The urban politics of sustaining growth:

Sustainability governance in the Gothenburg metropolitan area

Nazem Tahvilzadeh

Stig Montin

Mikael Cullberg

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Foreword

This working paper examines urban sustainability policy in the Gothenburg Region and how the local and regional actors in the Gothenburg Region have chosen to jointly define it. It is part of an international research project funded under the auspices of Mistra Urban Futures, Centre for Sustainable Urban Development (http://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en). The research project studies knowledge, governance and sustainable development policy in four cities: Manchester (UK), Capetown (South Africa), Kisumu (Kenya) and Gothenburg (Sweden). The overall purpose of the project is to generate knowledge, which can develop alternatives to current policies for a more sustainable society by adopting trans-disciplinary research strategies in which research and practice are closely linked.

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Nazem Tahvilzadeh[1]

Stig Montin[2]

Mikael Cullberg[3]

Abstract: Urban governance for sustainable development (SD) can in Sweden, for several reasons, be given a privileged position. By scrutinizing such a promise case, illustrated with a case study of a city regional collaborative governance process in 2002-2014 in the Gothenburg Metropolitan Area (GMA), the aim is to give insights on how city regional collaborative governance arrangements address SD and what story lines regarding SD are deployed. In GMA and its city regional body of governance, the narrative of weak sustainability privileging economic growth, regional enlargement and urban densification is advanced by a cohesive discourse coalition. While critical coalitions are present, stronger SD narratives are not structured or institutionalized in the strategies. The article contributes empirical insights in how the discourse coalitions became dominating and discusses some factors involved in the adoption of the weak SD narrative and the potential for stronger interpretations in future processes.

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[1] Division of Urban and Regional Studies, Department of Urban planning, Royal Institute of Technology, KTH
[2] School of Public Administration, University of Gothenburg
[3] County Administrative Agency, Director Gothenburg Platform, Mistra Urban Futures.

Introduction

Urban governance for sustainable development (SD) can in Sweden, for several reasons, be given a privileged position. Compared to other contexts, the Swedish welfare model enables a robust capacity to reconcile urbanization processes with rapid and adequate CO_2 emission reduction, while preserving environmental values, increasing levels of social equality, developing a vital and resilient economy combined with a popular support for and stability of the representative democratic political system. Urban planning strategies in Sweden are internationally highlighted and rewarded in terms of environmental protection (Metzger and Rader Olsson 2013), Swedish technological and architectural models of "sustainable cities" have become global export services (Hult 2013). Further, the Swedish welfare model and its measures of redistributive justice are still internationally prominent in sustaining relatively high levels of health, income and gender equality, although the neoliberal transformations in recent decades (Larsson, Letell and Thörn 2012). During the last decade, the awareness of the existent ecological damages, climate change and the increasing social and economic gaps within cities have increased, and SD has become a meta-narrative around which almost all other political aspirations of urban and regional governments circle. Urban governance strategies have recurrently been framed as crucial factors for sustainability politics, manifest among others in the conclusions of the Government Commission "Delegation for sustainable cities" (DFSC 2012). Regional and metropolitan developmental partnerships are encouraged and established with the purposes of finding effective and legitimate solutions to unsustainable infrastructure and economic development through the promotion of collaborative practices and stakeholder involvement as modes of organization (Hudson 2005, Herrschel and Tallberg 2011). The sustainability narrative was mainstreamed in the regional partnership policy arenas by the end of the 1990's and has resulted in a number of reports, policies, plans and networks which embrace the narrative as a long-term objective. On the surface, Sweden thus serves as a most-likely case of successful urban governance for SD.

Scrutinizing such a promise case can thus give valuable insights on what opportunities and impediments that exist in the "best of worlds" for front line urban politics of SD. This article will provide such insights on governance for urban sustainability illustrated by the second largest city of Sweden, the Gothenburg Metropolitan Area (GMA). During the 20th Century, the growth of the city of Gothenburg was based on an internationally successful manufacturing industry, which after the shipyard crisis of the 1970's and the globalization processes of the 1980s and 1990s lost its' dominance as the economic base of the city

economy and distribution of resources. Since the 1990s, the city has pursued entrepreneurial strategies to complement the manufacturing industries with information technology, science, tourism, event economy, cultural attractions and waterfront and brownfield regeneration projects (Thörn 2011). An important aspect of these politics of the new urban economy is the active pursuit of collaborative and strategic "partnerships" between actors in the public and the private sector which have emerged as distinguished arenas for the framing and execution of urban politics (Brorström 2015). In 2002 the 13 municipalities in GMA initiated a consultation process within the organizational framework of the Regional Association of Local Authorities in the Gothenburg Region (GR). The initiative was taken by the political leader of the City of Gothenburg as a way to combat the inefficiencies of competitive politics between the municipalities within the region in order to promote collaboration on issues of common interests and create win-win effects for the entire city region. This process included elected politicians and professional planners from all municipalities and set out to develop a strategy integrating social, ecologic and economic dimensions of SD by deploying a discourse of "sustainable growth".

These new regional arenas for politics, long-term visioning and framing of developmental objectives are becoming more prominent in the multi-level governance arrangements of European politics (Lidström 2007, Gualini 2006). However, few studies provide insight on what actually happens in these spaces, how power-relations play out over time and how issues of for example SD become interpreted and operationalized in policy and action plans (see e.g. Krueger and Savage 2007). The general issue addressed in this article is whether city regions functioning as spaces of the new economy have opened up a window for sustainability governance. The governance for SD in the metropolitan region of Gothenburg is used as an empirical illustration to this dilemma. The aim is to give insights on *how* new city-regional collaborative governance arrangements address sustainable development and *what* they mean with sustainability when addressed as a policy concern.

The city region: A moment for sustainability governance?

In this paper, "sustainability governance" denotes the "deliberate adjustment of practices of governance in order to ensure that social development proceeds along a sustainable trajectory" (Meadowcroft, Farrell and Spangenberg 2005, 5). The collaborative governance efforts in GMA represent an innovative attempt to enhance regional development networks on the basis of a storyline based on the concept of "sustainable development" (SD) (Montin,

Johannson and Forsemalm 2014). Considering the potential of these new political arenas for policy elaboration, the fundamental differences present in theoretical debates on the causes behind *new regionalism* approaches should be taken into account.

City regional approaches seem to have opened up opportunities to mainstream some ecological and social concerns in order to create honourable visions such as "good quality of life" and "good environment" in the more prominent agenda of enhancing economic success and attractiveness for different forms of capital. By some, the city region is considered to be better equipped to manage the vulnerability of urban areas and a more efficient way to steer land-use and fair resource distribution (Savitch and Vogel 2009). The sub-national and sub-regional spaces of political economy have been described as more "functional" scales of policy-making (Healey 2009) which can better understand and provide for good living environments to urban dwellers and commuters to whom administrative borders hardly appear as rational. The GR collaboration can accordingly be viewed as a way to organize political processes in order to reduce economic, social, racial and other disparities between urban cores and sprawled suburbs

To others, these new spaces of governance pose new layers of problems and power structures that hardly influence urban development towards more environmentalist concerns or social justice. For example, Brenner conceives the emergence of metropolitan governance strategies in Western Europe as "Glocalizing Competition State Regimes" with the purpose of rescaling and reconfiguring state spaces of regulation. The entrepreneurial governance strategies are in this argument not conceived as strategies which contribute to "sustainable forms of economic regeneration or territorial governance" as they are predicted to intensify geographical differentiation and uneven development (Brenner 2004, 479). Gibbs and Kreuger argue that the new city regional spaces manifest the ideological tensions between the "sustainable" and the "entrepreneurial" city: "as the ideology of neoliberalism continues to hold sway, economic decision making increasingly dominates the political agenda and thus maps directly onto the sustainability agenda" (2007, 117). The widely adopted "smart growth" concept is for example intimately integrated with sustainability concerns, but may stand in sharp contrast to the change of course that SD demands by mainly relying on "fetishized" urban lifestyles which avoids the critical issue of consumption patterns (Krueger and Gibbs 2008, 1272).

Further insights on city regional policy-making reveal that they tend to neglect the distributional consequences of competitive policies, and little focus is directed to issues of poverty reduction and unemployment (Etherington and Jones 2009). McCann (2007) argues

that ambitions to stabilize city regionalist agendas and coherence often revolve around issues of smart growth and "liveability". But these agendas are the objects and contexts for political struggle in where inequalities in the processes and the outcomes might be further consolidated. Issues of power and democracy in the study of city regional cohesion strategies have also been highlighted as neglected issues (Purcell 2007).

Studies from the Swedish context indicate that the economic dimensions often prevail over ecological and social perspectives in urban and regional sustainability governance (Hilding-Rydevik, Håkansson and Isaksson 2011, Polk 2010, 2011). In particular, the vastly growing literature on sustainability governance and resilience often point to the dominance of the eco-modernization and growth agenda (Lidskog and Elander 2012). However, empirical insights on how such agendas become dominant in specific institutional settings and *how* the struggles within and outside of governments play out when defining the *what* of sustainability governance are generally absent.

Sustainability governance: story lines and discourse coalitions

An immediate problem which arises when conducting such an analysis is *what* SD actually denotes. Rather than providing one definition of sustainability, we approach the concept as a medium for various visions and ideologies which suit different interests and agenda. To address the "what-question" we make use of a distinction between "weak" and "strong" sustainability (Rydin 2010). Weak sustainability separates between different forms of capital (natural, man-made and human) which are treated as substitutable. Put simply, this means that "natural capital can be safely run down as long as enough man-made and human capital is built up in exchange" (Neumayer 2013, 23). This enables an optimistic view of economic growth based on increased consumption as the driver of sustainable development.

A less optimistic view is that natural capital is regarded as non-substitutable, which means that it would demand "the current generation needs to compensate the future for its use of non-renewable resources with investment into replacement renewable resources that are functionally equivalent" (ibid, p 26). Even if the allocation of resources is "efficient" according to neoclassical welfare economics, it would still not be a just inter-generational distribution. A metaphor illustrating this is that of a boat that sinks in spite of the load being optimally allocated on board, but it will sink optimally (Daly 1991).

The distinction between weak and strong sustainability focuses mainly on the distinction and conflict between environmental and economic capital. The issues of "human

capital" and the social dimensions of SD are generally dealt with prematurely. It has concurrently been argued that the social dimension is generally overlooked and vaguely defined in research on sustainable development (Dempsey et al. 2011, Boström 2012). The discussion on the social pillar concerns both its relation to the other dimensions of sustainability and its concrete contents and objectives. In an extensive review Murphy (2012) identifies four concepts which define the contents of the "social pillar" in policy documents and scientific literature: equity, awareness of sustainability, participation and social cohesion. Murphy (2012, p. 21) regards equity as a key concept but points out that the usually broad definition of equity masks "myriad conceptual and ideological debates that a rigorous examination of the concept would expose". Boström (2012) argues that social sustainability serves as a frame or a portal between the policy-making sphere and the many concepts and theories in the social sciences. Still, policy processes focusing on translating the social dimension into practical action are different from the other two dimensions as "the social" becomes more infused with moral and ideological controversies compared to the more "scientistic" dimensions of ecology and economy. Thus, what becomes interesting in the study of the operationalization of the social dimension is that it makes transparent the political ideologies and power-struggles present in the framing of sustainability.

For example, the ideological differences between aiming for equity when defined as the traditional social-democratic concern of "equality in outcomes" or the more neo-liberal concern of "equality in opportunities" are tremendous (Kantola and Squires 2010). The former would imply some form of distributional justice approach in where the responsibility for equalities are regarded as "vertical" and necessarily addressed by social welfare policies. The latter would however be related to "horizontal" issues of social inclusion where the equal participation in economic markets and policy-making is of primal concern (ibid p. 89). Consequently, depending on the definition of "equity" or "justice" at hand, widely different approaches on the responsibility of governments would apply (Fainstein 2013, Harvey 1992).

Discourse coalitions

Sustainability governance is here regarded as a policy process in which discourses and a certain set of actors seek dominance for their interests and perspectives. By applying the concept of "discourse coalition" as framed by Hajer (2005) the concept discourse is defined as (ibid, p. 45): "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena". Discourses are co-existing and competing social constructions of

reality, and they frame what is possible, necessary or impossible to do. When specific ideas, concepts and categorisations are shared among a group of actors a "discourse coalition" is formed. Discourses are manifested by specific narratives, which are expressed in certain *story lines* used and articulated by members of the coalition (Hajer 2009). Although there are several, more or less coherent, discourse coalitions, one or a few usually dominate a distinct institutional context. Following Hajer, there are two criteria that makes this domination; first, the coalition of actors dominates the room of discourses, which means that central actors are convinced, or for different reasons accept the rhetorical power of a certain discourse ("discourse structuration"); second, the structuration imprint practices in political domains, which means that policy processes become organised along the ideas of a given discourse ("discourse institutionalisation"). Hence, while some discourses are firmly structured and dominant in a specific context, other discourse coalitions are co-existent with perhaps less structured and less dominating story lines.

By using the concept of discourse coalition, we analyse the process of forming and re-forming sustainability strategies and institutional practices. The framework informs us of both the semantic and the ideological aspects of sustainability governance ('the what') and the power-relations between different actors which characterize the institutions and political processes studies ('the how'). The specific questions posed to the empirical material are:

A) How do concerns for sustainability become integrated into the planning policies of city regional governance practices in terms of *what* storylines are used to frame SD.

B) *How* do specific storylines become dominating in the political processes of city regional collaborative governance, and what actors and coalitions dominate the process?

Methods and data

The data collected covers a political process in a city region during 2000–14 and was based on qualitative methods and conducted during a five-year period. Parts of the data collection and analysis work were conducted in close collaboration with the policy practitioners involved. Other parts were more separately conducted by process tracing and passive observation strategies. The main methods comprise individual and semi-structured group interviews, focus groups, passive observations and document analysis. In total, around 30 interviews were held with key figures, both politicians and public officials, and four rounds of

focus groups with public comprising a total of about 60 individuals were carried out. Four consultations in four different municipalities were observed. The consultations were dialogue sessions with the public officials and politicians serving as members of the board in GR and the local councilors in which information on the development of the city region were presented by the planners, followed by smaller semi-structured group deliberations. Beside the consultations, one conference, one council meeting (förbundsfullmäktige) and one board meeting arranged by the GR were observed.

A draft of the main project report was presented at a workshop and the final publication was presented at a conference in which about 100 politicians and officials from the city region participated. The discussions and debates in this forum, together with a debate in the daily newspaper of the city region further highlights the "what" and the "how" issues, and provide information that will be used to discuss briefly the major impediments and opportunities for the future of sustainability governance.

The Gothenburg city region

The thirteen municipalities of GR are part of the Counties of Västra Götaland and Halland on the Swedish West Coast. The population is 900,000 of which half a million within the city of Gothenburg. Each municipality is self-governed in accordance with the structure of the Swedish decentralized welfare state. The municipalities have significant responsibilities for implementing national welfare policies and enjoy both strong constitutional status and a relatively high degree of policy-making autonomy and financial independence vis-à-vis the national government (70 percent of the annual budget is based on local income tax). GR was established in 1995 with the mission to promote inter-municipal cooperation and provide a forum for an exchange of ideas and experiences within the 13 self-governing units of the urban region. The association focuses on regional planning, the environment, transport, the labour market, welfare and social services and capacity building. The authority of the association is delegated from the member municipalities. Leadership from each municipality is brought together proportionally in a council consisting of 97 members. The executive board consists of 22 representatives and 11 deputies, with the chairperson and three deputy chairpersons constituting the presidium of the board. GR works closely with Business Region Gothenburg (BRG), a non-profit association owned by the city of Gothenburg with the main function to strengthen and develop trade and industry in the city region. As the party political situation in Sweden gets more fragmented and varied, so do the party coalitions governing

GR. Until 2006 the chair of the GR council was Social Democratic, but in 2006 the centre-right party coalition "The Alliance for Sweden" won the national elections and advanced in municipalities. Since 2006 the chair of the GR is the leader of the Conservative Party in the City of Gothenburg, while the city itself has continued to be governed by the Social Democrats in a coalition with the Green Party, the Left Party and, from 2014, the Feminist Initiative.

Four rounds of consultations 2002–2008

A regional consultation process[4] – Rådslagsprocessen – started in 2002 in response to the history of tensions and competition for affluent citizens and capital between the municipalities. Gothenburg, as like many traditional manufacturing cities, can be viewed as the "loser" in the movement patterns: valuable tax-incomes move to their suburban well-to-do neighbouring municipalities while the city is left with high social welfare and infrastructural maintenance costs, polluted air and a congested traffic situation. The first consultation process in 2002 aimed therefore to establish a consensus oriented collaboration in which the social dimension of development was defined as priority: "How do we build a region with as small gaps as possible between inhabitants" (GR 2004, p. 8).This initiative resulted in several agreements between the thirteen municipalities on a regional plan for the development of transport infrastructure, housing and workplaces. The first strategy, "Sustainable Growth" was launched in 2006 later updated to "Sustainable Growth" in 2013, and several plans for infrastructure development and the the protection of the environment called a "structure vision" were formulated. The most prominent agreements in terms of investments in the built environment are housing for 135 000 dwellers and 50 000 workplaces, of which 45 000 dwellers and 60 000 workplaces will be developed within Gothenburg city boundaries. For the city, this project implies the most significant regeneration project since the 1960s, as the

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[4] The consultations with all the councils followed the same procedure: After an introduction concerning the specific theme of the current round held by the politicians of the GR Board and the officials of the GR services, the participants were organized into groups for discussions. The groups consisted of councilors from different political parties and the discussions were semi-structured. The results of the discussions were documented by the GR services and then processed in different working groups consisting of politicians from the GR Board, before finally processed and decided on by the Board and the Council. The average number of participants in each municipality was about 50 and overall, the majority of the 1,100 municipal councilors participated in the consultation process. The first round of consultations (2002–2003) lasted for eighteen months, the second (2004) for nine, the third (2005) for three, the fourth (2008) for only two months and the fifth (2012–2013) lasted for seven month.

city centre will be enlarged by four times compared to the existing centre. Furthermore, the insufficient transport infrastructure in the GMA will be developed by trains, underground railway, a motorway tunnel, a motorway bridge, roads, commuter parking etcetera called "the West Swedish Package", an investment of around SEK 34 billion.

How did concerns for sustainability, and what interpretation of SD, emerged in these consultations and strategies? While the social dimension and equity concerns were on the top of the agenda at the outset, the process was turned around in 2006 as the infrastructural issues became dominating primarily motivated by economic growth-arguments. In the invitation to the first consultation it was argued that "A society with minor social differences has an intrinsic value no matter if it is a factor of competition or not" (Ibid, p.10). It is also stated that "sustainable growth" should be facilitated in order to decrease "class distinctions" and that the social dimension should be understood as prerequisite for a competitive economy as well as for a long-lasting environmental capacity" (ibid). This idea of equality in outcomes, a traditional social democratic discourse, was there long before the awareness of finite ecological resources. It is argued that the "environmental capacity" is to be "durable" but it is not explicitly discussed in terms of finite ecological resources. In the conclusions from the first round, a number of issues were identified as important to address: social and ethnic spatial segregation and inequalities; infrastructure; housing; public transport; lifelong learning with the emphasis on municipal adult education, and regional enlargement.

The second round was devoted to contemplate the strategies for the implementation of the prioritized social dimension which mainly resulted in a repetition of the strategies discussed in the first round. In the memos from the second round, spatial segregation and issues of inequalities were regarded as main obstacles for regional development. At the end of 2005, the executive board of GR initiated an effort to establish goals and strategies for the development of the Gothenburg urban region. A proposal was ready when the third consultation round started entitled "*Sustainable growth – goals and strategies with focus on a sustainable regional structure*". The municipal councils basically only had one proposal to consider, which after some minor changes was adopted as a mutual agreement in 2006. It was clear that the focus now had shifted to economic development by growth, by framing the main objective as: "developing the Gothenburg region as a strong and distinct growth region in Europe" (GR 2006). The main measures framed to achieve this were a population growth of 8,000 inhabitants per year, enforcing the regional centre's housing and workplaces, the infrastructure packages and the strengthening the capacity of the city regional airport. Much emphasis is put on "sustainable infrastructure" referring to mainly the measures to increase

public transport from 20 to 40 percent of the total private transport effort in the region. Beyond this operative measure, the main sustainability issue framed was to further "develop the sustainability model" capable to address among other issues the dependency on fossil fuels and to decrease of social gaps. The only proposed measure connected to the latter discussed in the policy is collaborative efforts of "providing balanced housing" (Ibid).

The main ideological vision in the document is to enable regional enlargement and the widening of the local labour market. The theories and knowledge bases for this ideology were framed in another document published by the parallel organization Business Region Gothenburg (BRG) entitled *"Growth in the Gothenburg region – a basis for strategy"*. The purpose of this report was to "illustrate the fundamental growth mechanisms for modern metropolitan regions, and to analyse their consequences for the growth agenda of the Gothenburg region" (p. 3). According to several respondents, the BRG had significant discretion in the process which was used to focus on the economic growth dimension, anchored through a parallel consultation process. BRG, which is owned by the city of Gothenburg to promote an economic vital and entrepreneurial region, acted on their own initiative using targeted regional growth-embracing consultants and economic scientists which were presented and anchored in each of the top-level political managements of the thirteen municipalities. The consultations with the rest of the politicians in the councils were conducted in a highly rushed process of only three months. When the strategy of 2006 "Sustainable growth" was released, BRG also published its document which does not mention sustainability at all. The informants state that there was confusion on the different strategies in the region, concerning which document served as the operative one. A senior director at BRG states that the strategy was deliberate: to lobby the GR-politicians according to the objective of regional enlargement and arguing the increased commuting opportunities would make the strategy sustainable.

In the fourth round, the "regional growth" theme was made yet more distinct in terms of ideas for a "sustainable regional structure". As discussions moved to how implementation of this idea was to be managed, the focus was increasingly on physical structure, leading to a schematic overview of the regional infrastructure and its inherent possibilities called "the structure illustration" (GR 2009), an illustration showing how suburban municipalities should connect to the centre of Gothenburg through agreed corridors for transport and the preservation of the "green wedges" in between. The idea was also that new housing developments should mainly take place close to railway stations in order to impede suburban sprawl.

The fifth consultation 2012–2013: "sustainable growth"

A fifth consultation round (2012–2013) was initiated in order to "update" the six-year old strategy "Sustainable Growth" by assessing if the objectives needed revising. The political head of GR stated that the strategy from 2006 was "anorectic" in terms of the environmental dimension and the planners at GR intentionally pushed environmental and social issues on the agenda. Processes had previously been initiated to arrange a consultation dedicated to the social dimension, according to several respondents. In 2010, GR released a report on social sustainability in which it firmly stated that "the single largest threat against a socially sustainable development is the accelerating socio-economic and ethnic segregation – increased social gaps and geographic polarization" (GR 2010). However, despite the efforts to enhance the social dimension in a separate consultation, the board of GR decided to put all the issues into a single round of consultations in order to reflect on the relevance of the strategies and the municipal achievements to implement it.

While some changes were made in the strategy, the overall storyline was confirmed and the growth narrative reaffirmed and reinforced in the new plan entitled "Sustainable Growth" (GR 2013). "We see strong trade and industry and sustainable growth as prerequisites for continuous prosperity – 'the good life' – for all" the plan states, and the ambition of population growth was increased to 10,000 per year, the actual amount of migration into the city region which in turn called for more housing and workplaces. In terms of the environmental concerns, GR adopted the Climate Strategy of Region Västra Götaland which plans for a "fossil-independent economy" by 2030. The main action-strategy is framed as "green" economic growth and the creation of a transport system independent of fossil fuels. The amount of carbon dioxide accounted for per city regional inhabitant reflects the production perspective, not the climate footprint of the consumption of the regional inhabitants.

The social dimension remained vaguely defined as "social cohesion", a concept argued to be "integrated" by "the creation of mutual relations" and "everyone's participation in social life" which in turn are regarded as drivers of the "regional identity" and of regional development. The social dimension also became further decoupled from operational measures as the only proposition is that "identifying what areas that will benefit the most from inter-municipal cooperation is a first step" (GR 2013, p. 13).

The only political party which officially contested the plan in the formal process was the Green Party who argued that the estimated growth ambitions were hardly sustainable,

given that the increased emissions caused by a growing population in the region were not dealt with (MP 2013-05-24). The objections were however symbolic gestures in a consensual forum and did not influence the strategy more than a mere change of title from "durable" to "sustainable" growth. What eventually became the major point of contention in the process arose in the city of Gothenburg where the issue of congestion charges and the building of a subway train line called the "West Link" became heavily contested. In 2010, a political party called "Vägvalet" ("the Juncture") received about 5 percent of the votes, based on opposing the congestion charges. A prominent tabloid arranged a successful petition, which forced the city to hold a referendum in which a majority, roughly 57 percent of the votes, opposed the congestion fees. As referendums only are consultative according to the Local Government Act in Sweden, the City of Gothenburg decided to stick with the plan as the congestion fees represent a significant part of the financing for the West Sweden Package. By 2013 and onwards a fierce debate on the economic rationality of the West Link and the congestion fees have been taken place in the media. Surprisingly few contributions in this debate were critical of the overall idea of sustainability in the plan behind the infrastructural program as its opponents mainly argued within an economic logic. Using this debate to put issues of sustainability on the agenda and to raise attention of the results of this research project, an article was published by the researchers in this project in the daily newspaper of the GMA arguing that ecological and social issues were dealt with inadequately in the "Sustainable Growth" policy of GR. In a response to the article, the political head of GR summarized the story line: "A growing region gives the opportunity for more people to realize their desire for jobs, housing and studies" (GP 2014-12-01).

However, contentious perspectives on the SD narrative were present among several respondents within the public organizations involved in the framing of the GR strategy. These actors were remarkably frank about their dissent with the established ideas and policies in the interviews. In different networks and forums within the public organizations, these actors were engaged in raising alternative and critical voices on the established discourse of SD. However, this loose circuit of critical actors did not have any significant voice in the framing of the final strategy.

The sustainability coalition: knowledge and ideas of sustaining growth

Did the coalition involved in the mobilisation of city regional actors in the GMA deliberately seek to adjust the governance of the region along a sustainable trajectory? Regarding the significant watering-down of both ecological and social concerns in the process, one can doubt whether the case presented dealt with "sustainability governance" at all. Yet, the weak sustainability narrative structured has served the purpose of attracting a robust and influential coalition behind the transport infrastructural investments in the city region. The underpinning knowledge bases used to structure this discourse is in line with Brenners (2004) arguments of "Glocalizing Competition State Regimes", as the GMA appears to be mainly concerned with competitiveness strategies. Theories of the "New Economic Geography" (Krugman 1998, 2011) have been used to argue that regions rather than nations carry competitive advantages in global competition and that territorial concentration is regarded as a prerequisite for economic growth in general. Sustainability concerns are coupled with "smart growth" or "the compact city" ideas (Neuman 2005), which it is argued give the attractive urban life and diversity necessary to attract "the creative class" (Florida 2002). An extended regional transport infrastructure which would provide better commuting possibilities to the suburban municipalities and increased tax incomes for the City of Gothenburg through the development of attractive housing projects are the manifest products of this story line.

The "sustainable growth" story line serves thus as a unifying function promoting perceptions of a win-win situation for all involved municipalities, the business sector and even the political that traditionally advocate environmental issues and social justice. From the viewpoint of the latter, the increased possibilities of public transportation, the congestion charges and the enablement of a larger labour market for the dwellers of the city region gives enough political capital to support the policy. Despite the objectives to achieve a fossil-independent economy by 2030, the ecological costs of an enlarged urban landscape, population growth and consumption patterns are not considered as paradoxical strategies. Their faith pinned on the promise of technological modernization and urban densification. In this weak interpretation of sustainability, concerns for social justice are not ignored but rather transformed to visions of *equality in opportunity*, instead of the traditional Social Democratic concern for *equality in outcomes*. The purpose of *social cohesion* formulated as a prime concern is hardly defined as a vision to be realized through distributional justice or the equal distribution of resources or decision-making power, but rather through regional enlargement.

This "trickle down" logic assumes that the providing of better opportunities for business investments and enterprises will lead to increased job opportunities which will enable wealth and a good quality of life for all in the region.

A simplistic interpretation of the motives behind the city regional collaboration in the GMA would suggest a strict economic rationality of competitiveness. But in that case, why bother with the sustainability narrative at all? We argue that the political conditions and the configuration and the party political setting in Sweden necessitates concerns for the environment, in particular climate mitigation, and social equity due to the strength of the red and green coalition of the City Council of Gothenburg. During the first two rounds of consultations, the Social Democrats held the majority in several of the member municipalities which framed the initial purpose of collaboration as mainly concerning social justice. The shift that took place in 2005 towards a pro-growth agenda reflects the political and ideological change in 2006 when the Alliance for Sweden (the Conservative, Liberal, Centrist and Christian Democrat parties) came into national political power, which lasted until the elections in 2014. The Alliance framed "regional development" as exclusively a matter of "regional economic growth". In the framing document ecological restrictions or social issues are not even mentioned (Government Bill 2012/13:1). The Social Democrats, the Leftist Party and the Green Party remained in majority in the City of Gothenburg in the 2006 and 2010 elections, but in most of the other municipalities within GR right wing parties were in the majority during the period of the consultation process.

However, the change of discourse from 2002 and onwards cannot exclusively be explained by the shift of political majorities. The formation towards weak sustainability started before the Social Democratic Party lost most of its political power. Actually, the Social Democratic "mayor" of the City of Gothenburg initiated what was to become the strategy of "Sustainable growth". Behind the shift of discourses there is a formation of a coalition consisting of different actors and interests that goes beyond party politics. The fact that all thirteen municipalities, the GR, BRG, the West Sweden Chamber of Commerce which represents nearly 3000 business enterprises, and several other national and regional organisations support the agenda, is important emphasize. The weak SD narrative seems to be an appropriate discursive instrument in the game of establishing dominance in the political spaces of the city region.

What of the critical coalition?

But the institutionalisation of the weak SD story line did not happen by turning on an auto-pilot switch in the GR. The structuration and domination process was started and pushed through deliberately by actors who were well accustomed to the political landscape of the city region. It is important to note that the weak discourse is not the only discourse present in the political processes of the GMA. In parallel there is also an alternative critical discourse, however not as dominating and institutionalised.

The critical discourse coalition is a fragmented set of contentious, yet pragmatic, activists, scientists, professionals and politicians ideologically rooted in a stronger version of sustainability. This discourse pays attention to the paradoxes inherent in the agenda of economic growth and puts forward the need for more ecological awareness and an agenda for coping with social injustice with the purpose of enabling equality in outcomes, and not only opportunities. Rather than being able to structure a discourse which becomes institutionalized in the GMA, the critical coalition survives by focusing on specific issues, task-forces, research collaborations and other spaces of policy debate which emerge as pockets of resistance to the dominating sustainability coalition.

For instance, several politicians and experts argue that we have to consider consumption and not just production when measuring CO_2 emission. The City of Gothenburg launched a new climate strategy in 2014, which is far more radical than similar strategies in other Swedish cities by taking into account the consumption perspective of carbon emissions in its strategies (Gothenburg 2013). This strategy was developed by politicians and administrators who deliberately involved scientists and research projects through a research centre for sustainable urban development in a joint effort between the universities, public organisations and companies in western Sweden, Mistra Urban Futures. Another example is the establishment of an expert unit within the City of Gothenburg devoted to issues of social sustainability in the spatial planning process called "S2020". Experts within this unit mobilized a network of professionals from other departments and have managed to form a discourse of social equity concerned with health and income disparities and spatial ethnic and socio-economic segregation through seminars, conferences and the innovation and implementation of process-tools. These endeavours have not only raised awareness but also resulted in the widespread of practices like citizen participatory and collaborative planning processes (Tahvilzadeh, forthcoming). The unit has also managed to integrate the increasing

demand for social justice in terms of dwellings for low-income groups into the regeneration processes of the city centre, in where almost only exclusively expensive condominiums have been planned.

The critical coalition is not very comprehensive; it is fragmented and lives under the shadow of the dominating sustainability coalition and its narrative on how economic, ecological and social sustainability can be achieved without conflicts over resources and without impact on consumption and lifestyles. Still, it is remarkable that the critical narrative has not been more influential in GMA, considering that it includes international renowned scientists, experts, individual politicians and established professional planners. While a plausible explanation to this fact cannot be fully covered in this article, a hypothesis can be formulated when regarding *how* the storyline of the sustainability coalition became institutionalized in the GR consultations.

The BRG whose main concern is the entrepreneurial issues of the region took the initiative to establish their perspectives in the regional collaborative policy agenda which, given the political setting at the time, paved the way for a weak sustainability discourse. However, the BRG did not act alone; it has some powerful allies in the business sector of the region and also in the Social Democratic Party which chairs the Board of BRG The need for regional enlargement strategically launched by BRG is an offer that the political leadership in any small suburban municipality cannot resist: It is possible to have it all – growth, environmental safeguarding and social cohesion – by investments in transport infrastructure and increased regional attractiveness.

As a consensual arena for decision making, the GR construction perhaps makes such interventions more possible than the institutional construction of a municipal body. Issues ignited with party political tensions are deliberately excluded or at least avoided in the decision-making bodies of GR as the main purpose for the participants is to participate voluntarily in negotiations to find feasible agreements. The discourses which became structured and institutionalized in the GR arena were processed between party ideological combatants and territorial competitors until the conflictual aspects were ground off. They did not become politicized in the public debate until the introduction of congestions fees was publically announced. The politicization which occurred had few common denominators with the ideologies of the critical coalition; the opponents were hardly concerned over the weak sustainable policy agenda, but were rather pursuing their economic interests. Most important, for the average citizen of the GMA, the GR is an obscure organization, not least as it is not the main focal point of municipal planning or policy debates.

It is also important to emphasize the lack of resources and coordination among the critical coalition, especially between environmental and social justice advocates. The critical discourse coalition has perhaps its main part of proponents in the environmental and human rights oriented civil society associations of the city region who, with the exception of the party organizations, are kept outside the GR process.

Conclusions

Urban and regional sustainability governance in Sweden could play a role in the global front line achievements within CO_2 emission cutbacks and social justice. However, following the same discourse patterns as other political contexts, ideas of competitiveness in a global economy and discourses of smart growth, urban densification and the attraction of the creative classes cast their shadow over environmental and social equity concerns. Summarizing the GR consultation process as a case of city regional collaborative governance for SD, the strategies adopted by the actors involved use the terminology of sustainability in a significantly weak interpretation. The narrative of SD, championed in the policy processes by a strong coalition between the municipalities in the city region, the supra-tiers of government and the business sector organizations, views economic growth through production and consumption and urban densification as the driver of a sustainable city region. The initial ambitions of collaborative initiative were indeed more concerned with social justice than growth, but as the political landscape shifted towards centre-right ideology nationally and in the GMA, the weak narrative become more structuralized and institutionalized. Surprisingly, the collaborative efforts in GR started out in the beginning of the 2000s with a stronger sustainability definition which emphasized the problematic aspects of the regional disparities in wealth and well-being.

As an example of new regionalism in urban governance structures, rather than opening up a moment for a more sustainable and equitable urban future, the GR strategies of "Sustainable Growth" risk to intensify unsustainable economic development, urban development and social inequality. Several major challenges in the city region were not dealt with during one decade of collaborative governance: uneven territorial development in the spatial structures of the city, lack of affordable housing for migrants, youths and low-income households, spatial segregation, income and health inequalities. While the strategy aims for a

fossil independent economy by 2030, investments are decoupled from consumption oriented calculations in the accounts for the regional emissions of CO_2.

Looking ahead, the established discourse coalition reliance on weak sustainability could be challenged by strong narratives from opponents within the public organizations in the GMA. However, any change of discourse must probably intensify and champion the classic conflict between the interest of the business elite and advocates of environment and social justice. Still, it is not only the ideology of neoliberalism that "holds sway" in these policy agendas, but also actors with far more power resources than the critical discourse coalition can mobilize.

The ideology of ecological modernisation and strategies adopted in Sweden, in which economic growth is framed as the crucial driver of social welfare and environmental values, are increasingly contested. National environmental objectives are not fulfilled and economic recession, unemployment and spatial segregation and concentration of poverty in the urban peripheries are increasing (Lidskog and Elander 2012). Riots and social disturbances plagued several stigmatized and marginalized neighbourhoods of the capital Stockholm and other cities in 2013, and served as a fierce wake-up call regarding the increasing spatial inequalities and social polarization taking place in cities (Schierup, Ålund and Kings 2014). Perhaps much of the future hopes of urban governance for SD could be put on the strength and strategies of the critical coalitions present in the institutional fields of operation. However, that would require more coordinated and institutionalized actors who propose stronger interpretations of SD coupled with operational measures that can achieve the cut-back of greenhouse gases and the equal distribution of resources and equality in living conditions all over the city region.

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