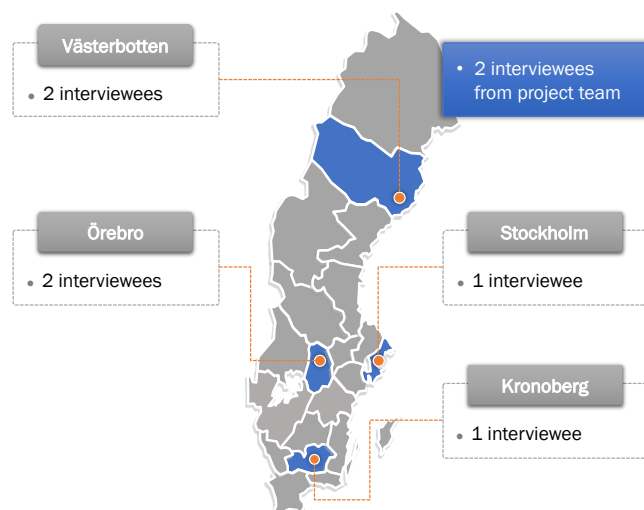


REGION 2050 AS A TRANSITION INITIATIVE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES TO TRIGGER CHANGES

Summary of the research project

This study analysed Region 2050 as a transition initiative aimed at strengthening capabilities regarding future 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 2nd workshop and Årskonferensen 2018), and analysis of Region 2050 project documentation¹.



Region 2050 as a transition initiative

Region 2050 is a *multi-organisation transition initiative*, where different organisations (in this case regional authorities) are involved through one or several individual representatives. Thus, Region 2050 can experience challenges typical for the 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 and of the transition initiative itself,

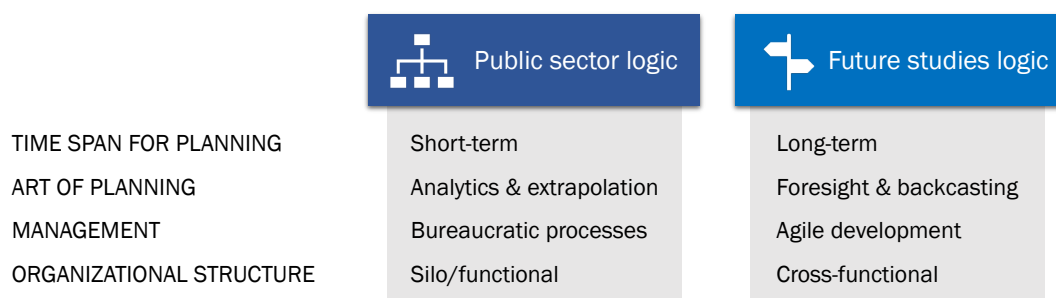
¹ For qualitative data analysis transcriptions of the interviews and observation protocols were coded using specialised software MAXQDA.

and even the higher level external factors such as national and international policies, culture and societal values.

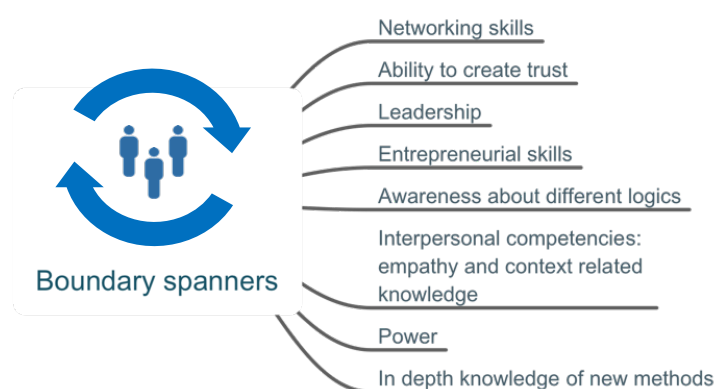
Being a transition initiative aimed at capacity-building in new type of strategic regional planning, Region 2050 needs to go beyond capacity building concerning new methods and also bring together and empower practitioners so that they are able to implement the new strategic planning practice. These processes in turn need to take account of institutional logics and related organizational structure and barriers for organizational change.

In this study we have focused on a challenge related to mismatches of *institutional logics* associated with different planning practices and suggest several directions towards overcoming related barriers.

As a result, we have identified two different logics within Region 2050 - one common for the involved organisations (regional authorities), and another represented within transition initiative Region 2050. We named them *Public sector logic* and *Future studies logic* correspondingly and characterised them in terms of typical time span for planning, art of planning, management and organisational structure.



Connecting different logics is crucial for enabling changes desirable within a transition initiative (the practice of strategic planning in this case). 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*. On the organisational level, *institutional plurality* - opportunities for alternative logics to exist within an organisation - is another factor that can be helpful for new practice to emerge. In this study we found institutional plurality to be an opportunity but also a challenge for triggering changes in the practice of strategic planning.



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 incorporation of novel ideas

and methods for strategic planning. A first step towards this new planning techniques that the participants mentioned was an inspiration for [changing their mindsets](#) towards new forms of planning and awareness on the related challenges:

"The biggest learning, I think it's on different levels but this difficulty to talk about the future I haven't met in previous organisations where I've been doing this kind of work."

They have [learnt new methods](#):

"I think I've learned quite a lot but also we have talked in there with the other colleagues who are attending these workshops that it's also, it is quite hard so it's a lot of information, a lot of technique, methods crammed into, it is usually three days but very intense."

And not only regarding [strategic planning](#) but, for example, how to arrange a big inspirational event:

"There are the learning sessions, there are spaces between the snack bar and it's everything like the pictures all around. I get a lot of inspiration from that because we arrange big conferences in our region with about 150 to 200 people."

They start to try out these [new methods](#) at home, some small and some big steps:

"We have a smaller group of about ten or fifteen people who we do 'home' lessons together with. Then we say there have been other people contacting us from other organisations saying, "We want to be part of this. We want to hear more and we want to practice as well" so we have started to think how we can expand this but we haven't done it yet."

And this helps, as one of the organisers stressed:

"Some of these things are really big regional seminars with politicians but most of them are small things which is in my theory or ideology that's how change happens. It starts with small things."

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 *Future studies logic* of strategic planning and dominant among the regions *Public sector logic*. This is only possible because of the high [trust](#) that regions have in Reglab, as the following quotes 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 future 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 a single proper way of adapting and incorporating them in a daily practice.

Another important factor was existing and emerging **collaborations** among regions – 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 incorporation of new approaches.

What are upcoming challenges?

The study has also revealed a number of challenges that can become more visible and urgent in the upcoming year of the project. This first of all is connected to the 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 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, 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

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

One of the interviewees

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.

“...it’s still always tricky to translate theory into practical exercises, that’s always a difficult task to do... I want you to become a good chef that boils something here, and that tastes good, and it’s not about following the recipe, but there are certain things that we need to have there.”

Link of Future studies logic to such organisational characteristics as 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.

“...the project gives a lot back to that person but it’s also a huge task for an individual to bring all that back to the whole organization that’s not easy to do so. So we said we

need to have not only one person participating in there from two sources and also try to spread from different areas in our organization."

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.

CHANCES FOR FURTHER COLLABORATION

With better understanding of the context of Region 2050/Reglab activities as well as of the Swedish regions, we see two promising directions for future cooperation, both with a potential to bring valuable findings for research community and important insights for practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the strategies to address challenges related to institutional logic mismatches?

- In depth analysis of the regional authorities as organisations
- Linking micro level of individual participants and changes on organisational and system-level
- Identification of the relevant competences and skills of boundary spanners/change agents

How a transition initiative can be designed to

- account for diversities in institutional logics?
- be relevant for the context of regional planning?

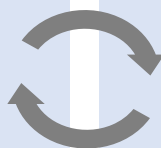
SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

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

Identification of skills and capacities that should be targeted by future projects of RegLab (in combination with knowledge sharing activities)

Suggestions for alignment of capacity building projects for regional authorities with their institutional logics

Suggestions for various aspects of design (selection of participants, timing, follow-ups) and practical activities to be incorporated in transition initiatives in regional planning context (including RegLab's projects)



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