (politicians) had a decisive coordinating function. These actors can be seen as "meta-governors" conducting "meta-governance". Meta-governance has become an increasingly used concept referring to different ways of "governing of governing" (Kooiman 2003:170). As other concepts within the governance literature it has several definitions. For the purpose, meta-governance is defined as "coordinating the actions of self-governing actors" (Sørensen & Torfing 2007:169; cf. Jessop 1997:575). Following Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing (2005) four types of meta-governance are applied.

The first type is *framing*, which refers to institutional design or games structure that enhance the desired choices among the actors (individual and organisational). In the case of Swedish municipalities framing hierarchy means mainly to withhold the rule of law and the primacy of political control. Framing networks means that problem solving power is delegated to managers and professionals with the mission to find pragmatic solutions without any "hands-on" political control. The second type is sometimes called "storytelling", which emphasise the

idea that by using certain story lines, metaphors and symbols people can join the very same frame of reference and meaning, and thus interpret events or political decisions in a similar way. Another way to theoretically describe this type of meta-governance is to use the concept of *discourses*. Discursive steering can roughly be described as a process when work groups of self-governing actors decided to think and act in a way that coincide with how the political leaders or professional management wants them to think and act. The third type of meta-governance is *support and facilitation* refers to as a way to meta-govern networks (Sørensen 2006). This can mean that new networks are created for different reason. One reason could be that politicians want a certain policy problem to be framed, but that this cannot be handled within formal political arenas because of potential conflicts. In this case it is more suitable to let a network of civil servants make the framing. Finally, there is a fourth type called *participation*, which means that the meta-governors directly participate in different processes and networks. This type is also defined as a matter of meta-governing networks and is labelled “hands-on meta-governance” (Sørensen 2006).

Social learning

Those processes could also be understood as illustrations of social learning processes between networks of communities of practices at many levels. Learning is crucial for sustainable urban development, and here we would like to point at the importance of social learning which leads to changes of practices. We often neglect that un-sustainable developments to a large extend is a result of established routines and practices among professionals (Cooper & Symes 2009). Professional practices develop through an on-going process of sense-making which could be understood as a movement between negation and reification (Wenger 1998). A community of practice, according to Wenger, distinguishes itself as a group of people who share a mutual understanding of how to do something and that are involved in a constant negation about this. This mutual understanding manifested itself in different artefacts – a process of reification. New knowledge – and understanding – creeps into a practice piece by piece through those processes of negations (Weiss, 1990). In those processes, Wenger (1998) argued for the importance of individuals who could act as brokers, and bring new ideas between different practices. New ideas could also creep in to a practice through boundary objects, which are artefacts with a multiple meaning.

Using a social learning approach, governance could be understood as something that is dependent on those on-going negations of meaning. Successful governance is a sign of a

mutual understanding and a successful social learning. This means that every attempt to promote collaboration also needs to facilitate learning.

In a professional context, Ellström (2001) make a difference between two main forms of learning: adaptive versus developmental learning. Adaptive learning means, in short, that individuals face a work situation where tasks, methods and results are given. It is possible to “do the right thing” because there are established routines and purposes. The negations of meaning circles around an already established idea of what kinds of practice that should take part. In developmental learning, the task may be given, but not the methods and the results. If the task is not given either we have a situation of creative learning, when everything has to be developed from scratch. In a developmental learning, the process of meaning making has a different content comparing to a situation of adaptive learning.

However, developmental learning takes time. It is not unusual that attempts to promote development, reduces itself to a situation of adaptation to established practices. Developmental learning takes time and efforts. It is often easier to re-interpret new tasks, as something well-known, which could be solved through established methods. Therefore, social learning are to a large extend dependent on situations where one leaves the daily routines and have the time to see things from new perspectives.

Governance networks

The governance processes discussed in this essay are examples of particularities, of the very process of leaving the daily routine to learn something new to able to manage sustainable (regional) development. However, for these particularities to be fruitful in regards to the daily routines – which is where the knowledge gained are meant to be used – these knowledge finds need to find a shape that make them fit for these routines. In this section, we focus on how relations between subjects and objects make that possible (cf. Brown & Capdevila 1999).

The above-mentioned *boundary object* could in this context be a helpful concepts of understanding the dynamics of “joint approaches” and “policy synergy”. As defined by Starr and Greisemer (1989), “*boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites*” (1989: 393). Boundary objects could be created when different groups work together, for examples in multilevel collaboration. Lee (2005) introduces the concept of *boundary negotiating artifacts*. The purpose for these is to function as a way to develop routines and standardized procedures, which also could be understood as

the reification of social processes into more long-lasting structure. Standards and routines are organizational memories. Without them, organizations risk to invent the wheel again, and again. In the everyday-use and creation of concepts and artefacts, some becomes “boundary objects”, while others do not. Akkerman & Bakker (2011) defines four levels of use of the “boundary object”; identification, coordination, reflection, and transformation. In the processes studied in this project, a point of departure has been that “business as usual” doesn’t cut it in terms of reaching the goals – sustainable regional development (identification; “the existing boundaries i.e. ways of conduct isn’t working”). Managing (coordination) the regional cooperation in a new way – through open discussions (reflection) – pave way for a possibility to locate ideas that all co-operating municipalities could agree upon as bearing pillars for an alternate future (transformation). Here, the concept of “re-framing” (Goffman 1974, cf. also Czarniawska (2000) and Callon’s (1986) concept of “problematization”) is usable. In the case of *Rådslagsprocessen*, business as usual would have meant making another ordinary regional plan for the greater-metropolitan area around Gothenburg. *Identifying* the world as increasingly complex however, regional development needed new approaches as the regional plan failed to be plastic and adaptable to local needs for enough number of municipalities. I.e. no object towards which the actors involved with regional development in the region was turning for support and guidance for decisions. *Rådslagsprocessen* and K2020 could thus in this context be discussed to be an acts of re-framing, of problems and possibilities as well as the institutional settings. Of what does a network (i.e. a “discourse formation”) consist? In our empirical interpretations (below), a wide variety of actors appear, some of which becomes boundary objects, thus central to the development in a certain direction for the regional development in the Gothenburg region.

Empirical interpretations

As described above, K2020 started as a professional network consisting of experts and managers from different agencies and authorities at the regional level. During a couple of years the network gathered different types of information relevant to the issue of public transport. As this knowledge building process went on, there were occasionally meetings with political leaders at GR. No political hands-on interference was made, which was quite satisfying for the network participants. One key politician in GR metaphorically described the rather informal relation between the network and the leading politicians in the Gothenburg regional as a snowball rolling down the hill. The only thing the politicians did was to put down some “iron-bar levers” in order to adjust the direction of the rolling. After some time

when the network had gathered enough information and framed the problem, the network was turned into a formal project with specialised working groups, but it was still only consisting of experts and managers. After still some years a formal proposal of a public transport was put forward and approved by GR's board of directors. The transformation of the network into a formal project and a final proposal was by the same political leader described in terms of that the snowball had become rather big and it was time for the politicians to "cut in into a cube".

The story of the snowball illustrates very well that the network, although politicians did not initiate it, became an instrument of meta-governance. However, the politicians did not frame the problem in any distinguished way by applying certain story lines. Actually, the storytelling became an important part of the network activities (which is dealt with below).

In 2014 congestion charges will be introduced in Gothenburg, similar to what they have in London, Stockholm and Oslo. The K2020 network was important for transforming this politically rather conflicting issue into a proposal which all the political parties in GR could approve. Already in the 1990s, the leading Social Democrat in Gothenburg, Göran Johansson, had formulated such ideas, but it was not put on the formal political agenda at the time. When K2020 made their overall analysis of the complex issue of public transport they went to the above-mentioned cities to learn more about congestion charges. Simply speaking, when they managed to organise all good argument for doubling public transport, K2020 could frame the idea of congestion charges as an important way to get money for needed investments for public transport. The overall frame of doubling public transport included arguments that could attract all political parties, such as gender arguments, environmental arguments, but most important they framed it as important for regional economic growth. A further overall aspect which was referred to as an important driver behind the idea of doubling public transport was an increasing awareness of problems related to global warming. The interpretation of this process from the point of view of meta-governance is that leading politicians "lowered" the complex issue of public transport to experts and managers in K2020 mainly because they knew they could not managed to get any agreements across the political parties on their own. This issue was too political to be handled by politicians.

For many years there had been a view of competition between the city of Gothenburg on the one hand and the surrounding municipalities on the other hand and there had never been any collaboration between all other twelve municipalities. During the late 1990s, however, this discourse of competing local authorities changed into a discourse of collaboration, departing from an idea that Gothenburg is the (natural) centre of the region and "what is good for the

region centre is good for the whole urban region". The consultation process (Rådslagsprocessen) became a manifestation of this new discourse. An important "meta-governor" behind this transformation was the former chairmen of GR and chairman of the executive board in the city of Gothenburg, Social Democrat Göran Johansson. The story goes that by having lunch with each one of the chairmen of the municipal executive boards in the other twelve municipalities by late 1990s, he managed to convince everyone that cooperation would be best for all.

The aim of the consultation process was then that it should generate a mutual insight into the importance of regional co-operation and a common attitude towards overall planning matters and a common view of tools and working methods. An expression used was that local politicians should come together at a regional level and be more pro-active. The process was defined as a knowledge-generating collaboration without any kind of hierarchical intervention or other kinds of top-down steering from the GR leadership. Instead, the term "multi-level governance" was used; creating the image those formal or informal hierarchies should not have an impact on the consultation process. Furthermore, it was regarded specifically important that politicians, not professional planners, should generate future regional visions and goals.

However, from the point of view of a meta-governance perspective, we can point at some important events and actors who had significant impact on the process. During the first and the second round, focus was put on several aspects of regional development and especially the social dimension (segregation, social and economic cleavages etc.) in documents and in the discussions. When the written basis for the third round was presented, focus had moved from rather broad spectra of issues towards more specific issues concerning regional growth and infrastructure. Actually, the earlier list of priorities had been put upside down. In accordance to the third round, an expert on regional economics from "Business Region Gothenburg" gave a speech with high impact on the participating municipal politicians and the following process. In our interviews he was referred to as a "preacher", a "missionary" and a "guru of growth". His message was in short that expanding regions by increased access and population growth facilitates sustainable economic growth, which in turn creates opportunities for sustainable development in a broader sense.

According to several participating municipal politicians, this particular speech and the supporting documents concerning regional sustainable economic growth became very important for the outcome of the collaboration process. From the point of view of a meta-

governance perspective, this change of the process and the priorities can be traced back to Göran Johansson and other political leaders in GR. Although he did not take active part in the collaboration process, he encouraged certain perspectives. According to one story about the process, he considered the collaboration process too inactive. Two rounds had been conducted, but the outcome was regarded as rather meagre. By sending a “preacher” with a certain message, Göran Johansson (and associates) put some new energy in the process and also provided a successful way of thinking around regional development. The story is that the innovative outcome in terms of a mutual agreement on how to support regional development had not been there without the meta-governance activity.

As discussed above, in the processes here discussed and departing from our empirical studies, some persons could be said to have had a certain role when it came to the creation of “energy” for the processes. From the opening rounds in the *Rådslaget* consultation processes, mostly “conversation” was produced. To get past this deadlock, a highly influential politician in Gothenburg City then “sent out” the “preacher”, who was using knowledge to make the discussions more concrete. I.e. to get something out of the consultations that would make the thirteen collaborating municipalities move in the same direction. Such a move could, as seen above, be discussed in terms of meta-governance. Seen from a micro-sociological analytical approach, this could be analysed as an assemblage, into which more and more actors were enrolled. Actor network theorist Czarniawska & Hernes (2005) discuss “narrative trajectory” as “*narrative programs becom[ing] chained to one another in logical succession*” (2005:8).

From the transcripts from the group interviews conducted for the study, we read how different actors were creating “narrative programs”, stories based on the prerequisites of the organizations they were representing at the *Rådslaget* consultations. These prerequisites differentiating actors from each other could supply an understanding of why there were so varied stories amongst the participants concerning how the processes started, what the significant actors and moments had been from the start and onwards, for instance. Not as disparate in terms of narrative programs, however, was the value of “the preacher” entering the scene. “The preacher” formulating the objective “sustainable growth” becomes a trajectory element, as the presentation uses not too much and not too little economic “lingo”, but just enough to be able to enrol more members of the consultation participants to get the work moving towards the next stage – to the third round and towards a sustainable regional future. The “preacher” became just that, a missionary travelling to the partaking thirteen municipalities to spread the “insights”. For this new joint venture to become something more

long-lasting than a subject presenting some (interesting and eye-opening) facts about sustainable growth, something that could change these facts into something more easily transported to all members of the association municipalities was needed. The “preacher” simply couldn’t visit every single office at every single offices or unit at all of the thirteen municipalities. The power-point presentation was off course down-loadable, and spread through e-mail services. For some of the offices or units, that might have been just enough to be able to manage the regional development in a way synced with other “sister offices” at other municipalities. The most obvious sign of new policy synergies becoming the result of the process, i.e. old regional transport policies being transformed into new and inter-municipally supporting ones, was the *structural image*, a stylized, simplified and comprehensive map of the important region cities and junctions. This image was carrying a new strategy, aimed at the municipal’s comprehensive planning management. The structural image – a boundary object in the sense that it has become *the overall strategy* for the region, directing planning development to junctions (giving a more dense structure in the region, and to a lesser extent urban sprawl) – is “plastic enough” through its simplified execution, and yet usable for local needs.

Rådslaget could, in this way, be understood as *boundary negotiating artefact*. It functions as a gathering point for many different and contradictory views and interests in regional planning. It also becomes a concept one could refer to as a way to handle regional issues. K2020 could also be understood as a *boundary negotiating artefact*, but the developmental process differs from Rådslaget in several aspects. The most important differences are that there is no such significant change of purpose as in the consultation process. K2020 was slowly developed through a network of professional planners working within a specific area: regional transport planning. Even if there were differences among them, they shared enough of knowledge about transportation issues, which in turn meant that it was easier for them to focus the discussions. What was radically new is the agreement among the participants in the network to use public transports as the main tool for handling the growth of travels within the region. Instead of arguing for more and broader roads they put the efforts on a better and more efficient network of commuter trains and buses. Those who participated in the process described it as more of a knowledge exchange than of knowledge development. K2020 become a boundary object which could carry different views of the role of public transport in the future. In this case it could be understood as a text book example of a boundary object. This function as a boundary

object becomes obvious when the ideas from the discussion within the networks had to be accepted among the regional politicians.

Both examples also illustrated the need of anchoring the development of boundary objects in social learning processes. In the consultation process (Rådslagsprocessen), the learning take part among local politicians, who become more and more aware of the regional perspective, and their role in the regional development. However, the learning process was to a large extent dominated of at top-down view, where the introduction of “a preacher” who convince the local participants in the process about the need of focusing on economic growth on a regional level. The Consultant process could be seen as an example of a social learning process on a horizontal level, among those local communities who take part in the process. But one could doubt if there is a vertical learning process between the local participants and the regional level. K2020 could be also understood as social learning process among a group of professional transport planners, which results in a suggestion of how public transports could be used more actively as a way of handling a regional growth of traveling. Here, K2020 functions as a boundary object in the process of convince regional politicians of these ideas.

Conclusions and discussion

The two cases presented and analyzed in this paper are two examples of the contemporary dominating idea of “collaboration for sustainable development”, which can be seen as reflecting the “post-traditional” or “post-political” view of network governance (Davis 2011). In general, this concepts refers to a development were party-political and ideological conflicts have been transformed into a widespread image of consensus (Swyngedouw 2007). Compared to such arrangements in many other countries, collaboration processes in Sweden concerning these matters mainly includes public authorities and organizations and not public-private collaborations. In that sense, K2020 and Rådslagsprocessen are typical Swedish cases. However, the two cases are different in respect to who the main participants were. In K2020 it was professional planners and no politicians, whereas it in Rådslagsprocessen was mainly municipal politicians participating, leaving professional with a less active role. This is a rather significant difference. Usually, regional policy-making in Sweden is regarded as elite projects, with leading politicians and managers at least visibly dominating participants. In the two Gothenburg cases, leading politicians was acting more as meta-governors in the background (as in Rådslagsprocessen) or as process approvers and final consolidators of expert propositions (as in K2020). Compared to other similar regional collaborations in Sweden, the Gothenburg case seems to have included more broad elite.

Another characteristic of regional collaboration in Sweden is the consensus-orientation. This is why it can be conceptualized as “post-political”. It is assumed that all have the same basic interest and that although politicians from different political parties participate (as in Rådslagsprocessen), all are expected to act in the name of a common regional interest. The K2020, which was a network of only experts and no politicians, can be seen as a way of dealing with political issues without making them politicized. Consensus means that all participants are unanimous, which imply that certain issues have been sorted out of the process along the way. This is the case of Rådslagsprocessen. At the beginning a wide range of issues were discussed, but in the end the focus was set on the “structure image”.

The two processes are unique, but they also represent something more general about the contemporary way of making policies without politics. By analyzing the two cases we found out that the process from initiation (which is hard to date) to some kind of end were collective agreements have been made can be explained by intertwining factors. Although a meta-governor has great influence of framing the content of a process, there have to be some further mechanisms working for the process to end up in unanimous agreement.

One mechanism is the different social learning processes, which took part in Rådslagsprocessen and K2020. Above we argued for that successful governance is dependent of a mutual understanding about the problems that need collaboration in order to be handled. We would like to argue that successful social learning is one crucial factor for successful multilevel governance. This is especially true in case when actors from different levels need to collaborate in order to make progress.

Several of the participants in the group interviews talks about the importance of dialog and how they understood both Rådslaget and K2020 as a kind of a never ending process. In both cases, there are also individuals who work as “storytellers”, like a chronicler. In these stories some key episodes, like micro-sociological events, are mentioned over and over. These events are given a specific meaning, which placed them into a chain of events, which in turn become a boundary object which tied different actors together. Even conflicts and disagreements could be included in this stories, and chains of events. Here, both Rådslaget and K2020 also works as a way of socialize new actors into an established way of understand regional planning and collaboration, and also hos sustainable development should be interpreted. This shared understanding could be seen as a necessary condition for different forms of meta-governance, and it something that should be examined further on. These shared understandings seem to evolve from the every-day practice that take parts in meetings and

study visits. It evolves in the process of identification, coordination, reflection, and transformation, and both Rådslaget and K2020 become processes that give shelter of this shared understanding.

Maybe this shared understanding is something that follows, or is a result of, the consensus-orientation, that seems to be characteristic for regional collaboration in Sweden? We would also like to address the question of the role of boundary object in multi-level governance. If we see shared understanding as one condition for multi-level governance, maybe, the development of boundary objects, like Rådslagsprocessen and K2020, is also a necessary condition for governance? However, it would be worthwhile to further explore the role of boundary objects in different kinds of governance processes: It would also be worthwhile to further explore how governance takes place on a micro-sociological level.

Processes of multilevel governance are complex. In this analyze, we tried to handle this complexity by using three different perspectives, in an attempt to capture the richness and complexity. The weakness with this approach is risks of fragmentations, which results in three singular views, but fails to create a synthesis. But we hope that our approach instead has contributed to enlarge how we could understand and examine processes of governance.

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