

# REGION 2050 AS A TRANSITION INITIATIVE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES TO TRIGGER CHANGES

## Summary of the research project

This study analysed Region 2050 as a transition initiative aimed at strengthening capabilities regarding futures studies-based methods within regional authorities in Sweden to advance their strategic planning practices.

The study was conducted by researchers from UrbanT/KTH, Sweden, and Leuphana University, Germany, during November 2017–April 2018 and included 8 semi-structured interviews, observations during two events within Region 2050 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop and Årskonferensen 2018), and analysis of Region 2050 project documentation<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1).

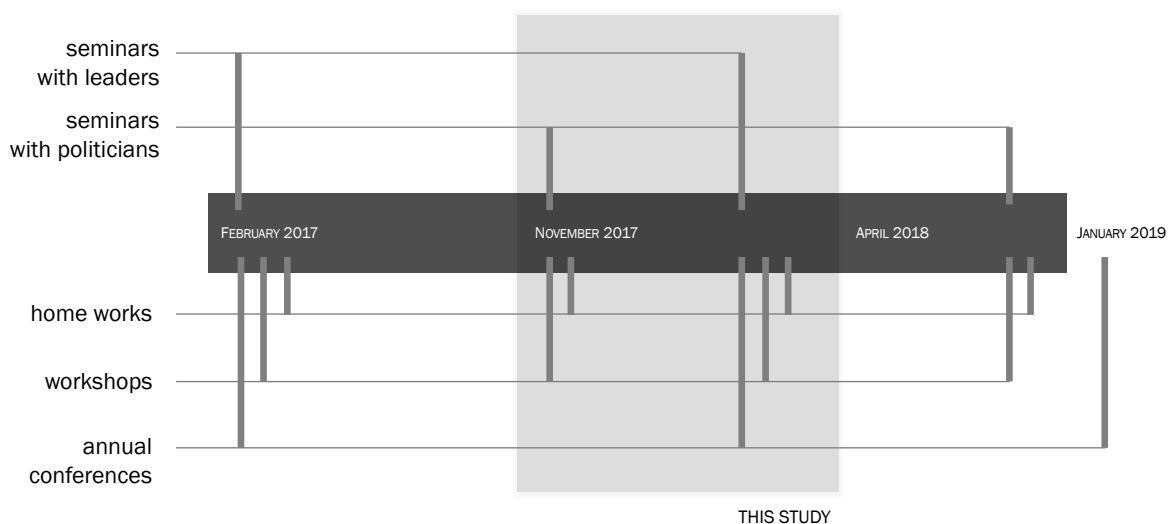


Figure 1. The timeframe of this study within Region 2050.

## Region 2050 as a transition initiative

Region 2050 was analysed as a *multi-organisation transition initiative*, where different organisations (regional authorities) were involved through one or several individual representatives. Thus, Region 2050 could experience challenges typical for transition initiatives intended to trigger organisational changes through individuals. These challenges can be related to competences and skills of individuals (e.g. participants of events), characteristics of the involved organisations, characteristics of the transition

<sup>1</sup> For qualitative data analysis transcriptions of the interviews and observation protocols were coded using specialised software MAXQDA.

initiative itself, and higher-level external factors such as national and international policies, culture and societal values.

To be efficient, transition initiatives need to account for barriers related to *institutional logics*<sup>1</sup> and related *organizational structures*. As a transition initiative aimed at advancing the strategic planning practice in the regions, Region 2050 needs to go beyond capacity building concerning new methods and also bring together and empower practitioners so that they are able to implement the new strategic planning practice in their respective working environments. In this study, we focus on challenges related to mismatches of institutional logics associated with different planning practices and suggest several directions towards overcoming related barriers.

Within Region 2050, we have identified two different institutional logics – one common for the involved organisations (regional authorities), and another one represented within transition initiative Region 2050 (Figure 2). We named them *Operational logic* and *Strategic logic* correspondingly and characterised them in terms of typical *time span for planning*, *art of planning*, *management*, and *organisational structure*.

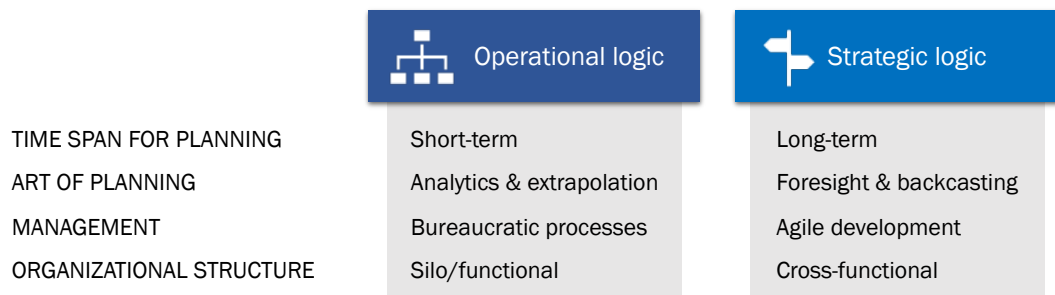


Figure 2. Institutional logics identified within Region 2050.

Connecting different logics is crucial for enabling changes desirable within a transition initiative (in this case, regarding the practice of strategic planning). On the individual level, individuals able to connect logics are called *boundary spanners*. This study identifies characteristics of boundary spanners through a *boundary spanner profile* developed based on the interviews (Figure 3). On the organisational level, *institutional plurality* – opportunities for alternative logics to exist within an organisation – is another factor identified as helpful for a new practice to emerge in an organisation. In this study we found institutional plurality to be an opportunity but also a challenge for triggering changes in the practice of strategic planning.

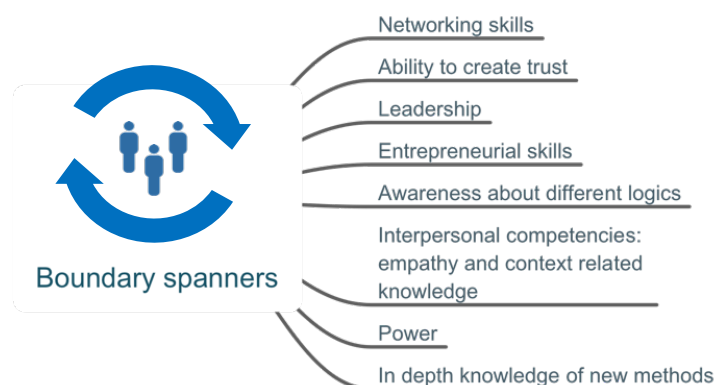


Figure 3. Boundary spanner profile.

<sup>1</sup> Institutional logics can be defined as socially constructed, historical patterns of practices, beliefs, values, and rules that guide actors' thinking and actions

## What has been achieved so far?

The findings of this study show that Region 2050 has been a rather successful project and already led to a number of changes in the regions regarding the incorporation of novel ideas and methods for strategic planning. The first step towards this new planning practice that the participants mentioned was an inspiration for [changing their mindsets](#) towards new logic of planning and awareness on the related challenges (e.g. difficulty to talk about the long-term future). The involved participants have [learnt new methods](#), and not only regarding [strategic planning](#) but, for example, how to arrange a big inspirational event in own region. At the time of this study, in spring 2018, some of the [participants started trying out the new methods](#) at home organisations. An approach of starting with “small things” like practicing new methods with colleagues from the same departments identified as one of the commonly used.

## What has made Region 2050 a successful transition initiative?

Reglab and its members have been rather successful in acting as boundary spanners, connecting new for the majority of the participants *Strategic logic* of strategic planning and dominant among the regions *Operational logic*. This is only possible because of the high [trust](#) that regions have in Reglab, as the following quote illustrates:

*“Reglab has been a very important platform, actor for learning and for exchanging experiences and learning from each other.”*

It has been proven very successful to have an [“insider”](#) able to connect futures studies methods to the context of the regions and to find suitable ways of introducing and explaining new methods, as well as identifying how they can be useful in work of regional authorities. However, [further adaptation](#) of the suggested methods and tools will be needed. Due to the diversity among regional contexts in Sweden, there is no single proper way of adapting and incorporating them in a daily practice.

Another important factor are existing and emerging [collaborations](#) among the regional authorities – they found very useful sharing experience regarding first attempts of incorporating new planning methods in own environments. Further support of this emerging [“community of practice”](#) could be beneficial for the successful incorporation of this new methods.

## What could be upcoming challenges?

The study has also revealed a number of challenges that can become more visible and urgent in the final year of the project. This, first of all, is connected to a need in incorporation and use of new methods for strategic planning in the regions. In addition to already provided support – highly appreciated materials on the website, coaching sessions, possibility to ask questions during and after the workshops – even **more support** will be needed. The interviewees suggested the potential usefulness of coaching sessions in everyday work, further learning and deepening knowledge on new methods, familiarisation with underlying theories behind these methods and others.

*“Organisational learning needs to be consistent within and throughout the different levels (individual, group, and organisational), otherwise misunderstandings and even conflicts could arise; this is known as alignment.”*

Rodrigo Lozano  
associate professor, Gävle  
Högskola

In organisations, incorporation of a new logic can be guided, for example, by the strategies of decoupling, compromising and logics combination. In this regard, the institutional plurality among the regions can evoke **different types of answers**. While such situation creates opportunities for new logic to be incorporated in the regions through various creative solutions, it also implies a challenge for Region 2050 and Reglab as a facilitator of change – it is really demanding to help in developing a tailored approach for each particular case within time and resource limitations of the transition initiative.

*“Communication, learning and change management: that is very close. It is interconnected (...)”*

One of the interviewees

Link of *Strategic logic* to such organisational characteristics as an agile development of a strategy and cross-functional structure shade light on a character of **organisational changes needed**. While **bottom-up activities** initiated by the participants of Region 2050 are more probable, their combination with relevant **top-down management approaches** can be of help.

Overall, incorporation of a new logic of strategic planning along with related organisational changes usually is a long process. Thus, it is expected that logic incorporation will **go beyond** the time frame of **Region 2050** project and will need additional support before fully accomplished.

# TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AGENDA

Based on the conducted study, we have identified several themes that have potential to bring valuable findings for the [research community](#) and important insights for [practice](#).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Identification of strategies that could help in addressing challenges related to institutional logic mismatches by

- in depth analysis of the regional authorities as organisations
- linking micro level of individual participants and changes on organisational and system levels
- identification of the relevant competences and skills of boundary spanners/change agents

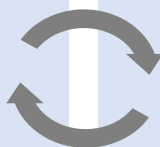
Devising design approaches for transition initiative in the context of regional planning addressing diversities in institutional logics

## SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

Mapping of the approaches used by the regions to implement new methods and connect institutional logics

Identification of skills and capacities that need to be targeted by future projects aimed at advancing strategic planning practice

Development of various aspects of design (selection of participants, timing, follow-ups) and practical activities to be incorporated in transition initiatives in the context of regional planning



## Involved researchers

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