Soft space regional planning as an approach for integrated transport and land use planning in Sweden – challenges and ways forward

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the emphasis on strategic planning to meet complex, multiple and inter-twined challenges has increased (Albrechts, 2004). One example of this is transport sector climate emissions, which have highlighted the need to integrate land-use and transport planning at regional or sub-regional functional scales (e.g. Naess, Hansson, Richardsson, & Tennöy, 2013). A key reason for the need for a regional perspective in planning is the steady development towards longer journeys and the dominant position of the car as a means of transport. According to Holmberg (2011), 75% of passenger kilometres travelled in Sweden...
can be classified as regional, i.e. the journey originates in one municipality, ends in another and thus, crosses one or several municipal borders.

Formally, the Swedish administrative system consists of three levels: the national level (the state), the regional level (18 counties and 3 regions) and the local level (290 municipalities). When it comes to land-use planning, however, the Swedish planning system is characterised by a ‘municipal planning monopoly’, where the municipal governments control the formal planning instruments such as comprehensive plans (mandatory but not legally binding) and detailed plans (legally binding). While it is possible for regional planning bodies to draw up regional or sub-regional plans, these are not legally binding documents and cannot force the municipalities to comply (Larsson, 2006).

Recent decades have seen numerous examples of reforms aimed at increasing regional influence in planning. One example is Region of Skåne, a political/administrative body established in 1999, today formally responsible for several policy areas such as health care, public transport, regional economic and cultural development and environmental issues. The regional mandate also includes establishing Regional Development Programmes, which are meant to function as non-spatial plans for economic development. Additionally, Region of Skåne plays an important role in transport infrastructure planning (although not necessarily in terms of money and power); see Pettersson (2013).

The tendency towards more emphasis on the region as a functional scale in planning, and the limited possibilities for land-use planning at the regional level have sparked a growing number of initiatives that can be characterised as informal planning arenas, or what Allmendinger and Haughton (2010) call soft spaces in planning. An example from Sweden specifically related to the integration of land-use and transport planning is initiatives called ‘structural images’, typically referring to initiatives to connect the Regional Development Programmes with the comprehensive municipal plans. This has become commonplace in several parts of the country in recent years, including, for example, ‘Structural image for Skåne‘, which is in focus in this paper.

1.1. Soft space planning

While the specific initiatives described above concern Swedish examples, the tendency towards new, often informal, planning arenas is more extensively researched in other contexts. While concepts such as ‘soft space’ and ‘fuzzy boundaries’ were initially developed as analytical concepts to explain the development after devolution and planning reforms in the UK (e.g. Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010; Heley, 2013), Olesen (2012) and Galland (2012) also make use of similar concepts in different contexts. Galland (2012) introduces the concept of soft spaces of governance to illustrate the emergence of overlapping jurisdictions and new means of influencing development in Denmark after the 2007 planning system reform. Galland (2012) argues that the Danish example is illustrative of a broad, ongoing transition where traditional welfarist, socio-spatial approaches to planning, focusing on territorial management and land-use control, have given way to growth-oriented strategies. The role of planning has transformed from a growth management device into a growth facilitation device (Galland, 2012).

Attention has also been paid to the fact that soft space planning approaches are typically closely tied to neoliberal political agendas and are used as instruments by certain actors or groups of actors to influence the formal planning arenas (e.g. Galland, 2012; Heley, 2013;
Olesen, 2012). Allmendinger and Haughton (2010) highlight this as a problem concerning democratic legitimacy and transparency of planning practices.

Olesen (2012, p. 911) argues that the concept of soft space planning should be understood as referring to ‘… particular episodes of spatial strategy making aiming at destabilising existing governance practices and planning cultures, or at least supplementing and complementing these practices and cultures in significant ways.’ According to Allmendinger and Haughton (2010), soft space forms of planning operate across a wide range of current spatial and administrative boundaries are typically sanctioned by government, and are often used as a substitute for local government reform. Soft space planning is typically conducted through new networked forms of governance that work outside the rigidity of statutory planning processes (Olesen, 2012). Soft space forms of planning should not however be viewed as antithetical to hard, or statutory, spaces of planning; they are instead ‘… intended to work alongside, augment and – where more expeditious – challenge existing institutional frameworks.’ (Heley, 2013, p. 1329). In the episodes of spatial strategy-making, new spatial imaginations are introduced through new informal planning spaces located outside the formal planning system and the formal scales of planning (Olesen, 2012).

It can be argued that due to mismatches between institutional mandates and boundaries and important contemporary policy issues (including e.g. transport and land-use integration) the concept of soft spaces in planning is set to stay (Heley, 2013). Soft spaces have emerged as complementary planning arenas based on the rationale of ‘getting things done’ (Galland, 2012, p. 540) in ‘… the “real” geographies of problems and opportunities…’ (Haughton, Allmendinger, Counsell, & Vigar, 2010, p. 242). But in terms of practical impacts, previous research indicates a discrepancy between ambitions and delivery of soft space planning processes.

While soft space approaches have been successful as deliberate attempts to influence the content of strategy documents by generating new thinking and including new actors (Haughton & Allmendinger, 2008), the implementation of new strategies have been much less successful (Haughton et al., 2010). Heley (2013) found that soft space planning resulted in improved communications between actors across sector boundaries, but in terms of practical outcomes, delivery was weak. Olesen (2012, p. 919) who argue that soft spaces can be understood as new scales in planning intended to fill in gaps, and to act as ‘the glue’ between formal scales of planning, found that concerning outcomes the process was ‘… rather disappointing in terms of developing an integrated approach to urban development and transport planning.’ Galland (2012) concludes that the ‘softening’ of the Danish planning system resulted in implementation problems and a lack of coordination of sectoral objectives.

As such there is considerable evidence that while soft spaces in planning is a fact to relate to in many different contexts, the imprint beyond including new perspectives and establishing new strategies is questionable or non-existent. A key reason for the lack of influence on practical planning decisions pointed out by several authors (e.g. Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009; Heley, 2013; Olesen, 2012) is the nexus between the formal scales, legislation and resources which mean that prevailing planning practices are proving resilient to attempts at destabilisation or change.
1.2. Aim, research questions and outline of the paper

Given the evidence of limited influence of soft space planning on practical planning decisions, the aim of this paper is to contribute to understanding difficulties and suggest improvements to improve the possibility of soft space regional planning to promote sustainable development. This is done by analysing soft space regional planning as an approach for integrated transport and land-use planning in a context of strong local governments (theoretically possessing a ‘planning monopoly’), in a region where conditions vary considerably across different municipalities.

More specifically, the purpose of the paper is to analyse how soft space planning as spatial strategy making at regional level influences municipal-level planning. In Section 2, the process of developing a new spatial imagination for Region of Skåne is presented. The key strategies of the spatial imagination are presented and a number of assessment criteria used to analyse the influence of the strategies on municipal planning are introduced in Section 3. In Section 4, the rationale for choice of municipalities to study is explained and the characteristics of the 10 chosen municipalities are briefly described. The research questions are addressed in Section 5 drawing on data from an analysis of comprehensive planning documents in 10 municipalities and six semi-structured interviews with planners. In Section 6, the results of the study are discussed focusing on the challenges of the current soft space planning approach and possible ways to coordinating land-use and transport planning. Conclusions are drawn in Section 7.

### 2. Structural image for Skåne

In 2005, Region of Skåne initiated a project called *Structural image for Skåne* as an initiative for spatial land-use planning focusing on the regional scale. The initiative, highly influenced by the European Spatial Development Perspective, was originally partly funded as an Interreg project. The ambition of the project was to create a consensus between regional development, spatial planning and municipal comprehensive planning and to develop an arena for dialogue where the region’s actors meet and agree on a common holistic view of how the region should develop (Region of Skåne, 2010).

The project was conducted in two phases, or what Olesen (2012) refers to as episodes of spatial strategy making. The first episode focused on establishing trust and legitimacy for the project in the municipalities and on building knowledge. This included a substantial

### Table 1. Strategy areas and instruments for achieving ‘the polycentric metropolis’.

| Strategy area | Strategy instrument |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 1. Develop Skåne’s growth engines and regional cores, and develop the polycentric regional structure | Concentrate development to seven prioritised urban areas |
| 2. Strengthen accessibility and connect Skåne internally | Develop regional public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure |
| 3. Grow efficiently with balanced and sustainable land use | Promote ‘efficient land use’ through an integrated view on transport and land use |
| 4. Create attractive environments offering high level of quality of life | Create conditions for sustainability by creating attractive environments |
| 5. Strengthen Skåne’s connection to the Öresund region, the southern Baltic region and the south of Sweden | Capitalise on the geographical context of the region and the critical mass of the hinterland |

Source: Region of Skåne (2013).
dialogue process with politicians and civil servants at municipal level to discuss and inform about the work process. Additionally, a knowledge bank on spatial dimensions of Skåne was created, the purpose of which is to function as a basis for municipal planning and thus generate increasing cooperation between municipalities, government agencies, public transport agencies and trade and industry. The first report was published in 2006, and to date, more than 20 reports have been produced that focus on a variety of thematic issues such as green structure, population and demographics, trade and industry, land use and growth (Region of Skåne, 2013). In 2010, the second episode was initiated when the project became a permanent part of Region of Skåne’s planning department.

The focus in Structural image for Skåne is on developing a shared strategy with common priorities regarding the development of Skåne related to land-use planning. The ambition is that Region of Skåne in concert with the municipalities will create a long-term sustainable and energy-efficient regional land-use structure (Region of Skåne, 2013). In the second planning episode, four different development scenarios for 2030 have been developed. The scenarios labelled Sprawl, Polycentric, Monocentric and Few-centric visualise four ‘more or less realistic’ spatial imaginations of the future regional structure that have functioned as a point of departure in a dialogue with all the municipal boards regarding common issues, objectives and strategies (Region of Skåne, 2011).

In 2012, a proposal called structural image for Skåne 2030 – proposal for common strategies for the polycentric metropolis Skåne was presented. The proposal included five strategy areas to realise the vision, presented together with the key instruments for achieving the strategies in Table 1. The strategy areas contain a number of principles expected to function as points of departure in municipal planning processes and thereby lead to a development where both regional and municipal values are strengthened (Region of Skåne, 2013). The strategies were approved by the political steering group of structural image during the autumn of 2013. However, while the political adoption of the strategies is a symbolic starting point, the process of developing and anchoring the strategies with the municipalities had been gradually developing since 2005.

While vague, all five strategy areas and their associated instruments are linked to transport and land-use issues. An intertwined development of the public transport system and a supportive land-use planning are viewed as key to achieving several of the strategies (Region of Skåne, 2013). This is most explicitly expressed for strategy areas 2 and 3, which will be the main focus of the paper, and also for strategy area 1, which will also be included. Strategy areas 4 and 5 are not covered in this paper.

3. Assessment criteria for analysing the influence of the regional strategy areas on municipal planning

The influence of strategy areas 1–3 on municipal planning is analysed through a number of assessment criteria regarding the municipalities’ approaches to land-use and transport planning. The assessment criteria are structured in two broad but overlapping categories – the first set focuses on land-use issues and the second on transport issues. Since these issues are highly intertwined in practice, the division should be viewed as an analytical construction used for structuring the analysis. The assessment criteria, the theoretical rationale underpinning them, and the analytical approach in the paper are briefly explained below and further developed in the analysis.
The assessment criteria draw on Naess et al. (2013), who argue that based on previous research within the specific Nordic context

… planners aiming to reduce car dependency … should seek to avoid urban sprawl, increase the proportion of the population living and working in the inner and central areas of the city, and ensure a sufficiently high density in new development areas to facilitate a provision of local service and a good public transport provision. (Naess et al., 2013, p. 475)

The assessment criteria are thus theoretically underpinned by the assumption that achieving the spatial imagination of ‘the polycentric metropolis’ requires a development where sprawl is avoided and population densities increase. In turn, this requires development to be concentrated to the municipal urban cores and public transport to be a natural modal choice for regional travel, while walking and cycling are the natural modal choices for local travel.

The following assessment criteria are used to analyse whether municipal land-use planning contributes to, or counteracts, the spatial imagination of ‘the polycentric metropolis’:

- Concentration of planned development to existing urban centres
- Definitions of densification
- Incremental expansions of urban fringes
- Sprawl in rural areas

The following assessment criteria focusing on transport are used to analyse whether the municipal planning approaches are supportive of the spatial imagination of ‘the polycentric metropolis’:

- Definitions of public transport accessibility/proximity
- Location of planned development in relation to public transport

Since previous research has shown systematic problems for soft space planning strategies to deliver impact on actual planning decisions, the analytical approach in the paper is open minded. Given the vague nature of the strategy areas and the strategy instruments in focus of the research, the criteria are used to analyse and discuss the process of implementing the regional strategies. The criteria are used as a way to discuss the problems of implementing soft planning strategies, both in terms of analysing similarities and differences between the regional strategies and municipal-level planning, and in terms of discussing the implications of the vagueness of the strategy areas and strategy instruments.

4. Geographical and administrative context of the case study

The Region of Skåne covers 10,939 km² and has a total of 1.2 million inhabitants. The region consists of 33 municipalities who are all required to establish comprehensive plans. The comparative case study approach in this paper includes a selection of 10 comprehensive plans (see Table 2) and interviews with planners from six municipalities (Helsingborg, Lomma, Svedala, Åstorp, Lund and Östra Göinge). Key selection criteria for comprehensive plans were adoption date after the 1st of January 2010 and that the municipality was not conducting a revision of the plan at the time of the study. The plans included in the study were adopted between January 2010 and January 2013. Further criteria were to strive for a differentiated mix of municipalities regarding geographical size and location, population size, population density, population growth and characteristics regarding commuting. Table 2 summarises the general characteristics of the sampled municipalities and Table 3
summarises some characteristics regarding commuting patterns, train station access and whether or not the municipal is designated a regional core or ‘growth engine’ in the regional strategy.

There is only one municipality with more than 200,000 inhabitants in the region (Malmö, which is not included in this study). Of the municipalities included in the sample, the designated ‘growth engines’ of Helsingborg and Lund stand out since they have a population exceeding 100,000, a population increase in excess of 5000 for the period 2008–2012, and net in-commuting. The urban cores of Helsingborg and Lund contain a significant concentration of workplaces whereby these urban areas supply a wide hinterland with jobs.

The study also covers two distinctly rural municipalities, Osby and Östra Göinge. These are characterised by a low and decreasing population and a population density 10 times or more smaller than the most densely populated areas.

The municipalities of Kävlinge, Lomma, Svedala, Trelleborg, Vellinge and Åstorp are all characterised by being located close to the regional cores and display moderate population increases between 2008 and 2012. Kävlinge, Lomma and Vellinge are most clearly characterised by out-commuting; the number of people commuting to another municipality is more than twice as high as the number of people commuting to the municipality. There is also a relatively low share of people (less than 15%) both living and working in these municipalities.

Trelleborg and Åstorp are also characterised by out-commuting, but have a higher share (more than 15%) of people both working and living in the municipality.

| Table 2. Geography and population of case study municipalities. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Municipal- | Area (km²) | Population (2012) | Population density (pop/km²) | Population change 2008–2012 |
| ity | | | | |
| Helsingborg | 344 | 132,011 | 384 | 5257 |
| Kävlinge | 153 | 29,427 | 193 | 1006 |
| Lomma | 56 | 22,298 | 402 | 1849 |
| Lund | 427 | 112,950 | 264 | 5599 |
| Osby | 576 | 12,637 | 22 | —11 |
| Svedala | 218 | 19,971 | 92 | 581 |
| Trelleborg | 125 | 42,542 | 340 | 1047 |
| Vellinge | 236 | 33,615 | 143 | 667 |
| Åstorp | 92 | 14,806 | 160 | 273 |
| Östra Göinge | 431 | 13,620 | 32 | —42 |

| Table 3. Commuting characteristics of case study municipalities. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Municipality | In-commuting (2011) | Out-commuting (2011) | Living and working in the municipality (2011) | Train station access (2012) | Regional core, or ‘growth engine’ status (2011) |
|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Helsingborg     | 21,810               | 15,297               | 43,099                          | Yes                    | Yes                             |
| Kävlinge        | 3167                 | 10,054               | 4394                           | Yes                    | No                              |
| Lomma           | 2973                 | 7902                 | 2431                           | No                     | No                              |
| Lund            | 34,943               | 18,956               | 31,810                          | Yes                    | Yes                             |
| Osby            | 1376                 | 2451                 | 3410                           | Yes                    | No                              |
| Svedala         | 3904                 | 6966                 | 2961                           | Yes                    | No                              |
| Trelleborg      | 3796                 | 8875                 | 10,362                         | No                     | No                              |
| Vellinge        | 3245                 | 10,533               | 4935                           | No                     | No                              |
| Åstorp          | 3155                 | 3783                 | 2681                           | Yes                    | No                              |
| Östra Göinge    | 1414                 | 2781                 | 3317                           | No                     | No                              |
5. **Results**

Since all the plans included in the study were adopted before the adoption of the ‘polycentric metropolis’ as the official spatial imagination in 2013, the regional strategy areas were not expected to be explicitly mentioned in the comprehensive plans. However, since the process of developing the strategies had been going on since the inception of *Structural image* in 2005, it was still relevant to analyse the influence of the regional strategy areas on the comprehensive plans.

The interviews with the planners revealed that the spatial imagination of the ‘polycentric metropolis Skåne’ was well known at the municipal level and that the interviewees were familiar with the key strategies and the related strategy instruments for achieving it. All the interviewees stated that the municipality agrees with the spatial imagination of the ‘polycentric metropolis’.

Regarding the three strategic areas, all the interviewees argued that the municipalities consider that they are included in their planning. They are not, however, actively applied in the planning process. Instead, the interviewees argued that the strategic areas are so general that it is difficult to work against them. The strategic areas instead largely reflect how the municipalities are already conducting planning, and therefore, it is easy to refer to the strategies and argue that the current planning contributes to achieving the strategies.

### 5.1. **Density and land use**

Four assessment criteria concerning density and land use were used to analyse whether land use planning in the 10 selected municipalities contributes to or counteracts the achievement of the ‘polycentric metropolis’.

#### 5.1.1. **Concentration of planned development to existing urban areas**

As shown in Table 4, there is a clear tendency towards concentrating planned development to the major population centres in the municipalities. Nine of the ten municipalities have a dominating urban area containing the largest concentration of population, the majority of the workplaces, and public and commercial services. The exception is Östra Göinge, a rural municipality lacking a dominating urban area; here, workplaces and services are dispersed across several minor towns or villages. According to the interviewee from Östra Göinge, it is politically infeasible to suggest that only a few villages should be prioritised in the comprehensive plan. According to the comprehensive plan ‘… the polycentric local structure with housing dispersed between villages of different size is an asset … the orientation of the comprehensive plan is to create conditions for all the villages to grow …’ (Östra Göinge municipality, 2012).

In the other nine municipalities, it can be concluded that if the development plans are realised, density at urban level will increase. It is not evident, however, that this will support the realisation of the spatial imagination of ‘the polycentric metropolis’.

The reason for this is that the municipalities are also working with concepts of polycentricity at the municipal level. Although the main strategy is typically to concentrate development to a few urban areas, all the municipalities allow for new development in smaller towns and villages. A zoom out from the local level to the regional level thus means that the development could contribute to a sprawling regional structure. This indicates that although
there is an awareness of the regional spatial imagination, it is interpreted differently at the local level, and the municipalities formulate their own vision of polycentricity.

### 5.1.2. Definitions of densification

All of the studied municipalities are planning infill development within the existing urban structure but how the municipalities define the term *densification* varies. As shown in Table 4, only three of the municipalities (Helsingborg, Lund and Trelleborg) provide an explicit definition of the concept of densification in their comprehensive plan. The other municipalities use the concept without giving it a precise definition. A comparison of how the concept is used reveals that it refers to any type of development planned in already zoned land. Densification may, for instance, refer to complementing existing development, building more on inefficiently used land, building in green spaces or converting old industrial sites.

Although the reviewed plans often lack an accepted and documented definition of densification, the interviews showed that the concept is frequently applied in different phases of the planning process. One interviewee (from the municipality of Åstorp) explained that:

> Densification doesn't necessarily mean a higher site ratio [of the added development] compared to the existing surroundings, which may often be the case in larger cities. For the municipality of Åstorp, densification may mean building more detached houses in an area with detached houses. It doesn't have to mean building multi-family dwellings.

| Assessment criteria/municipality (dwellings planned) | Concentration of planned development to existing urban areas | Definitions of densification | Incremental expansion of urban fringes | Stance on sprawl in rural areas |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Osby (1000)                                        | Primarily, approximately 50% concentrated to the main town | Not defined                 | No                                    | Positive                      |
| Åstorp (550)                                       | Yes, divided between four municipal cores                   | Not defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Svedala (2600)                                     | Primarily, majority planned in three municipal cores       | Not defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Helsingborg (N/A)                                  | Yes                                                         | Densification explicitly mentioned and defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Kävlinge (3400)                                    | Primarily, more than 70% planned in the main municipal core | Not defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Lomma (2000)                                       | Yes, 95% concentrated to two municipal cores                | Not defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Lund (31,500)                                      | Yes, 50% concentrated to the main municipal core, 30% planned in three other cores | Densification explicitly mentioned and defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Östra Göinge (N/A)                                 | No, development dispersed                                  | Densification explicitly mentioned and defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Trelleborg (4000)                                  | Primarily, 80% planned in main municipal core, the rest in three other cores | Not defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
| Vellinge (N/A)                                     | Primarily                                                 | Not defined                 | No                                    | Restrictive                   |
In Helsingborg and Lund, the two municipalities with regional urban cores, the pervasive trend is that densification is planned for in the urban central areas, where the majority of densification projects include townhouses and apartment buildings. This will increase the site ratio in the urban centres. In eight of the municipalities, however, it is openly stated that the municipality is primarily attractive for those who want to build a detached house. While density at urban level is likely to increase according to proposed development plans, the definitions used indicate that in many instances, especially in the small- and medium-sized (in terms of population) municipalities, the density increases are likely to be very small.

5.1.3. Incremental expansion of urban fringes

Generally, the maps of the comprehensive plans indicate that the urban areas are becoming concentrated by new development sites being added in contact with the existing urban areas (see Table 4). However, if site ratio measures of the planned development are included, another clear pattern emerges. High site ratio measures are pursued in the central areas, mainly in the larger cities and then gradually drop closer to the urban fringes. Detached houses are planned for either in the larger urban areas’ peripheral parts or in smaller towns or villages in the municipalities. The comprehensive plans of Lomma and Lund, respectively, summarise this pattern quite well:

… generally, the central areas of the main communities of Bjärred and Lomma should be denser … land for detached housing should be offered in more peripheral locations … and in the villages. (Lomma municipality, 2011, p. 59)

To conserve land we build densely. However, there are possibilities for small areas of dense detached housing at the fringes of Lund and in the other urban areas in the municipality. (Lund municipality, 2010, p. 24)

The interviewee from Lund offered the following reflection on this planning approach:

One can interpret the comprehensive plan as saying that the further away from public transportation you get, the more scattered development is allowed. Why is this then? Of course, it is because there is a demand for low-density settlement and this should also be satisfied in some way. But a carpet of detached housing is not easy to supply with public transport in the next step, so in this way you accept a lock-in to car travel.

Nonetheless, the main pattern that emerges from the analysis is that the plans express a stance that actively avoids the incremental expansion of urban fringes. Together with the parallel development of various infill development within existing urban structures, this will contribute to increasing the average densities of these urban cores. The density increases, however, are likely to be modest and development areas at the fringes will have lower density.

5.1.4. Sprawl in rural areas

Nine of the ten reviewed comprehensive plans emphasise a restrictive stance towards new development outside the boundaries of existing built-up areas (see Table 4). Two of the municipalities, Lund and Svedala, are also taking an explicit stance on being restrictive with permission for new development at the fringes of urban areas. However, as was shown in the previous section in the case of Lund, this does not mean that development at the urban fringe is avoided completely. The restrictive stance concerns developing new areas but there are several areas where fringe development is taking place.
The one exception to a restrictive stance is the municipality of Osby, one of the municipalities experiencing a population decrease. In the comprehensive plan, it is explicitly stated that:

The municipality has a positive approach to development in rural areas. This applies to both permanent residencies and vacation homes ... For the convenience of those who want to build, the plan has three areas that are assigned as appropriate for holiday cottages ... The municipality will not get involved in the planning of these or other vacation areas. The field is free for interested property owners and other private stakeholders to develop proposals in consultation. (Osby municipality, 2010, p. 30)

In Lomma, a small municipality with strong population growth, the interviewee expressed a much more restrictive approach:

The municipality says no to new development in the countryside ... however in some cases, surprisingly even in beachside locations, the municipality has had to fold for appeals [to the County Administrative Board].

This illustrates that even though Lomma emphasises a strict view on sprawling development outside existing built-up environments, there are also limits to the possibilities to enforce this approach.

5.1.5. Findings on density and land use

If development unfolds according to the plans, the levels of density at urban level will increase. It will increase most in the regional cores where most development is planned for. Lund alone is, for example, planning for more dwellings than all of the other non-regional core municipalities together. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the planning approaches in the reviewed municipalities seem to harmonise with strategy area 3 (Grow efficiently with balanced and sustainable land use). For strategy area 1 (Develop Skåne’s growth engines and regional cores, and develop the polycentric regional structure), it is more difficult to determine if the planning approaches at municipal level are in line with the regional strategy. The tendency of municipalities to define their own local-level visions of polycentricity highlights that the polycentric metropolis is a vaguely defined spatial imagination which seems to have limited influence on prevailing planning practice.

5.2. Transport and land use

The interviews showed that there was unanimous agreement that ‘transport lean’ planning at the municipal level involves reducing the need for transport. When asked how the municipality works with reducing passenger car travel, the general answer was by planning new development in public transport accessible locations. However, there are several different definitions and interpretations in use regarding precisely what this means.

The planning measures mentioned in the plans and in the interviews emphasise developing alternatives to car use rather than measures to restrict car use (e.g. parking policies, public transport and cycling priority measures).

5.2.1. Definitions of public transport accessibility/proximity

A clear pattern that emerged from the analysis of the comprehensive plans was that ambitions to locate development areas close to public transport are explicitly expressed. However, only five of the plans (Osby, Svedala, Helsingborg, Kävlinge and Lund) include definitions of
public transport accessibility or proximity (see Table 5). In four of the cases, the definitions
could be inferred implicitly from wordings in the documents, e.g. in the plan for Kävlinge
where it is argued that:

The planned development means that 2600 apartments can be built within 2 km from the train
station, provided that the Lomma line is opened for traffic so that Furulund gets a station.
The remaining 800 apartments planned are not located near a station. (Kävlinge municipality,
2010, p. 54).

In the plan for Osby, a similar Euclidian distance-based definition is found since it is
argued that the planned development in the municipal core is located within 2.5 km of the
train station (Osby municipality, 2010). From the plan for Svedala, it can be inferred that
a 10-minute walk (1 km) or bike ride (2 km) constitutes the definition of public transport
proximity (Svedala municipality, 2010).

In Lund, the definition of public transport proximity is implicitly inferred from a dynamic
distance-based method used for calculating a ‘car leniency’ factor used to assess different
development areas. Areas achieving the highest scores must meet the following criteria:
Access to a regional train station with a minimum frequency of four departures per hour
in peak traffic, within 1000 m, or within 1500 m from Lund central station. Areas achieving
second best scores must meet the following criteria: within 400 m from a regional bus stop
with a minimum frequency of four stops per hour in peak traffic (in the city of Lund) or
within 1000 m from a regional bus stop (in the municipality’s other urban areas) (Lund
municipality, 2010).

On the map in the comprehensive plan for Helsingborg, the only explicit definition was
found in the form of circles visualising a distance radius drawn around the train stations.
Three stations are highlighted as being of regional importance and have double circles
visualising a distance of 1 and 2 km, respectively. The entire 2 km radius counts as public
transport proximate, but it is stated that in development areas within 500 m from a train
station, a high development site ratio should be pursued. The interviewee from Helsingborg
further explained that:

This is a very stereotyped definition, where we only show the distance. /…/ [However,] When
we are talking about station proximity it’s the train stations that counts, not the bus stops.

While the other five plans lacked definitions of concepts such as ‘station proximity’ and
‘public transport accessibility’, the interviews revealed that access to public transport was
still an important issue in planning. Several of the interviewees referred to the National
Transport Administration’s definition of station proximity as 2–3 km from a train station,
based on the assumption that this is an ‘acceptable cycling distance’.

This was exemplified in Östra Göinge, where no explicit or implicit definitions could
be found in the plan. Here, the planner explained that they worked according to the motto
that when planning for new development, it should be as easy to catch the bus as to take
use car. The interviewee pointed out that:

In principle, 100% of the development areas are in public transport accessible locations.
Generally speaking, everything is within 1 km cycling distance in the villages, which means
that it is close to public transport …

5.2.2. Location of planned development areas in relation to public transport

There are typically passages in the plans explaining how the identified development areas
are located in relation to existing, and sometimes planned public transport networks. The
development areas are described using concepts such ‘station proximity’, ‘public transport
accessible location’, and ‘within acceptable walking and/or cycling distance from public
transport’. However, as described in the previous section, there are various time/distance
criteria in use.

Of the 10 plans analysed here, it was only in Kävlinge and Lund that the comprehensive
plans accounted for how large a share of the planned development was planned in a public
transport accessible location (roughly 70% in Kävlinge and 75% in Lund). In the interviews,
questions were put about the share of planned development in public transport accessible
locations, but none of the interviewees from the other municipalities could provide a pre-
cise answer. However, the interviewees from Lomma, Östra Göinge, Svedala and Åstorp
estimated that all, or a majority of the planned development areas, would be located in
public transport accessible locations based on assumptions of a reasonable cycling distance
of 2–3 km. In some cases, such as for spatially small municipalities such as Lomma and
Åstorp, this distance interval means that almost all of the municipality would be eligible as public transport accessible.

Similar wordings recur in several plans, stating that development should be prioritised in locations with good public transport access, with respect to both train and bus. However, all the reviewed plans lack a clear development strategy to locate development areas adjacent to bus stops. One reason for this was provided by the interviewee from Lomma Municipality, who argued that:

We can't steer [development] towards [locations accessible by] buses, since it's uncertain whether the bus stops will remain. What we can do is try to locate development areas within reasonable distances [from bus stops]

This expresses a common response in the interviews; the permanence of train routes and train stations are contrasted to the perceived fickleness of the bus routes and bus stops. This is not least interesting since Region Skåne has had strategies in place for the development of both trains and regional bus services based on the regional council’s goals since 2006. However, the analysis of the plans revealed that no municipality explicitly prioritises development in areas directly adjacent to the regional bus routes. This indicates that the bus strategy has had limited impact on land-use planning in the studied municipalities.

Only Lund and Helsingborg, the two in-commuting municipalities, have explicit objectives of planning for workplaces and public and commercial services in public transport accessible areas. The other municipalities are characterised by out-commuting and most of them lack larger, labour-intensive workplaces. These plans typically also lack the integrated perspective on creating a sufficient basis for trade and services in public transport accessible locations.

5.2.3. Findings transport and land use

Based on the findings of the analysis, it can be concluded that public transport accessibility is regarded as important in all the municipalities. The definitions used, however, vary considerably. Using the most generous definitions of public transport accessibility/proximity, the planned development in all the studied municipalities seems to be in line with strategy area 2 (Strengthen accessibility and connect Skåne internally through developing regional public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure). However, if the more stringent measures used in some municipalities were used as the benchmark, it would be less obvious that the realisation of the plans will contribute to strategy area 2. Additionally, even using the most generous definitions of public transport accessibility/proximity, not all new development will be in public transport accessible locations. It is unclear whether or not the results of this study should be considered sufficient shares of public transport accessibility to contribute to implementing the regional strategies and the goal of the ‘polycentric metropolis’. Once again, this highlights the vagueness of the regional spatial imagination and shows that it does not really matter how the municipalities act; the planning already undertaken can be justified as to be in line with the regional strategy.

6. Discussion

Olesen (2012, p. 911) defined soft space planning as ‘… episodes of spatial strategy making aiming at destabilising existing governance practices and planning cultures, or at least supplementing and complementing these practices and cultures in significant ways …’
The results indicate that the soft space planning approach studied here is more about supplementing and complementing than destabilising existing governance practices and planning cultures. On a rhetorical level, it seems clear that the introduction of the regional perspective in planning has been successful. The introduction of the spatial imagination of the ‘polycentric metropolis’ is a clear example of spatial strategy making outside the rigidity of the statutory planning process (Olesen, 2012). It can also be viewed as a clear example of soft space planning used as a substitute for local government reform (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010).

But the absence of any clear evidence of ‘impacts on the ground’ confirms the findings of previous studies (e.g. Haughton et al., 2010; Olesen, 2012). The analysis showed that there is awareness of the importance of striving for increased densification at the level of urban areas, and that this is pursued through restrictive approaches to incremental expansion of urban fringes, and to sprawl in rural areas, and the location of development areas in public transport accessible places. At the same time, the analysis also shows that concepts are interpreted differently and that local authorities apply their own guidelines and principles, which are not always in harmony with a transport-efficient regional development structure.

So what do the results say about the influence of the three strategy areas on municipal planning? And more specifically, what do the findings say about how this soft space planning approach contributes to the integration of land-use and transport planning on a regional scale?

Regarding the question of regional soft space planning as an approach for integrated land-use and transport planning, it can be concluded that some impacts linked to the regional strategies, e.g. increasing density at urban level and location of development areas with good public transport accessibility, can be expected if the plans are realised. However, density increases can in most cases be expected to be minor or moderate, and – given the varying, sometimes rather loose definitions of public transport proximity – the potential impacts on mobility patterns and CO₂ emissions will most likely also be limited.

The results give some support for claiming that ‘Structural image for Skåne’ has raised awareness of the regional perspective in municipal planning. But based on the findings of the study, it is not possible to clearly state that the soft space planning approach is making much imprint. The strategy areas seem to reflect the type of planning already conducted at municipal level rather than challenge existing practices. These results confirm the findings of Persson (2013) who concluded that Swedish municipal planning is highly structured by ‘planning doctrines’ which make attempts at changing practices difficult. Planners typically start with ready-made planning principles and tools that shape the framing of problems. The regional dialogues have in this case perhaps been too influenced by the established doctrines to result in strategic goals that actually possess capacity for change.

6.1. Challenges and ways forward in soft space planning

The results of the study indicate some main challenges for soft space planning to function as an approach for integrating land-use and transport planning. Here, this is discussed as challenges for implementing the regional strategy areas 1–3, and the more general implications of the results.

The most clear link between the strategy areas and municipal planning was found for strategy area 3 (grow efficiently with balanced and sustainable land-use), for which the
strategy instrument was defined as ‘Promote efficient land use’ through an integrated view on transport and land use. However, for all three strategy areas, a number of challenges were identified.

The first challenge is that there are different interpretations of the goals, i.e. what the spatial imagination of the polycentric metropolis actually entails.

The instrument for implementing strategy area 1 (Develop Skåne’s growth engines and regional cores, and develop the polycentric regional structure) was to Concentrate the development to the seven prioritised urban areas and the ‘growth engines’. Here, it seems as if the general development of population and market forces supports the strategy – the strongest increases and development pressure are found in Helsingborg and Lund, the two municipalities in the study with ‘growth engine’ status. However, all the other municipalities in the study, even the ones experiencing population decline, are also planning for considerable (at least in relative terms) expansion.

Further, the concept of polycentricity seems to have a different meaning at the regional level compared to the municipal level. At the regional level, the concept has an, admittedly vague, but none the less hierarchical meaning through the seven prioritised urban areas (including the three ‘growth engines’), followed by towns or villages with train stations and with good public transport provision. According to the spatial imagination of ‘the polycentric metropolis’, development should primarily be concentrated to those places of which one or more can be found within each municipality. The findings of this study show that polycentricity at the municipal level in many cases is defined quite generously, and that there is little support for claiming that the regional strategy has had much impact on planning priorities.

This illustrates an intrinsic conflict concerning the purpose of the regional strategy. Using the vocabulary of Galland (2012), the strategy is intended to fulfil a dual role, both as a growth facilitation device and as a growth management device. The idea that these roles are possible to combine builds on the notion that the spatial imagination of ‘the polycentric metropolis’ is clear enough to actually influence municipal-level planning. The results of the analysis illustrate the difficulty of steering towards a transport energy-efficient regional land-use structure when the internal hierarchies of polycentricity within each municipality also come into play. The more generous the interpretation of which municipal cores to focus on the harder it will be to reduce transport-related emissions of greenhouse gases.

A second key challenge is that there are different interpretations of key concepts of the strategies applied to achieve the spatial imagination of the ‘polycentric metropolis’.

For implementing strategy area 2 (Strengthen accessibility and connect Skåne internally), the key instrument is to Develop regional public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure. The findings illustrate that there is strong support for developing public transport on a general level in all the municipalities. However, the results also indicate that key challenges are found at a more operational level, e.g. in the variations in definitions of concepts, such as public transport accessibility/proximity. These variations mean that what counts as a public transport accessible location in one municipality does not necessarily count as one in another. This is probably in part a result of different local conditions, e.g. concerning development pressure, geography and demography, etc. Given these different conditions in different parts of the region, it is not evident that it is feasible to apply one common definition of public transport accessibility across the entire region. It is, however,
clearly a challenge to strengthen accessibility if there are many different interpretations of what this means.

These two challenges illustrate an important issue related to the strategy areas being too vague as well as the proposed instruments for realising them lacking clear definitions. This describes a key problem in soft space dialogue and consensus-based spatial planning; to get all the municipalities to accept the spatial imagination of the polycentric metropolis, the strategies and the instruments for achieving them must be so diffuse that their practical significance will be limited. While as in other studies of soft space planning, e.g. Heley (2013), there is a dominating discourse on consensus and win–win situations, the prospect of achieving consensus and drawing on win–win situations are likely to be challenged when moving from a general level to a more operational level. The stronger the emphasis on the regional perspective, the greater the probability of growing conflicts with municipal interests. If, for instance, strategy area 1 of concentrating development to the seven prioritised urban areas was defined more strictly and pursued more stringently, conflicts with the other 26 municipalities would be likely to ensue.

The findings indicate that perhaps the most tangible result of the soft space planning approach is the establishment of an arena for dialogue. Even though there may be limited evidence on impact on municipal planning so far, this is still an important achievement and indicates a potential for increasing the influence of the regional perspective.

Two main points are illustrated by this study. These points are both of practical relevance in the specific region studied, and of general relevance for understanding possibilities and limits of soft space approaches to integrate transport and land-use planning in other contexts.

First, developing and refining common goals and strategies is essential. This is, however, likely to be a time- and resource-consuming process lined with conflicts. Refining common goals and strategies will most likely entail growing conflict as it will visualise different interests hidden or ignored due to vague definitions. In the case of the soft space planning approach studied in this paper, refined definitions of the goals and strategies for the spatial imagination of the polycentric metropolis would clearly compromise the current consensus. However, if the soft space planning approach is to have any impact on integrated transport and land-use planning, it is necessary to handle this conflict. With more clearly defined goals and strategies, it could be easier to make consistent evaluations to examine if the strategies are influencing municipal planning.

Second, there is a need for common and in some cases more stringent definitions of the concepts used to implement the strategies. The results indicate that a possible way forward is to develop more precise definitions of concepts such as density and public transport proximity. This could increase the potential of soft space approaches to integrating transport and land-use planning.

**7. Conclusions**

The purpose of the paper was to analyse how soft space planning at regional level is influencing municipal land-use and transport planning. More specifically, this meant posing the question of how the soft space planning of ‘Structural image for Skåne’ functions as an approach for integrated transport and land-use planning at a regional scale.
The results give some support for claiming that ‘Structural image’ has raised awareness of regional perspective in municipal planning. But based on the findings of the study, it is not possible to clearly state that the soft space planning approach is making much imprint. Some impacts linked to the regional strategies, e.g. increasing density at urban level and location of development areas with good public transport accessibility, can be expected if the plans are realised. Density increases can in most cases, however, be expected to be minor or moderate, and, given the varying, sometimes rather loose definitions of public transport proximity, the potential impacts on mobility patterns will most likely also be limited.

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