



Working paper

***Regional planning in Finland,
Iceland, Norway and Sweden***



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Iceland, Norway and Sweden**

Prepared by

Nordregio for
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Nordregio has been commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Environment to give a short presentation of the regional planning systems in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The overviews given in this paper are based on state of the art knowledge from four of the staff members at the institute and do as such not represent any research effort. The overviews, while trying to represent and discuss the same topics, differ slightly from country to country as a reflection of the variations of planning focus of the countries in question. The texts only express the opinion of their authors.

Arto Ruotsalainen, Pétur Ingi Haraldsson, Jon P. Knudsen and Moa Tunström.
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Preface

This report on regional planning in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden is required to be used in the work of the Regional Planning Committee.

The Regional Planning Committee was established by the Danish Government in 2002 with an objective of giving recommendations for an improvement and simplification of the present regional planning in Denmark. For this purpose it has been appropriate to include examples from the countries around us.

The Regional Planning Committee is to make a proposal to the future regional planning in Denmark, a proposal that is based on the forthcoming reform of the regional and municipal structure.

Copenhagen, February 2004

*Niels Østergård,
Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee*

Contents

Introduction..... 5
The Finnish planning system..... 6
The Icelandic planning system..... 14
The Norwegian Planning System..... 18
The Swedish Planning System..... 24
Conclusions 30

Introduction

Regional planning has attracted renewed attention in the Nordic countries. This has several reasons.

Firstly the continuous effort to optimise land use and the allocation of other scarce resources press for scrutinising the way we plan across sectors and geographical levels. In modern society, where the division of labour has become a more salient feature than ever, the need for societal coordination has subsequently grown accordingly. This need is often met by evaluations of and reforms in administrative structures and planning procedures.

Secondly a new emphasis has been put on “the regional” as a new entity in contemporary European debates on social, economic and political processes. This has at least two facets: A. The economic restructuring of Europe has increasingly come to see functional regions, i.e. regions where a growing amount of flows delimit a daily commuter area as a geographical meaningful entity more or less challenging older administrative divisions of municipalities and counties. B. The political arrangements in the European Union has intended regional bodies on various geographical levels to take an important role in carrying out the political tasks of the structural reconstruction of the continent.

These challenges have been met in various ways by governments throughout Europe. In Denmark, a commission has been set to work mandated to propose alternative solutions to solve the questions of regional administrative set-up and planning tasks.

In this paper we briefly explore the nature and logic of the Nordic regional planning systems, except for Denmark. We also try to focus on how the national debates in these countries have dealt with some of the same challenges as listed above.

The Finnish planning system

Recent changes in the Finnish planning system

The Finnish planning system has been reformed during the last ten years. Finland's membership in EU and the new Land Use and Building Act (which is the basis for physical land-use planning) has reshaped the planning system. The new system has three levels of land use plan with a clearer division of labour between them: the regional land use plan, the local master plan and the local detailed plan. In addition, the Government defines national land use goals, which are supervised by a central government or regional environmental authority (Regional Environment Centres) when implemented in land use planning.

In principle the land use planning system is hierarchic: higher level planning steers plans at lower levels. When a plan has legal power, it is binding for all actors. For example, a regional plan has legal power when the Ministry of Environment has confirmed it, but the regional plan is not valid in areas where a legally binding local plan is in force.

The Government has set up national land use guidelines, which came into a force at the end of 2001. These goals comprise, e.g. main infrastructure networks or natural and built-up areas of national importance¹.

In addition to the changes in the planning system, the administrative structure of the country has also changed. According to Böhme², the main purpose of the reform was the merging of various regional authorities in order to achieve a simpler and more homogenous regional administration. The reform on the Regional councils took place in 1994, when 20 new regional councils were established and the number of counties was reduced from 12 to six in 1997.

In Finland the municipalities and the State are responsible for regional development, there is no secondary level of self-government. The country is divided into 446 self-governing municipalities (of which 111 are towns or cities), which are governed by a uniform set of rules. The government defines the principles of municipal self-government by legislation. Planning and zoning of the municipal area as well as strategic and regional planning in co-operation with other local authorities are some of the most important statutory functions performed by municipalities.

Regional Councils act as regional development authorities. For further development of a region each Regional Council draws up a regional plan and a regional strategic programme that outline the aims of regional development. The regional strategic programme shall include development objectives, essential measures to achieve the objectives and finance the planned programme.

Spatial planning responsibilities at the State level

At the national level the three policy fields of land-use planning, regional development and environmental policies are separated between two ministries. The Ministry of Environment is responsible for the issues of environmental policies (and sustainable development) and land-use planning, while regional development is under the Ministry of the Interior. The main

¹ Ministry of Environment (2002). Finland's National Land Use Guidelines (2002). *Environment Guide 93*, Ministry of Environment.

² Böhme, K (2002). *Nordic Echoes of European Spatial Planning*. Nordregio R2002:8

elements of legal structures concerning spatial planning consist of the Land Use and Building Act and the Regional Development Act.

The Land Use and Building Act³ came into force at the beginning of the year 2000. In a nutshell, the main aim of the new act is to increase public participation in area development at the local level, enhance sustainable development and to delegate decision-making to local authorities.

Local authorities are expected to adopt a more open and interactive planning culture. The new legislation opens better opportunities for public participation and involvement, since “a procedure for participation and assessment” will be required in every planning project. The aim of this requirement is to safeguard everyone’s right to a healthy environment and the right to influence in the decision-making in one’s own living environment. New act emphasises also other socially sustainable issues, such as availability of services by controlling the siting of the location of hypermarkets.

Local authorities are given more powers and independence in land use planning matters. Municipal plans will be approved by the municipal councils after necessary negotiations with neighbouring municipalities, the regional council and the regional environmental centre have taken place. Local authorities are also allowed to draw “joint master plans” or to establish “development areas”.

The aims of national regional policy and the measures taken to implement them are confirmed in the regional policy objective programme accepted by the Government. The Regional Development Act⁴ is guiding national regional development by aiming at balanced regional development throughout Finland. National regional policy aims at recognising regional diversities and different potentials of the regions. Together with EU’s regional policies national regional policy forms a framework, whose objective is to promote equitable regional development in Finland. Programme-based regional policy includes e.g. the Centre of Expertise Programme, the Regional Centre Development Programme, sub-regional cooperation, urban policy, rural policy and development of the island areas. In addition, projects are under way to revise regional legislation and the regional development strategy, to relocate the activities of the State and to increase the efficiency of business aid.

Regional State administration

For the purposes of central government administration, Finland is divided into six provinces (State Provincial Offices). They act as joint regional authorities, without democratically elected organs, for seven ministries in the following fields: social and health care, education, police administration, rescue services, traffic administration, competition and consumer affairs, and juridical administration⁵.

³ For further information see Ministry of the Environment: www.vyh.fi/eng/landuse

⁴ For further information see Ministry of the Interior: www.intermin.fi/en.

⁵ State Provincial Offices: www.laaninhallitus.fi/lh/home.nsf/pages/index_eng

For environmental administration there are 13 environmental centres, and the ministry of labour has 15 employment and business development centres with the responsibility for regional labour policies. In addition, there are regional road departments and forestry centres.

Planning at the national level

There is no national spatial plan in Finland. Apart from general legislation and policy statements⁶, the involvement of the national administrative level in spatial planning is carried out by the formulation of national policies and national land use guidelines, which outline Finland's land use far into the future. National guidelines are implemented mainly through regional plans.

The national land use guidelines cover the entire country and include requirements on the quality of the living environment, economical and ecological development of the community structures, the preservation of natural values and the built heritage, sparing utilisation on natural resources, and functional communication networks. They also give guidelines for more than regional issues, such as balanced settlement structure, transport and other main infrastructures and environmental issues. The national land use guidelines are also linked with international considerations (e.g. ESDP). They ensure that issues of national importance are taken into account in planning and decisions on land use regionally and locally as well as by all government authorities.

Planning at the regional level

Regional Councils are statutory joint municipal authorities operating according to the principles of local self-government. The Councils operate as regional development and regional planning authorities and are thus the units in charge of regional planning and looking after regional interests. Their member municipalities fund them and for the statutory regional development and regional planning the municipalities receive a general state grant. The main tasks of regional councils are the management of regional development work, responsibility for regional development, responsibility for regional planning and taking care of the international functions under the Regional Development Act⁷.

Regional development work consists of a strategic regional plan, a regional plan and a regional development programme (see figure below). The emphasis in regional planning and development is on visions and strategic matters. The strategic regional plan (regional scheme) is the key task of the Regional Councils as a fundamental document for the region's development. It defines the objectives of the long-term development of the region. Furthermore, the Councils draw up regional development programmes and reconcile them with the regional development measures of the regional administration authorities, present objectives for the development of regional infrastructure and reinforce the regional economy in every possible way. Plans and programmes are drawn up in co-operation with the state and local government and with businesses and organisations within the region.

⁶ The Ministry of the Environment prepares non-binding national strategies, such as Finland 2017: Vision of the Spatial Structure and Land Use, or National Environmental Policy Programme 2005. There are also special programmes on e.g. forests, shoreline management, cultural heritage etc, which are implemented mainly by the land use system. There are also EU directives, that have direct or indirect impact on land use, for example Natura 2000 and SEA-directive, which will implemented latest by June 21th 2004.

⁷ Finnish Regional Councils: www.reg.fi/english/engindex.html

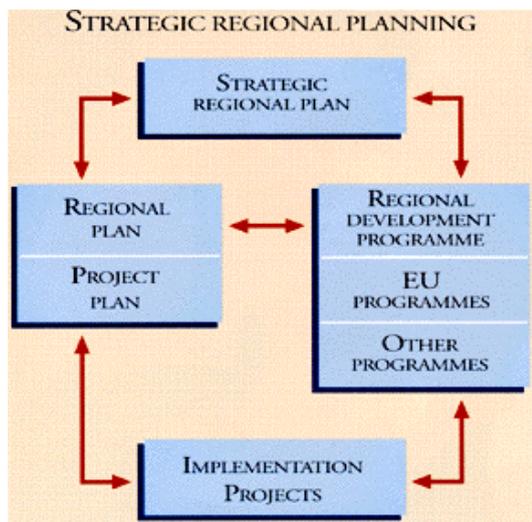


Figure: Regional development work in Regional Councils (source: www.reg.fi).

Regional plans

National and regional goals will be expressed in regional plans, which are the only plans to be submitted for ratification. The plan is supervised by Regional Environment Centre and confirmed by the Ministry of the Environment. Preparation and approval of regional plans are the obligation of regional councils (alliances of municipalities). The planning object is the entire region or part of it. The basic objective is that the regional plan implements national land use guidelines. The legal impact of the regional plan itself is that it must be taken into account when planning, preparing or amending local plans. Regional plans should also be used as a guideline when sectoral measures, e.g. traffic infrastructure development, are taken to organise land use.

The regional land use plan transfers national and regional land use goals to land use planning at the local authority level. When the plan is being drawn up, special attention is given to ensure that there is an appropriate regional and community structure, to preserving landscape values and ecological sustainability, and to providing the proper operating conditions for business and industry. It should also show transport and technical infrastructures, protection of natural and cultural heritage and promote the availability of recreation areas.

Planning at the municipal level

The local government, the municipal council, has the exclusive right to initiate, carry out and adopt local master plans and local detailed plans. On the basis of the new Act, both local plans should promote a well functioning community structure, good access to services and prudent management of the natural and cultural heritage.

The general guidance of community structure, land use and the siting of various activities are provided by a local master plan, which is approved by the municipal council. The planning object can be the whole municipality or a part of it. Depending on the needs, the local master plan can be either a very general strategic plan or a more detailed one for direct regulation of building. The local master plan is used to resolve questions concerning the functionality and economics of the community structure, the accessibility of services, the preservation of natural and cultural values, the quality of the living environment and the reduction of environmental hazards. When the plan is being drawn up, consultations have to be held with the Regional Environmental Centre, which ensures that national goals are taken into account in local plans.

Municipalities may also decide on joint master plans, regulating road planning, and the siting of retail trade, workplaces, and residential areas. Such joint plans require the approval of the Ministry of the Environment.

Local detailed plans, such as town plans are used for regulating building, the formation of the physical townscape and size and type of the buildings. The planning object is a part of the municipality where development is needed. The emphasis is on taking local conditions into account and promoting the use of the existing building stock, as well as ensuring that there are enough parks and local recreation areas. In the light of public rights, detailed plans must not reduce the quality of anyone's living environment without a very good reason.

Current changes and debate in regional planning and development

Regional policy aspects in the new Government Programme

The new Government is defining the national objectives of regional development, which specify the general objectives of the Regional Development Act. A new objective programme will be accepted probably in November 2003. The responsibility of the preparation of the objectives lies under the Ministry of the Interior. The work has been done in close co-operation between different administrative organs. Ten ministries have defined their goals, measures, and funding principles for regional development. Regional Councils, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and essential organisations have also been heard during the planning process.

Improvement of regional balance, the strengthening of regional government and sub-regional co-operation are the general objectives of the new central-party led Finnish government. The government has a focus in expanding the positive territorial impacts of regional development plans and programmes also to the surrounding areas of the regional and expertise centres.

Finnish urban development has been characterised by certain major cities and their surroundings having gained rapid in-migration. This has led to a situation, where especially rural areas and towns with the dependency on heavy industry are losing active population.

The aim of the Government Programme is to balance migration and the population structure and to ensure adequate services nationwide. In order to do so, the Government will advance co-operation between the Regional Councils, the State government (especially employment and business centres) and businesses. They should further work together with other regional actors, such as municipalities, universities and research institutes to unite regional resources for future development. In addition, the regionalization of central government functions outside the Helsinki metropolitan areas will continue. This is expected to lead to a more balanced regional development and to use and support existing regional strengths.

The role of the Regional Councils as regional development authorities will be developed by reinforcing their position in the allocation of resources intended for regional development.

The Regional Centre Programme aims to strengthen the existing 34 Finnish regional centres. The programme will be developed and its implementation enhanced on the basis of evaluations carried out. It also pursues to support the development of areas around the regional centres. To expand the positive development effects of the regional centres, networking between regional centres and their surrounding areas will be made more efficient. Once again, municipalities, businesses, educational facilities and research units are given a central role.

The Centre of Expertise Programme is also expected to increase the regional impacts of universities and polytechnics. The programme will be used specifically to support the development of internationally competitive top expertise in welfare services, business and industry. Like in the Regional Centre Programme, centres of expertise are expected to boost the development also in areas outside these centres.

The general aim of the urban policy is the competitiveness and socially balanced development of urban regions. The network of Finnish cities will be made more comprehensive territorially. Also the co-operation between urban and rural area policies will be enhanced. In the areas of growth special attention should be paid to municipal co-operation especially in housing production and unifying urban structures.

The development of the Helsinki region focuses on improving the international competitiveness of the region. Special efforts are needed around various themes, such as land-use planning and in the policy fields of housing, businesses and commerce, research and education. The investigator appointed by the previous Government will submit proposals of co-operation procedures. Municipal co-operation experiences from Helsinki region will be used for the development of housing conditions also in the other urban growth centres.

To enhance the development of rural areas, The Rural Policy Programme will be updated. The aim is to improve the effectiveness of the actions of administrative organs and different stakeholders on the vitality of rural areas. The programme will focus on improving the potential for businesses in rural areas and securing the availability of basic services through new operational models and by using new communications and other technology.

Debate on land use issues

Certain problems are caused by the trend to build large retail shopping units outside urban fabric. This, and urban sprawl in general, cause e.g. degradation of urban centres, increases the use of private cars and may lead to social inequality. Although there is a common understanding that the existing infrastructure should be used more cost-effectively, the planning monopoly of municipalities gives power to local decision-makers, who often have to make rapid decisions because of economic realities. Therefore new awareness on sustainability knowledge is needed.

In the issues regarding sustainability of the urban environment, the living circumstances of children and other special groups will be highlighted. Also, the questions of the quality of air, reduction of traffic bound emissions, sustainable transportation systems, and access to recreation and urban green areas as well of urban landscape will gain special attention.

The Ministry of Environment will assess the topicality of national land use guidelines and will, if necessary, propose needed changes. In addition, MoE will continue to provide education and guidance for the implementation of national land use guidelines.

The process of regional land-use planning is proceeding. The Ministry of Environment had confirmed five regional plans by August 2003, and the planning process is going on in 18 regions out of 20. Current debate on regional plans concerns mainly the siting of large-scale commercial units and waste disposal sites, as well as the protection of natural and cultural landscapes concerning the placement of wind power plants and peat production areas.

Municipal co-operation and merger debate

The debate concerning the merging of municipalities has been going on in Finland for decades. So far the number of mergers of Finnish municipalities has been moderate. The

strong economic depression in the beginning of the 1990's launched discussion about municipal co-operation or mergers especially among small municipalities outside the growth areas. Many municipalities have faced problems in terms of providing basic services to their citizens. In the following two years five mergers will take place and 11 other cases are under study. A recent Finnish study argues, however, that the overall economic savings from mergers are not as obvious as it has been anticipated. In order to enhance balanced regional structure and to find solutions for municipalities' economic problems, the Ministry of the Interior has launched programmes and projects, whose aim is to develop the co-operation between Finnish municipalities.

Safeguarding public welfare services by municipal co-operation will be supported by a specific sub-region project (SEUTU-hanke), which is set up the Ministry of the Interior and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The aims of the project are to develop the methods of sub-regional co-operation, structures of decision-making and to encourage municipal co-operation.

Regional self-government experiment in Kainuu region⁸

The regional self-government experiment in Kainuu is the first attempt in Finland to grant administrative power from the state administration and its regional representatives (economy and employment development centre, road department, provincial government, forestry centre, environment centre) to a democratically elected regional council. The experiment aims at supporting the development of Kainuu region (the experimental region has 9 municipalities with an area of 22 700 sq.km, but only a population of 85,000), whose municipalities are declining due to weakening municipal economy, declining and ageing population and declining entrepreneurial activity and employment.

According to the experiment act, that will take force in the beginning of 2005, regional administration decides on the allocation of resources allotted to the experiment in the national budget. In other words, the region will have increased responsibility for its own development. The experiment is also expected to lead to providing sufficient support to the initiation of major, effective industry and business development projects in the region.

The responsibility for welfare policy will be transferred from the municipalities. The region will then provide nearly all of social and health care services together with vocational and upper secondary education. It is acknowledged in Kainuu, that if the current, distributed service production by individual municipalities were allowed to continue, their development would in all likelihood be severely skewed so that, within a short time, service production would concentrate in the regional centre, Kajaani.

Regional service provision is seen as a mean to ensure equal services to all inhabitants of the region.

In terms of regional physical planning, the experiment causes however no major changes to current principles and practices.

As for the development funding, the regional administration will also "apply expediency consideration to pass decisions on the use of significant national development funds and EU structural funds, allotting these to their designated purposes". Since regional industry policy and regional development in general will fall under regional authority, the guidance of the regional State administration of business subsidies will be brought into a single regional democratic organisation.

⁸ More information of the experiment is available at:

<http://www.kainuu.fi/kainuunliitto/Hallintokokeilu/Yleista/Self-government%20experiment.doc>

The Icelandic planning system

The Icelandic administrative system is divided into two levels of government, central government (national) and municipalities (local). The current planning system is based on the Planning and Building Act No.73 /1997 which came into effect in the beginning of 1998 and planning regulations issued later that year. According to the Act there are three planning levels: regional, municipal and local, and plans covering the same area have to be consistent to each other. It is the responsibility of local authorities to prepare the plans but the Minister for Environment has supreme control over planning, assisted by the Planning Agency, and both municipal and regional plans are subject to the minister's approval. Regional and municipal plans approved by the minister and local plans adopted by local authorities are legally binding.

The local level

All municipalities are obliged to have an approved municipal plan, covering all land within its borders. The plan describes the policy of the local authority regarding land use, transportation and service systems, environmental matters and the development of settlements during a period of at least 12 years. Every four years, after local government elections, local authorities have to decide whether there is a need to review the municipal plan.

In the 1997 Act the responsibility for plan making was formally moved from central authorities to local authorities but at that time, many of the largest urban municipalities had in practice been taking care of these matters for a long time, under the supervision of central authorities. This Act also introduced for the first time requirements for plans to cover all land within the municipal borders and not only the urban areas as in previous legislation. At present, not all municipalities have been able to complete the first generation of municipal plans according to the legislation but have until the year 2008 to finish this work.

The provisions set in the municipal plan are elaborated further in local plans, where planning and construction requirements for a respective area are described more closely. All development and constructions must proceed in accordance with a municipal and a local plan.

One factor that has affected the practice of land-use planning, especially in less populated areas, is that the administrative structure has been undergoing considerable changes since the early 1990s with the number of municipalities constantly decreasing. By the end of the year 2002 there were 105 municipalities in Iceland, half of them with less than 500 inhabitants and a population range from 56 to more than 112 000. The number of municipalities is relatively high considering the total population, which was about 280 000 in 1. January 2002. However, since the early 1990s, as a result of decentralisation of responsibilities from the central government to local authorities, there have been considerable efforts made to reduce the number of municipalities by consolidation, and today they are only half as many as they were in 1990 (204). This process is likely to continue the coming years and recently the Ministry of Social Affairs, which has responsibility for the municipalities in Iceland, together with the Association of Municipalities joined hands and started a process of preparing a proposal for further consolidation aiming at creating larger units more capable of dealing with increased responsibility over tasks previously taken care of by the central government.

The regional level

There is no regional administrative level in Iceland but two or more municipalities can, at the initiative of the relevant local authorities or the Planning Agency, prepare a regional plan

were the aim is to co-ordinate the policy of local authorities on development of settlement and land-use over a period of at least 12 years (article 12 in 73/1997). Then, a provisional planning committee with representatives from all municipalities involved in addition to one appointed by the Planning Agency is established and is responsible for preparing the plan. The regional plan becomes legally binding when all the municipalities involved have adopted the plan and the Minister of Environment has approved it.

In addition to the 'ordinary' regional plan, the Planning and Building Act includes a clause concerning a Regional Plan for the Central Highlands, covering an uninhabited area of some 40 thousand km². A regional planning committee appointed by the Minister for Environment is responsible for the regional plan, and not the rural municipalities in the area. It has representatives from all constituencies, the Minister of Social affairs appoints one, two are without appointment and then there are four non-voting members representing important stakeholders in the area. When it comes to the formal activities of this regional planning committee, there are two main aspects that differ from the activities of a regional planning committee dealing with *ordinary* regional plans. The first is that this committee is working on a permanent basis and the second is that only a simple majority in the committee is needed to confirm decisions.

The national level

There is no formal land-use planning at the national level but the Planning and Building Act does, though, include an article about "*plans and land use at national level*"⁹ where it says that the Planning Agency shall have access to and preserve plans prepared by public entities, which apply for the whole country. This applies for example to plans for transportation, power structures and nature conservation. Should inconsistency or other conflicts of interest be revealed in land use proposals as set forth in individual plans, the minister for the environment may, after consulting with the prime minister and the Association of Local Authorities, decide to appoint a special committee to make proposals on the co-ordination of the relevant plans. The minister for the environment then has the power to require the local authorities to incorporate the proposals in their land-use plans.

However, although this article has been in the Planning and Building Act since 1998, its content has not been practically established and therefore no active work on co-ordination of different plans or national planning is being carried out today and there has not been political will to develop methods for planning at this level. There are though signs that this might be changing in the nearest future, as this is an issue that has been brought up on the political agenda in relation to the current revision of the Planning and Building Act.

⁹ Article 11 in act 73/1997)

Although land-use planning at the national level has not been carried out in Iceland, actors at the national level have had much impact on both local land-use planning and regional development. The Ministry for the Environment has as previously mentioned supreme control over planning, assisted by the Planning Agency, and he has to approve all municipal and regional plans for them to gain legal status. Other ministries do also play an important role for land-use planning at all levels as well as regional development through their sector plans, especially in relation to transportation infrastructure, power structures and nature conservation.

The Institute of Regional Development is a state agency under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce responsible for implementing the regional policy of the central government. One of its main tasks is to make a proposal of a four year strategic regional economic development plan for the whole country, describing the objectives and policy of the government with regards to regional development, plans for action in the field of employment, public service etc. This plan, or policy document, describes the regional objectives and policy of the government, its plans for actions and the connections between regional policy and general economic and industrial policy and plans concerning public services e.g. the national sector plans of the ministries. The central government has recognised the need to co-ordinate land-use planning and economic planning but so far only modest attempts have been made.

The Capital region

The capital region, which is made up of eight municipalities, is the only large urban agglomeration with almost 180 000 inhabitants, and about 62 percent of the total population of Iceland. As pointed out earlier, although planning was the responsibility of the central government before 1997 the large municipalities in the capital region had in practice been taking care of their own planning matters for a long time. In general, co-operation between the municipalities in the region has mainly been on an ad hoc basis related to measures taking care of practical matters for example the operation of water works, electric supply and distant heating, fire department, garbage disposal, and just recently public transportation. Land-use planning in the municipalities has mostly been carried out independently without much collaboration or co-ordination between them, but the local authorities have though from one time to another recognised the need for more co-operation in this field.

The municipalities concerned have made three attempts in preparing a common regional plan for the capital area during the last four decades, but it was not until in December 2002 such a plan reached the status of formal approval by the Minister for Environment. The moment the minister approved the plan the formal role of the regional planning committee ended according to the planning legislation. However, the local authorities decided it would be necessary to continue this co-operation and establish a permanent regional planning committee, although it would for now not have any formal role according to the present legislation. The committee has now been established and is linked to the activities of the Association of Municipalities in the Capital region, an organisation that have revitalized recently, partly as a results of the regional planning process.

Current processes concerning reforms of the planning system

At present there are several ongoing processes that might bring about considerable changes to the current planning system. Recently, the planning debate has directed its attention to the role of the central government and the need for policies concerning land-use at the national level. One reason for this increased interest in land-use planning at the national level is recent controversies between local and national authorities concerning land-use of particular areas. In these cases, the policy of local authorities as set forth in their municipal plan regarding land-use for an area does not correspond to the policy of national sector plans for the same area.

The Planning and Building Act from 1997 is being reviewed and it has already been decided to split the Act up i.e. into a separate planning act and building act. Two committees have been established to prepare proposals for the two new acts. The one responsible for the planning part has representatives from the Ministry of Environment, Reykjavik municipality, the Association of Local Authorities, the Ministry of Industry and the Planning Agency, and one of its main tasks will be to find ways to reach consensus on and make clearer the division of responsibility between the national and local level concerning land-use planning. Another issue that needs to be dealt with is how the Act will define the horizontal co-ordination of the different state sectors and to what degree the local authorities have to comply with the sector plans.

The process of revising the Planning and Building act is closely related to the implementation of the so-called SEA directive¹⁰, which has to be completed before 21st July 2004. The directive has partly been put into force in the present Planning and Building Act and its regulations, but needs to be revised to fulfil all its conditions. In addition, the Planning Agency has put together guidelines on how the conditions of the directive should be followed in relation to the preparation of municipal plans and is currently working on a framework for integration of SEA in sector plans and co-ordination of spatial planning at the national level.

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www.bygg.is (The Regional Development Agency)

www.skipulag.is (Icelandic National Planning Agency)

www.samband.is (Association of Local Authorities in Iceland)

¹⁰ Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment,

The Norwegian Planning System

The Norwegian system of regional planning is based on three institutional pillars: nationally - the planning role of the Ministry of Environment, regionally – the planning role of the county councils and locally – the planning role of the municipalities. There is no overarching spatial or physical planning at the national level, the municipalities being the main loci of physical planning. The county councils are formally responsible for an integrative regional planning, but the scope, ambition and legitimacy of this planning activity has been substantially devalued and subsequently changed over time. There are several ongoing processes at the national level, which eventually may bring important changes to the present system.

The national level

The Ministry of Environment act as the national planning department and has the overall responsibility for local and regional planning. The juridical, financial and policy responsibility for the municipal sector, including the regional counties, remains with the Ministry of Local and Regional Affairs, whereas the various regional state bodies including the office of the state county commissioner (fylkesmann) are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Administration. At the over-arching level this means that most questions concerning the development and structure of regional matters and regional planning immediately involves three ministries.

Moreover the various sector ministries have a strong say in the regional policy matters concerning their own sectors, especially as there is no national level of physical or spatial planning. The subsequent weakening over years of traditional regional planning at the county council level has further led to more strongly articulated regional planning process within certain sectors, notably within transport and communications and health care.

In the transport sector, a concept of national transport planning has been introduced, which integrates geographical and sectorial perspectives. Existing sectorial and administrative divisions have deliberately been crossed, as the Ministry of Transport and Communications has sought to plan along two lines of integration: for entire transport corridors and for metropolitan regions.¹¹

In the health sector a new system of regional hospital structures has been created in the aftermath of the transfer of the hospital sector from the county councils to state run regional health companies.

Though there is no national planning at the physical level proper, there are however some national guidelines (rikspolitiske retningslinjer) with strong planning implications. The most important of these are the guidelines on transport development in relation to land use and the guidelines on coastal land use in the Oslofjord area. In some instances laws are even introduced to direct planning activities in certain ways as when the Government in 1999 introduced a moratorium on the establishment of new shopping centres above a certain size. The moratorium is regionally operative until succeeded by permanent planning regulations given by the respective county councils. In this case the county councils have a say in regional planning, which they are otherwise denied.

The regional level

¹¹ See: <http://www.odin.dep.no/sd/norsk/transport/index-b-n-a.html>

The administrative division on the regional level is made up of 19 counties. Oslo cumulates the function of being a county and a municipality. Within the rest of the 18 counties there has since 1976 been directly elected county councils responsible for regional service provision and planning. There are also 18 state county commissioners with responsibility for regional state issues. Oslo and Akershus share the same commissioner.

When the directly elected county councils were established, the idea was to furnish them with all major task related to regional service provisions and to give them a strong role in regional planning and coordination. It was also foreseen that all of major service provision and questions related to regional development concerns should be moved from the various regional state bodies and offices to the county councils. For several reasons this was never achieved. In 2002 the biggest bulk of service provision was instead lifted away from the county councils when the hospitals were transferred from the county councils to a set of new state operated health companies organised in five "health regions" each encompassing three or more counties. As for the present, the most important service task for the county councils is the provision of upper secondary education.

Similar regional reorganisations have taken place within other important sectors where a new administrative geography has occurred more or less as outcomes of intra-sectoral process. This has led to the national road administration being reorganised with five regions more or less congruent with the health regions, though with different locations of head quarters. Similar processes have also taken place within the administration of the police, courts, customs administration, taxation offices and labour market boards. The most radical process has been the reorganisation of the armed forces where a dramatic reduction of the number of regional divisions and entities has taken place.

Regional planning has undergone changes strongly influenced by the development and status of the county councils. The county councils were from the beginning mandated by law to undertake regional planning, and all other public instances, be they municipalities or various state agencies, are equally mandated to participate in these planning processes. In the late 70s county plans tended to be voluminous documents that sought to integrate most societal developments and aspects in their planning activity. Today county plans are more modest in style and primarily designated to handle sectors over which the counties have direct policy and budgetary impact. They further try to take the explicit role of economically oriented regional development planners to the instruments of RUP (regional utviklingsplan), whereas the physical aspects of regional planning is downplayed.

With the advent of a more development-oriented regional policy perspective in 2002, where the Government explicitly encouraged the county councils to head regional partnerships in EU style governance constellations, the county planning activity has attained a renewed interest in regional development. This could also be seen as a strengthening of the RUP-function. Their role in relation to regional development is however a complex issue in Norwegian political and administrative history as the county councils have their modern roots in the regionalised reconstruction work undertaken after World War II and in the regionalised activities of various state run programmes for business and innovation funding, especially designated to work in sparsely populated areas. One of the recent outcomes of the recent debate over these issues have been to establish the Norwegian Industrial and Regional Development Fund (SND) as a separate state run agency with its own regional boards and offices over which the county councils will only have a minor advisory function.

The ability of the county councils to function with authority as future regional planning nexuses may be judged an open question and strongly dependent on the role accorded to them by the national political institutions.

With the advent of the directly elected county councils in 1976, it was foreseen that the role of the state county commissioners should be reduced to the role of audit, ombudsman and legality control. For several reasons, the development never took this path. Important sector bureaucracies with strong planning impact as those relating to environment and agriculture still remain with the state county commissioners. In addition, several formally independently organised regional state bodies as the county medical officers and the county school officers have lately been incorporated with state county commissioners to form strong regional state entities.

The present Norwegian system of regional organisation could thus best be described as something between the Danish model of a strong county council and the Swedish model of a strong state county commissioner, whereas the original blueprint for the Norwegian model was the Danish way.

The local level

Physical planning in Norway is almost synonymous with the municipal enactment of the Planning and Building Act. As long as the municipalities do not violate national interests and guidelines, they are fairly sovereign on land use and planning decisions. In some cases they are even commissioned to grant exemptions from national laws, most notably in the case of the national building regulations prohibiting any building activity in the 100 meter coastal zone.

The Planning and Building Act was introduced in 1965, almost simultaneously with a reform that reduced the number of municipalities from around 725 to around 440. The immediate argument for this reform was the introduction of a compulsory system for 9 years of education and a subsequent need to create local entities big enough to carry the new schooling system. In the years to follow the municipal sector expanded enormously with regard to competence, budgets and service provision.

This development created a parallel need for planning both with regard to physical planning and to service and budgetary management. The municipal plan reflects these needs being on its normal set-up organised in a yearly budgetary process, a macro-budgetary planning process rolling over a four-year period and a ten year land use process revised every four year.

This system has with minor changes been rather stable over the last four decades and has proved robust for most purposes. There are several challenges with this planning system, notably in its ability to fuse the aspects of economic and land use planning, but increasingly also to cope with changes in service demands and the macro-economic preconditions. The Norwegian municipal income system is extremely complicated and is not, as in Denmark, subject to negotiations. It is basically made up of a set of national criteria forming the objective foundation for a basic *en bloc* budget in addition to a set of nationally targeted budgets set to stimulate specific sectors or activities. In addition the municipalities may at their own choice levy minor revenues from taxing houses in built up areas.

Since the mid-1980s the state has had the intention to level out what was until then understood as a rapid and uncontrollable raise in municipal economic activity. From the general municipal point of view, however, this has been taken as a sign of a central wish to

curtail municipal autonomy alongside with a continued wish to charge the municipalities with even more tasks and duties concerning local service provision.

The planning effect of these trends can be described as a tendency for local politicians to withdraw somewhat from local economic and service provision planning, which they tend to describe as beyond local political control and to concentrate more on land use planning and physical development planning, which they still recognise as their competence.

Regional policy and regional planning

When the Ministry of Environment was founded in 1972 the competence of local and regional planning was heavily disputed. Some advocated its natural location within the previous Ministry of Labour and Local Affairs, which is now the Ministry of Regional and Local Affairs, while others wanted it to become part of the new Ministry of Environment, which eventually became the solution to the question.

Behind this debate could be seen different perspectives on the nature and challenges of regional planning, as well as on the overarching or integrating potentials of the various ministries in question. As such, the debate continues, and regional planning is still divided between different ministries, with county and municipal planning being the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment and regional policy and development being the responsibility of the Ministry of Regional and Local Affairs.

For all practical purposes the two ministries cooperate in meeting the planning needs of the county councils and the municipalities.

Metropolitan regions

Urban policy has traditionally not been a strong political issue in Norway, though policy documents every now and then has highlighted the question.¹² The governmental report presented last year (st.meld.31 (2002-2003) on policy challenges in the major urban areas (Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger, Kristiansand, Tromsø, Fredrikstad and Drammen) could mark a change in this respect. The report discusses the need for more concerted policies in urban functional regions and advocates some minor service transfer to the municipal sector in these areas, but suggest no new encompassing planning measures. What is interesting from a planning perspective is that the report is heavily influenced by ESDP-like arguments and thus could mark the turn towards a more spatially oriented style of regional planning.

It could be foreseen, however, that the urban municipalities cited above will pursue the intentions of the report in the years to come by suggesting policy measures that could alleviate the planning situation in urban areas. This is however also a theme that cannot be discussed without taken into consideration the future status of the county councils as there could be said to exist a sort of rivalry between the major urban municipalities and the county councils on who should be heading the visions of regional development and organisational driving force of the regional partnerships. As for the present the government has made it clear that the county councils should be regarded as the regional agents of development and planning, but at the same time the present Minister of Local and Regional Affairs has made no secret of her personal view: to abolish the county councils and go for a two-level regional government system.

¹² See: St.meld.nr. 31 (2002-2003) Storbymeldingen

In the meantime various urban regions have organised in different ways. Most of them have established one or several inter-municipal boards or companies regulating specific planning needs as pertaining to for instance public transport, sewer and waste handling, water provision etc, but there are increasingly work undertaken on more over-arching policy needs. In the Stavanger metropolitan region the municipalities in question have formalised their cooperation in a joint planning agreement with the county council (fylkesdelplan). In the Kristiansand region, the six municipalities participating in the regional policy board have begun a process that eventually can lead to a formalised transfer of some power from the various municipalities to the board. In the Oslo metropolitan region, where the structure is extremely complex comprising several counties and a substantial number of municipalities, an advisory regional board with some policy functions is expected to be established during the autumn of 2003.

Ongoing process related to regional planning reforms

There has over the last few years been several proposals and process of relevance for the future of regional planning in Norway in Norway.

Following a heated political debate on the possible need for reforms in the Norwegian regional political and administrative system in the 1990s, a commission on the geographical and sectorial division of political and administrative labour (Oppgavefordelingsutvalget) presented its conclusions to the Government in 2000.¹³ The commission was split according to several lines of cleavages, but on the whole presented several models for reducing the number of counties and making their tasks more logically organised. One representative (Cons.) in the commission advocated the abolishment of the counties all together.

The recommendations presented by the commission became hotly debated, but none of its more substantial propositions have so far been adopted.

A special Planning and Building Act Committee presented its final conclusions to the Minister of Environment 13 May 2003 proposing several amendments to the present Planning and Building Act.¹⁴ Among the most relevant proposals concerning regional planning should be noted that the present county planning processes is proposed to become non-compulsory, but at the same time the municipal participating role in county planning processes is to be strengthened. More regional planning procedures involving state as well as local authorities is to be binding by law. A new chapter on inter-municipal planning is to be incorporated in the Planning and Building Act as an alternative to meet the needs of functional and cooperating regions. Special planning needs pertaining to sectorial concerns like transport, coastal management, water management and nature management are given special attention by own chapters. The committee has on the whole, though, paid more attention to the needs for municipal than for regional planning reforms.

A technical Commission on the effects and consequences of broad regional policy (Effektutvalget) is to report by the turn of the year. The commission's conclusions may have consequences for the future organisation of regional policy and hence also touch upon the role of regional planning.

Furthermore a political Commission on Regional Policy (Distriktskommisjonen) is in the midst of its work looking at the more political aspects of the present organisation and

¹³ See: NOU 2000:22 Om oppgavefordelingen mellom stat, region og kommune.

¹⁴ See: NOU 2003:14 Bedre kommunal og regional planlegging etter plan- og bygningsloven II.

priorities in regional policy. Its mandate is to point at possible reforms and future models for regional policy organisation. The commission is to report by September 2004.

The political debate on regional planning is not very accentuated in Norway, but there is a well articulated debate on regional policy and the regional political and administrative system. To put it in short, two political parties, The Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet) and the Conservative Party (Høyre) have taken a stand in favour of a two level political and administrative system with stronger and fewer municipalities and no regional level. The Christian Democrats (Kristelig Folkeparti), the Liberals (Venstre), the Centre Party (Senterpartiet) and the Socialist Left (SV) all speak in favour of a more or less reformed three-level system without too many amendments made to the present municipal structure. The Labour Party has been somewhat hesitating on the need to pass structural reforms to the regional political and administrative system, but is presently preparing a party debate (rådslag) on the issue.

Three counties in the south-east (Telemark-Vestfold-Buskerud) have recently agreed to merge their main functions on a confederal basis as a response to perceived challenges for structural reforms in one of the country's most densely populated areas. The two counties of Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder have failed to fulfil a merger process in the southern part of the country. In this case one of the main arguments for the merger was the need for more integrated planning in the Kristiansand metropolitan region divided by the joint county border.

Throughout the country, a number of voluntary county-overarching policy alliances have been created over the last decade leading to the existence of Vestlandsrådet (Rogaland, Hordaland and, Sogn og Fjordane), Agderrådet (Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder) and Trøndelagsrådet (Sør-Trøndelag and Nord-Trøndelag). There are also similar alliances in Northern Norway and in the eastern part of the country. Equally, most municipalities belong to one or several inter-municipal bodies of voluntary cooperation.

Some of these spontaneous processes of regional alliance formation should point to needs for regional planning not met by the formal regional planning and administrative systems.

The Swedish Planning System¹⁵

In Sweden, planning is mainly decentralised and a municipal concern. The regional level (county level) is not that strong formally as regards spatial planning in Sweden. On a national level there are steering documents and guidelines, but the interpretations and decisions mainly take place on the municipal level. Below the three levels and the formal structure of the spatial planning system are presented, as are some of the current discussion topics in the spatial planning field.

The local level

The municipalities (kommunerna) have the “planning monopoly” in the Swedish system. They develop *comprehensive plans* (översiktsplaner) covering the whole municipality and presenting the existing functions and the long term aims for land and water management. The comprehensive plan is not binding, but it is supposed to contain up to date guidelines for the future development, and to be renewed when necessary. The decision to renew it is taken by the politicians at least once during their term of office. *The detailed development plan* (detaljplan) covers parts of the municipality and is binding. This kind of plan is prepared when change is expected in a building block, a part of an estate or similar. The detailed plan is decisive for the building permits, and also a tool for the caretaking of the built heritage.

The regional level

On the regional level Sweden is divided in 21 counties (län). The county administrative board (länsstyrelse) is the regional state authority, seeing to that national interests are taken into account in planning, that laws are implemented and that governmental directives are followed. Issues like implementing the national regional development policy, transport policy and environmental policy are the responsibility of the county administration. It is possible to make a *regional plan*, if there are issues clearly concerning more than one municipality, but this is voluntary and the plan unbinding. More formalised regional planning for the moment only takes place in the Stockholm region, and to some extent in the Gothenburg region. The regional level as regards land-use planning is relatively weak as compared to other Nordic Countries.

The national level

On the national level, the Ministry of the Environment has the main responsibility for spatial planning. The Ministries of Agriculture and Industry are responsible for planning related issues such as regional development transport planning and agricultural policy. The state authorities are responsible for formulating policy objectives (in Government bills etc.) and seeing to that the decisions following these objectives are implemented. The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket), the National Rail Administration (Banverket), the National Road Administration (Vägverket) and the Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket) are the state departments relevant for spatial planning issues. Among their tasks is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of government policies.

The legal system

¹⁵ This entire chapter is mainly based on Nyström, J: “Planeringens grunder. En översikt”, Bjarnardóttir, H, Bradley, K: “Ny kurs för Norden – planering och hållbar utveckling” (Nordregio R2003:2), Schulman, M Böhme, K: “New Dynamics in a Municipal-Based Planning System: Spatial Planning in Sweden” “Swedish Planning – in times of diversity” in Built Environment vol 26 nr 1 ÅR???, Newman, P, Thornley, A: “Urban Planning in Europe” and www.boverket.se.

The legal structures consist of the Environmental Code (Miljöbalken) and the Planning and Building Act (Plan- och Bygglagen, PBL). The Environmental Code is an “umbrella” for both PBL and other acts concerning the physical environment that came into force 1999, replacing several separate laws. One ingredient in the legal structures is Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), i.e. environmental assessment of plans and programs. The legal demands for SEA relating to municipal land use planning are found in both PBL and the Environmental Code and apply to comprehensive plans and detailed development plans.¹⁶ There are however also demands for SEA in different sector planning activities, for example infrastructure planning. In the Environmental Code it is also regulated what is of national interest, such as threatened natural environment, important natural resources, areas for outdoor sports etc. The sites designated as being of national interest are protected and any development affecting them strictly regulated.

PBL is the legal framework for the comprehensive and detailed planning. The law describes what the plans should contain and how the planning process should be organised, with for example taking the interests of the different stakeholders into consideration.

There are several models of the public interest that have to be taken into consideration within the spatial planning system. It is important that the public, and the representatives of all the different interests, have a say in the planning process. This is regulated e.g. by the system with remittance authorities in the permit process, and by the fact that the plans have to be exhibited and open for comments, protests and such, for a time period before being decided upon and implemented.

The demands on the planning process for ensuring openness and democratic structures are formulated in PBL. Plans have to be sent out to remittance authorities, such as political parties, national authorities, NGO's, museums etc. and exhibited in public for a certain time period, allowing everyone the possibility to appeal it. The remittance authorities represent different sector interests, such as the caretaking of the cultural heritage, accessibility for disabled people etc.

Current changes and debates concerning Swedish planning

In this section some important themes in the “planning debate” in Sweden are brought up. Although the section is organised with subheadings, it is possible to view it all as different interpretations of the same process – the strive towards more transparency and influence.

¹⁶ See also EU Directive 2001/42/EC

The region

The weak regional level as regards the physical planning in Sweden is sometimes considered a problem. It can lead to that municipalities, instead of *complementing* each other, *compete* in a negative way by not co-ordinating their activities although the surrounding territory for most inhabitants in a municipality is a continuous space where administrative borders are invisible.

Regional planning can be said to be more important today, as mobility has increased. It is possible to travel long distances in short time and issues relating to daily commuting for example are more and more discussed and concepts such as the enlargement of regions (“regionförstoring”) are used. Working for enlargement of regions is also seen as a reaction on the migration from rural areas. Increased possibilities of long distance commuting, implies increased possibilities to live in rural areas.

Connected to this is the concept “polycentric regions” (“flerkärniga regioner”). Through the improved communications and living conditions, enlarged regions can be realized and within these, a functional division. The Mälars region is one example where fast train lines improves the commuting possibilities, and thereby the polycentric patterns and functional division within the region. In Stockholm the Regional Planning Office have worked with different alternative solutions towards a polycentric pattern of the region in the Regional Development Plan (RUF) in order to put some pressure of the inner city. Botniabanan, a debated train line between Sundsvall and Umeå in the north of Sweden is motivated, by the National Rail Administration, with that it creates an enlarged region, better possibilities for a competitive business climate, improved living conditions and a more long-term sustainable environmental development.

Also in a European perspective the regions are on the agenda, as the comparable unit and as the competitive unit. The Swedish regions – the counties – are in this comparison rather small. This is one reason among others that Skåne and Västra Götaland counties were formed, through fusion of existing counties. (See more below.) Other regional co-operations that have been formed in response to the European discussion are the Mälars region, Nordkalotten and Öresund region. These are however more loosely co-operative structures without formal administrative power or obligations.

Regional planning and regional policy¹⁷

Land and water management planning in Sweden consequently takes place mainly on municipal level. It has even been stated that “... planning is mainly understood as and focused on land-use planning. Physical planning is seen as the hard core of planning (...) Regional planning in a physical sense is in Sweden a dead end, which fortunately cannot be said for regional development. (...) To the extent that here the concept of spatial planning is put into practice, it has not gone under the flag of planning.” (Schulman and Böhme in Built Environment) It is as “regional development planning” that infrastructure planning and other bigger spatial planning projects take place, and where the traces of the European development through inspiration from the ESDP can be seen.

¹⁷ Additional sources for this section: The Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications: www.naring.regeringen.se, The Swedish Business Development Agency: www.nutek.se and The Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities: www.lf.svekom.se

Regional development has recently experienced a shift from focus on supporting the weak regions in the country, where people move away, where unemployment remains high and education level low etc. to a focus on all regions and on development possibilities.

A rather new tool for the regional development is the *Regional Growth Agreements and Programmes* (Regionala Tillväxtavtal/-program). The programmes should lead to better use of the endogenous regional potential for economic growth, or even “sustainable growth” – from economic, social and ecological perspectives. This should come as a result of the coordination of activities, the dialogue between sectors, and a cross-sectoral strategy for growth. The structure of the programmes is inspired by the EU Structural Funds, in that they are programmes, project-oriented and drawn up in partnership. The Growth Agreements are running until the end of 2003, and after that change name to Programmes, running until 2007.

For a more democratic process within regional development planning, there are attempts with extended regional autonomy in parts of the country. In the counties Skåne and Västra Götaland there are regional selfgoverning bodies (självstyrelseorgan) and in several other counties there are to a degree varying forms of regional co-operative bodies.

(samverkansorgan, kommunalförbund) In these cases, the regional development responsibilities are moved from the counties to the regional co-operative bodies. In Skåne and Västra Götaland the regional bodies also answer for the diffusion of the regional development funding. The regional co-operative bodies can also lead to co-operation outside strictly regional policy, such as infrastructure planning and tourism. The experiences so far also indicate that the environmental aspects of regional development planning are given more attention in the co-operative bodies. In addition, these attempts have initiated a debate on the division of labor between the administrative levels in Sweden.

The democracy aspects of the planning system¹⁸

At the moment a governmental committee have the task to review the Planning and Building Act (PBL) and propose possible changes. The role of PBL as a tool for sustainable development has to be strengthened and the act have to, better than at present, create preconditions for a good environment, housing construction, commercial activities and the business climate as a whole. The decision-making process has to be more efficient, without jeopardizing the rule of law or the participation of the citizens. The committee will be functioning until the end of 2004.

The safeguarding of the influence of the citizens and a democratic decision-making process is at the moment on the agenda not only through the reworking of the legal writings. In Stockholm the municipality in 1996-1999 reformed the administrative system with the introduction of the *city districts*. A major part of the municipal service was then transferred to the districts, 18 at the moment. The idea was to render the municipal administration more effective and to increase the possibilities for the inhabitants to affect the decision-making, and improve the municipal service.

As mentioned above, the attempts with increased regional selfgoverning bodies is another example of the striving for increased democracy and citizen participation in planning and development.

A national urban policy¹⁹

¹⁸ Source: www.stockholm.se and the PBL Committee: www.sou.gov.se/pbl

There is no national urban policy in Sweden, but there is an ongoing discussion and an onset to urban policy in the spatial planning of the major urban regions in the country. There is a Commission on Metropolitan Areas in Sweden (Storstadsdelegationen) and a “Swedish Urban Environment Council” (Stadsmiljörådet). The Commission on Metropolitan Areas is a government commission with the task to co-ordinate “national metropolitan policy” and to make sure that measures improving living conditions in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods are implemented.

In the Stockholm region there is a project on urban policy with the aim to formulate a national policy. It is stated in this project that the urban policy should emphasize the national measures necessary for the big cities to contribute to the development in the whole country.

Before the policy aiming at regional development focused on sparsely populated areas, and on being a counterweight to the urban expansion. In the European discussion the argumentation is different. Investments in urban regions are motivated by that they benefit the surrounding territories. This, to regard urban regions as growth poles, has inspired the Swedish examples above.

Sustainable development²⁰

Environmental aspects of planning and the concept *sustainable development* have been on the agenda in Swedish planning for some time by now and since the early 1990s with increased focus. On the municipal level the international incentive *Local Agenda 21* and the *Local Investment Programmes* (LIP) are examples of tools aiming for a sustainable society. The focus of LA 21 is e.g. on sustainable management of the local environment, public health and local democracy. One effect of the LA 21 work is increased environmental concern in comprehensive planning and increased public participation.

On the national level there are also the 15 environmental goals, a government decision in 1999. They describe the ecologically long-term sustainable qualities regarding the environment, and the natural and cultural resources. The goals are:

1. Reduced climate impact
2. Clean air
3. Natural acidification only
4. A protective ozone layer
5. Zero eutrophication
6. Flourishing lakes and streams
7. A balanced marine environment, flourishing coastal areas and archipelagos
8. Thriving wetlands
9. A magnificent mountain landscape
10. A safer radiation environment
11. A non-toxic environment
12. Good-quality groundwater
13. Sustainable forests
14. A varied agricultural landscape

¹⁹ Additional sources for this section: Miljøministeriet i Danmark et al: “Stadspolitik i Norden. Mot en hållbar utveckling av städer” (2002), Office of Regional Planning and Urban Transportation in Stockholm county (RTK): ”En modern nationell storstadspolitik” (rapport 5:2003) and The Commission on Metropolitan Areas in Sweden: www.storstad.gov.se

²⁰ Additional sources for this section: the website for Sweden environmental objectives, www.miljomal.nu and “Planering för hållbar utveckling – 13 utmaningar för den fysiska samhällsplaneringen” by The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning

15. A good built environment

In connection to the national goals, the counties have formulated the regional situation in the regional environmental goals. In the Environmental Code from 1999 there are regulations on environmental quality standards. This can be emission levels, and how to control these levels. The standards are tools for reaching the national environmental goals and in addition, they are necessary in order to fulfill EU membership obligations. It is the task of the government and the National Environmental Protection Agency to communicate the standards to companies etc.

Another important aspect of planning for a sustainable society is the sector co-operation and co-ordination. How can the administrative system be reformed so to encourage sustainable development? At the moment the government's attention is on this, through NUTEK (The Swedish Business Development Agency), the Swedish National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat and also at the Government Offices. The PBL Committee is also a part of this revision of the administrative system. The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning also have their attention on this kind of sustainability. They see increased democracy and co-operation in planning and a more holistic approach to planning as of central importance in parallel to the ecological aspects.

Social planning

An important planning debate that has reached beyond the immediate planning sector, and that in also encompasses several aspects of society is the discussion on social and ethnic segregation in urban areas – whether it is there and how it shows, the reasons and best measures to reduce it etc. Those involved in the debate come from several professional fields, and the descriptions of problems and good solutions vary. The focus is alternatively on the physical planning – architecture, out door environment and maintenance, on the social and demographic structures of the areas, on ethnical composition or on democracy aspects – citizen participation etc. in the broader picture, this is one sign that the social perspective on planning has gotten increased attention during the last decades. Segregation issues, public health and planning and “social impact analysis” of plans and projects are all examples of this.

Conclusions

There is obviously no such thing as a Nordic model of regional planning. In stead we should conclude that there seems to be important differences in the way the various countries deal with their regional planning. In this we could first of all speak of a cleavage between Denmark on the one side and the other four Nordic countries on the other by the fact that the latter have no national physical or spatial planning in the proper sense of the word. Denmark could more easily be grouped with Germany and the Netherlands in this respect as a country putting much importance to national control on land use.

This fact is important for regional planning as well, as what is of national concern tends to trickle down the geographical administrative chain. Therefore, physical planning is neither a strong regional case in any of the other Nordic countries. Physical planning is first and foremost a municipal specialty. Some exceptions do occur, however. Urban growth and the spontaneous creation of stronger functional regions raise the question for more integrated land use planning to take place in metropolitan regions. The planning activity in the Reykjavik area, the Finnish Urban Programme and the Norwegian Parliament Report on Urban Issues all demonstrate this development within planning.

Traditionally, regional planning in Finland, Norway and Sweden has been more geared to social and economic planning than to physical planning, whereas Iceland lacks any regional planning in the stricter sense. Moreover, the regional planning activity has been strongly state controlled in Finland and Sweden, and, with the weakening of the county councils, increasingly also so in Norway.

Recently, however, these patterns are changing somewhat. In Finland an elected county councils is for the first time set up in Kainuu, whereas in Sweden, the state controlled model of the County Administrative Boards have been blended with the county councils model in Skåne and Västra Götaland and with the introduction of Regional Cooperative Bodies in several other regions.

On the whole it could be argued that in these four other Nordic countries regional planning in the physical sense is mostly taken care of as a dialogue between the state and the municipalities, though in different arrangements.

This is not the place to explore the reasons behind the differences in planning style between Denmark and the other Nordic countries. Suffice it to say that differences in settlement structure, population density and land use may account for a lot of it.

What is interesting is in stead to point to parallel processes to the one going on in Denmark concerning geographical structures. The Planning and Building Act is undergoing revision in Iceland, Norway and Sweden and the number and nature of administrative divisions is especially hotly debated in Iceland and Norway. In all of the countries a need to come to terms with the pressing demands of an increasingly important functional regionality is manifest, and this inevitably entails the discussion of creating more robust regional entities. Again the answers seem different: Sweden already have fairly large municipalities, Finland have a historical tradition of inter-municipal cooperation, often regulated by law, whereas in Iceland and Norway the question of municipal mergers comes to the forefront.

Logically the trends of functional regional enlargements should lead to the tasks of land use and physical planning in the future being dealt with above the present municipal level. To which extent this will be the case, is an open question as the position of the municipalities is

very strong in the Nordic tradition. What may seem logical from a planner's point of view may therefore look different from a political point of view.

We could in this sense perhaps speak of an alliance between national and local politicians. National and local politicians do in some instances share an interest in keeping the regions (counties) down, whereas the regions in return look(ed) to Brussels for an allied. In Finland and Iceland this state-municipality alliance is the natural one as there is no intermediate level of government, in Norway the county councils came into a squeeze between the state and the municipalities and was never popular with any of them, while in Sweden the emergence of the cooperative boards have placed the municipalities in forefront on the regional scene.

What could be concluded from this is that there is a striking uncertainty in the four countries in questions to what represents "the regional". There is no strong political power on the regional level in any of the countries, the power bases are either local or national. Furthermore, there are much uncertainty as to what regional divisions will be most suitable in the future.

These are both conclusions that promise further debate and further experimentation. The map of lasting regional administrative entities has yet to be drawn and redrawn, and the question on who is to conduct regional planning and with kind of content, has not got a clear answer.

