Towards Sustainable Urban Development in Expansive Urban Regions

Conditions and Challenges for Municipal Spatial Planning Practice

JOHAN HÖGSTRÖM

Academic Dissertation which, with due permission of the KTH Royal Institute of Technology, is submitted for public defence for the Degree of Licentiate of Engineering on Tuesday the 19th December 2017, at 10:15 a.m. in D3, Lindstedtsvägen 5, Stockholm.
Abstract

From the local to the global level, there is a growing insight that human actions are having a profound and wide-reaching impact on natural and social systems. As a consequence, there is a need for sustainable development and planners are now challenged to integrate social, ecological and economic aspects in utilized planning process that span from the regional to the local. Thus, to put sustainability into practice requires a multi-level approach that takes into consideration the actions and the development in different countries, societies, cities and communities. In other words, sustainability is dependent on the performance and outcomes of multi-level systems of governance (including planning systems) across different contexts. Based on two case studies in the expansive Stockholm region, this thesis aims to explore the conditions for spatial planning to support a shift towards sustainable urban development. More specifically, it aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the conditions for spatial planning practice to promote sustainability in a context of rapid urban expansion and to analyze the management and utilization of available statutory planning instruments as a means to foster an effective interplay in planning practice. The results show that a shift towards sustainable urban development requires that planning practices are allowed to engage in learning processes with the aim to emancipate an effective interplay throughout systems of governance. In particular, it is important that planning processes are able to (i) integrate knowledge from ‘strategic’ levels with local project-specific conditions that are revealed throughout the detailed development planning process and (ii) make use of this synthesized body of knowledge to inform decision-making. The interplay in planning practice is an important mechanism to link ‘direction’ and ‘action’ in planning practice.

Key Words
Sustainable development; Sustainability; Cross-level; Interplay