

# Pluricentric coordination in regional planning: the enhancement of planning possibilities in complex governance situations

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## **Abstract**

*The article presents a new theoretical concept of pluricentric coordination developed from three strands of theory: public governance theory, relational planning theory and narrative organization theory. In several European countries we have witnessed a change at the regional levels towards a non-hierarchical and relational governance situation without a strong regional planning unit. Pluricentric coordination is a potential for some form of governance in such a fragmented governance situation. Pluricentric coordination is brought to life through governance processes that provide dynamic, selective, interactive and overlapping linkages promoting communication between otherwise disconnected stories and practices. These “floating” coordination elements can develop into temporary institutionalizations and provide multiple orders and temporary restings (fixations) created in the coordination process. The concept is illustrated and discussed in presenting a Danish case study of a regional planning authority changing its role from a regional hierarchic planning authority making regional binding plans to a new role as a strategic and coordinating planning institution, creating a regional non-binding development strategy. The regional authority is positioned as one of many actors in a fragmented regional planning arena. The result of the case study, which illustrates a learning process lasting 4-5 years reveals barriers but also the potentials for enhancement of pluricentric coordination. The barriers were related to mental maps and role perceptions, organisational matters and forms of involvement, planning competences and major power conflicts. The driving forces were the development of a common understanding of the necessity for collaboration among regional actors, organisational changes in regional administration to make room for more horizontal coordination and cross sector cooperation, and new planning competences in strategic link- and story making work. The article concludes by discussing the general contribution of the concept of pluricentric coordination to other regional planning contexts.*

Keywords: regions, strategic planning, network governance, pluricentric coordination, story telling, relational planning.

## ***Introduction***

In several European countries we have witnessed that public institutional changes at the regional public planning levels diminished the role of a public regional planning institution. In Denmark a major structural reform in 2007 resulted in larger municipalities (a reduction from 275 to 98) and five new regions based on 12 counties. Tasks and competences were changed with a number of tasks and competences moved from the counties to the municipalities and the state. The role of the new regional public authorities was weakened compared to that of the former counties. In the urban and regional planning field the region lost its hierarchical planning authority as a developer of mandatory regional plans for the municipalities. Their new task was to make a Regional Development Plan (with no legal authority) in cooperation with other regional and municipal actors and carry out a coordinating and advisory role. This example of a fragmented regional governance situation brings forward the interest in how governance is provided and how coordination takes place.

The discussions of fragmented governance situations have been intense in theories of public administration and planning for quite a while (ref.). The situation is described through theories of (network and multiactor/level) governance and meta-governance (e.g. Rhodes 1997, Sørensen and Torfing 2007, Salet et al. 2007, Meuleman 2008, Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). These theories bring forward important knowledge about governance possibilities in situations with a variety of governance actors through networking, network management and meta-governance. This article starts from and builds on these contributions, but integrates two other theoretical perspectives dealing with coordination in messy governance processes in order to develop the concept of pluricentric coordination. One is relational planning theory that stresses the importance of making a strategic selection of linkages and connectivity in communicative practices, establishing temporary restings and multiple orders (Healey 2007, Sieverts 2007, Hillier 2007). Another is narrative organisation theory stressing the construction of meaning and sense-making in situated practices (Pedersen 2009, Hajer 1995, Czarniawska 1998/99, Weick 1993.).

The article will argue that fragmented regional governance situations require a change in focus from steering to pluricentric coordination if we are to understand how a regional public planning authority may play an important role in regional governance. The argument is first elaborated on in theory and then illustrated by the results of an empirical Danish case illustrating pluricentric coordination in practice. The article goes on to analyse the barriers and drivers for the development of pluricentric coordination found in the case study and ends by discussing the relevance of pluricentric coordination in general terms in regional planning.

## ***The relationship between coordination and governance***

The concept of coordination has always been central in theoretical considerations about how public governance and planning is produced. Governance and coordination are closely related and sometimes used as synonyms for each other. There is, however, a tendency to use the concept of coordination to describe a mutual adjustment of the actions of some actors to the actions of others, and to use the concept of governance in general as the guidance of these actions in a certain direction (Pedersen et al 2011). Swanson (20xx) describes three different theoretical perspectives on coordination and introduces a more nuanced notion of coordination: Coordination as mutual adjustment, coordination as cooperation, and coordination as collaboration. This illustrates a

continuum in the concept of coordination from a minimum of adjustment in order not to undermine each other's actions and to a maximum of interaction based on a common understanding of the direction to follow (Swanson). The last interpretation is very similar to the idea of governance except that all performers take part in finding the direction as a voluntary act and not because they are obliged or ordered to.

The drive for coordination is interpreted very differently in theories concerned with public governance. One interpretation is that coordination is the pre-given outcome of functional and bureaucratic formal organisation set-ups first elaborated on by Weber. Later came the idea of coordination as a result of functional necessity driven by the "invisible hand" (Parsons 1953) and later again in the 60s contingency theory emphasized the need for strong leaders to tailor specific coordination standards and procedures which took the specific context into consideration (Mintzberg 1992). These perspectives are rational and instrumental and were contested in the 1980's and 1990's by the constructive neo-institutionalism approach which stressed coordination as an outcome of institutionalized norms, rules, and logics of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1989, Orton and Weick 1990).

The constructive neo-institutionalism differs in important ways from the rational and instrumental interpretation of coordination. Firstly, it perceives the rationale for coordination as an endogenously produced norm constructed through the coordination process underlining the interactive and interpretive aspect of the process. Secondly it stresses that the institutional logic that provides coordination is loosely fixed, ambiguous, incomplete and prone to situated interpretations. Thirdly it emphasizes that today coordination has to be made across all sorts of boundaries and not just within stable systems.

Constructivist neo-institutionalism forms the outset for the development of the concept of pluricentric coordination. The theoretical considerations from the different strands of theory presented below share these fundamental ideas in their development of coordination ideas.

### ***The concept of pluricentric coordination***

Contributions from governance theories, relational planning theories and narrative organisation theories each provide important elements to a new understanding of coordination in fragmented governance situations. A more thorough presentation of the theoretical background for the concept of pluricentric coordination is to be found in Pedersen et al. (2011). In this article only a short version is presented. We start with a short definition of pluricentric coordination derived from the three theoretical contributions.

Pluricentric coordination is brought to life through governance processes that provide dynamic, selective, interactive and overlapping linkages, promoting communication between otherwise disconnected stories and practices. These "floating" coordination elements can develop into temporary institutionalizations and provide multiple orders and temporary restings (fixations) created in the coordination process.

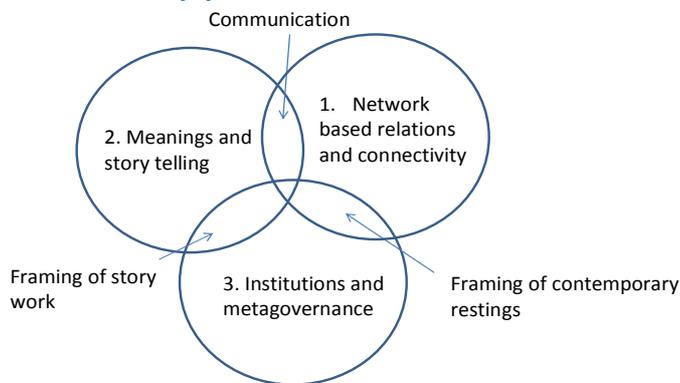
In the following the definition is elaborated on. The concept of pluricentric indicates that coordination processes take place in, are oriented towards and are framed by a great variety of more or less institutionalised governance arenas at different government levels and in different areas of the political system. The concept of coordination stresses that due to the high complexity in public

governance processes, governance is more often a result of mutual adjustment where different actors influence the process and change their actions and relations in the process.

Governance theories contribute with the notion of networking and interdependence between otherwise autonomous governance actors. The narrative organisation theories describe how story telling and story work contribute to coordination through the creation of common meaning. Relational planning theories stress selective inter-connectivity and framing through temporary fixations and introduce the transformative politics of difference.

Figure 1 illustrates an overview of the contributions from the theories to be elaborated on below.

## Figure 2: Drawing the contours of a pluricentric approach to coordination



Each circle illustrates a certain aspect of pluricentric coordination and the overlapping areas illustrate the connections between the aspects.

In the 1990s governance theories criticized the rational and instrumental notion of coordination as produced through a detailed hierarchical system of rules and command that regulates actions (Pedersen et al. 2011). Governance theories argue that a persistent interaction and communication between involved and affected actors in the governance process is essential for coordination in fragmented governance situations (Pedersen 2011). Policy networks are seen as a forceful coordination instrument in pluricentric political systems (Rhodes 1997, Kooiman 1993, 2003, Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997, Klijn and Koppenjan 2004). In these networks otherwise independent actors join forces and produce negotiated coordination in solving specific policy problems. In order to prevent lack of coordination between these policy networks, governance theories also claim that a new indirect form of meta-governance is required to install some form of integration and common direction in governance efforts. Meta-governance is the new term for a form of hierarchical coordination realised through the governance of self-governance (Sørensen 2006, Sørensen and Torfing 2007, Jessop 2002). Meta-governance can be produced through management by objective and incentives steering, facilitation and participation in policy networks and through the production and dissemination of discourses and narratives. Most of these forms involve direct interaction with the networks actors. These theories challenge the idea of a clear

distinction between vertical and horizontal coordination. While there is some element of horizontal coordination in policy network and an element of vertical coordination in meta-governance the situation is more complicated because policy networks are often involved in the act of meta-governance and thereby moderate meta-governance (Pedersen et al. 2011). Pluricentric coordination seems a more proper term for this kind of coordination with elements of both negotiated coordination in networks and interactive production of meta-governance.

Governance theories provide important insight in how coordination is produced in complex governance processes with interdependency and networking between a great variety of actors in policy processes y. The terms of policy networks and meta-governance are important contributions to understand these processes of interactive coordination in which self-governance and hierarchy is intermingled.

Looking to organization theories we find more important insights about the production of coordination in fragmented situated practices. In earlier organization studies the design theories were the most influential in the perception of coordination, arguing that coordination is produced through plans, schedules, formalized rules and procedures, as well as standardized information (Thomsen 1967, Pedersen et al. 2011). Mintzberg (1983, 1992) introduced context in this line of thinking and developed the idea of coordination mechanisms as mutual adjustment (horizontal coordination), direct supervision and standardization of work, output, skills and norms (vertical coordination). Later neo-institutionalism chose to focus on how coordination is produced in the coordination process itself through informal logics of appropriateness and the development of rules and norms in the coordination process (March and Olsen 1989, Orton and Weick 1990). Coordination is produced in different ways in different situations that are driven by particular logics and meanings (Pedersen et al. 2011). Narrative theory is one line of thought focusing on the production of meaning and sense-making as a forceful form of communication and coordination (Czarniawska 1998, 1999, Pedersen 2009). The concept of story-lines is used to capture the relationship between an event and a plot in a story and these story-lines can be very effective in coordination processes striving for a common sense of meaning (Pedersen et al. 2011). However, the result is not one coherent meaning but rather a relational polyphony of stories, as Boje labelled it (2000), because multiple voices always produce a plurality of stories in the coordination process. The concept of story work is used to describe the process of gluing individual stories together by producing and relating stories (Gabriel 2000, Pedersen et al. 2011). The fragmented governance processes are held together (coordinated) through intensive processes of story work within and between organizations and networks.

Narrative organization studies provide the concept of pluricentric coordination, giving important knowledge about coordination through sense-making in situated practices by the use of story-lines and story work. Coordination depends on the kind of story work that takes place through situated interaction in the governance processes. Coordination emerges in story work, where actors relate and construct shared stories that give meaning to their every day work situation.

Relational planning theories develop in opposition to traditional ideas of planning as a governance mean to regulate and synthesize human activity within a given territorial entity around general principles and standards by producing an integrated comprehensive plan for the future. Vertical coordination is essential, supplemented by horizontal coordination between units and sectors (Davidoff and Reiner 1962, Friedman 1987). Building stones for relational planning theories are found in various planning theories that challenged the idea of rationality and objectivity by

introducing power and context in planning theories and the concept of an incremental planning process which led to a pluralism in planning theories during the 1980's (Allmendinger 2002, Hall 2000, Pedersen et al. 2011). One trend of interest here is the turn towards a more bottom-up and praxis-oriented planning ideal which tries to exploit the potentials of fragmented and decoupled planning processes (Healey 2004, 2007, Albrechts 2006, Friedman 2004). This turn in perspective is founded on a notion of space not as something "out there" to grasp but as actively produced through meanings and experiences in daily life (Massey 2004). Space and place are a relational phenomenon of complex layering of multiple social relations where moments and sites are positioned in relational webs and networks (Amin 2004, Healey 2007). Situated practices are the main driver of planning processes, and the linkages between relations are understood in terms of connections and interconnectivity between flows of ever-changing relationships (Pedersen et al. 2011). The main coordination task is to shape and accommodate this connectivity and in this process handle and make explicit the differences and conflicts in the use of space. Coordination then becomes, not a matter of structuring relations within an orderly and coherent city or region, but a matter of encouraging the establishment of a messy plurality of situated moments of network-based interaction and communication (link making work) and in this very political process developing some kind of imaginative stabilizers (contingent fixations) in the form of multiple orders as Hillier (2007) and Sievert (2007) label it, or temporary restings through framing as Healey (2007) names it.

The relational planning theories provide the concept of pluricentric coordination with important knowledge about the necessity of strategic and selective link-making in highly political coordination processes, and they turn our attention to the importance of the transformative dynamics and politics of differences in coordination processes. Furthermore the theories provide a relational spatial picture of the coordination processes and introduce the idea of creating some form of common meaning and temporary fixation of relations by making multiple orders and temporary restings.

In all three strands of theory there is no clear hierarchy in these coordination processes, even though it might be inferred that one actor in a higher position functions as the link-maker and meta-governor, the main story-teller or the one powerful creator of temporary fixations. But this is not the case in fragmented governance processes based on pluricentric coordination. Instead there are only complex and floating coordination processes of mutual adjustments in which those who select, facilitate and create are just as transformed during the process as those they try to govern and guide.

In the following the theoretical argument of pluricentric coordination is illustrated and discussed in relation to a Danish case study but first a short contextual presentation of the Danish case study and the relevance of discussing pluricentric coordination in this case.

### ***A pluricentric governance arena in Danish regional planning***

In 2007 a new structural reform in Danish government was implemented. 275 municipalities were merged into 98 and 12 counties into five regions. Tasks and decisions were transferred from the former counties to these larger municipalities and to the state. In the process there was disagreement about the role of regions. Politically there were strong Government forces supported by the National Association of Municipalities who wanted only two government levels in Denmark: the state and the municipalities. The result was a compromise where the regions are still responsible for hospitals, but with almost no competence in other areas.. This conflict about the role of the regions

highly influenced cooperation between municipalities and regions in the first election period from 2007-2010. It was important for the municipalities to diminish the influence of the regions in order to illustrate their redundancy in the government system.

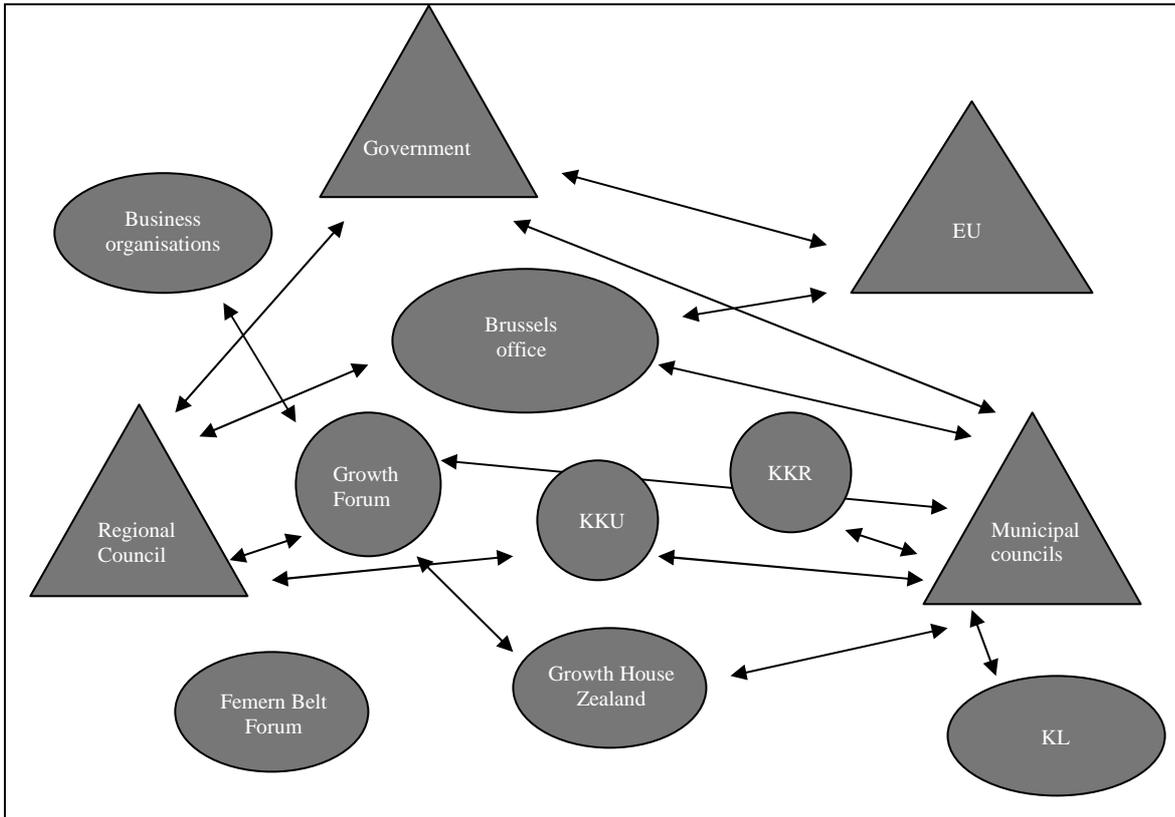
The new regions are governed by elected politicians but have no authority to collect taxes (as the former counties did) and rely on funding from the state and municipalities. As mentioned above, the regions are still in charge of hospital care, but in other areas their role has been reduced.

Furthermore, new formal regional governance institutions were established to enhance coordination between regions and municipalities and between public and private actors: A Growth Forum with public and private actors, a municipal contact council (KKU) and a health coordination council (SKU) with politicians from regions and municipalities. Furthermore the National Association of Municipalities established a new institution called KKR as a municipal contact council for the municipal political leadership in each region to strengthen the role of the municipalities at the regional level. KKR is not part of the formal structural reform. The structural reform created a very complex governance situation at the regional level. Previously there was a rather clear division between the state, counties and municipalities, which functioned in a hierarchical manner with the higher level having formal authority to make binding decisions on behalf of the lower level. Today the situation requires co-governance between several actors to make the governance system work.

The governance situation is especially complex in the area of regional planning. Before 2007 the state made national plans for counties and municipalities to follow, the counties made binding regional plans for the municipalities and the municipalities made municipal plans in accordance with the higher level plans: A traditional hierarchical planning system. After 2007 regional planning was abandoned. Instead the regional councils have the obligation to make Regional Development Plans (RUP), a strategic non-binding development plan for the region without legal authority. The RUP has no legal or administrative authority in relation to the municipalities. It is an advisory and coordinating document that sets out common strategies, visions and frames for the region in cooperation with other relevant regional actors. The new Regional Growth Forums have to make Regional Business Strategies. In Growth Forum regions, municipalities, educational institutions, business organisations, unions and other interest organisations are represented. The regional council has to use the Regional Business Strategy as an outset for the Regional Development Plan. There are only very few directives in the planning law on how to make the Regional Development Plan. There is no clear hierarchy between the two strategies – they are interdependent. The complex situation is illustrated in figure 2 below.

In a research project we have followed the new governance situation in one regional setting: Region Zealand for 4 years (2007-2010) and then made following-up interviews (2011) to investigate how the regional authority managed to change its governance role from the traditional “government” role to that of an influential governance actor in a pluricentric governance situation (see Sørensen et al 2010, Groth and Sehested 2011). The case study illustrates the learning process gone through when making a regional development plan in this new governance situation. Figure 2 illustrates the complexity of the planning situation in Region Zealand:

Figure 2: Key relations in formulating the Regional Development Plan in region Zealand



KKU: the formal municipal contact council with regional and municipal mayors, KKR: informal network of municipal political leadership in the region, KL: The Danish Association of Municipalities (who invented and manage the KKR's), Growth Forum: public/private policy network, Growth House Zealand: Femern Belt Forum: public/private policy network promoting the new bridge from Denmark to Germany. Growth House Zealand: implementation actor with a public/private board.

The figure illustrates the break down of hierarchy in regional planning. The regional council and the municipalities are in a relational and interdependent position and have to produce regional planning and strategies through co-governance involving different regional actors.

## **Method**

The results presented in this article are based on a deep case study for four years from 2007-2010 in Region Zealand supplemented by follow-up interviews in 2011. Region Zealand is an excellent example to use when investigating pluricentric coordination. The region was established through a merger of three former counties and it had to invent itself as a region, establish a new political and administrative organisation, invent its own way of making a Regional Development Plan and establish relations to all other regional actors in the regional planning area. This is also the case for the four other regions in Denmark, but Region Zealand differs in that it is the only region without a big city as a centre for the region. In Region Zealand there are several medium sized cities almost equal in size and this makes the demand for pluricentric coordination even higher.

The empirical data was produced using several qualitative methods:

1. Observations of meetings, seminars and other events to do with the making of the regional development plan. The observations provided very important information about the relationship between the actors during the four years. 2. Readings of documents related to the planning process. The written documents about the regional development plan became an important medium for the expression of conflicts and role definitions in the process. 3. Qualitative interviews with all key actors in regional planning at least twice in the period: regional and municipal politicians, regional and municipal planners, members of the growth forum, members of KKR, KKR, national representatives in KL and the ministries etc. In 2011 qualitative interviews and focus group interviews were made as follow-up interviews. During 2011 the region started to formulate a new regional planning strategy and the interviews provided information on the effects of the learning process in 2007-10. 4. Several interactive working seminars with regional politicians and planners discussing the results of analyses. These seminars contributed to the learning process among the regional actors and provided the research project with an opportunity to make a “reality check” on results.

### ***Towards pluricentric coordination in praxis***

The process of formulating the first and second Regional Development Plan (RUP) for Region Zealand illustrates a learning process as to how difficult it can be to make planning strategies in a pluricentric planning situation, exposing important barriers and showing how it is possible to succeed in pluricentric coordination (the drivers).

Most of the elected politicians in Region Zealand’s regional council were former county politicians and most of the employees in the regional administration were former county employees. These politicians and administrators had to build up a new regional organisation, change their governance role and find a new role in regional planning. This was a very challenging process for some of them.

In the new regional planning department in Region Zealand the first task was to make the Regional Development Plan - a new plan never made before. At the end of 2006, Growth Forum Zealand prepared the Business Development Strategy and this paved the way for the regional planners to use this strategy as an outset for their strategy. The planning department made a first outline for the politicians, this was very similar to a traditional regional plan with plenty of statistical documentation, structural models, maps, comprehensive planning ideas etc. This first outline was rejected by the politicians. The politicians wanted a political document with an overall strategy made in cooperation with other regional stakeholders.

The planning department had to start all over and an important step in the learning process was that the planners suggested the word “plan” replaced with the word “strategy”. It was decided that in Region Zealand they would make a Regional Development Strategy (RUS). They defined the difference between a plan and strategy in order to handle the new situation. The discursive change expresses the construction of a common meaning and understanding of their new task and role. Not

everybody among the planners agreed in the change and there was a long way from the discursive change to changes in behaviour.

At the same time, the planners arranged several meetings and a large kick-off conference, inviting a number of regional actors to discuss the contents of the regional strategy. They used the input to suggest central themes for the Regional Development Strategy. These themes became the structure of the final strategy.

Next in the process, the region arranged five dialogue meetings about the five themes. The meetings were held in different geographical locations in the region and again, all relevant regional actors were invited. Input from these meetings was then integrated into the strategy. A formal public hearing period was arranged and finally, the regional council adopted the strategy in May 2008.

The strategy consisted of an overall vision of Zealand Region with five themes: The Learning Region, The Innovative Region, The Healthy Region, The Sustainable Region and The Accessible Region (infrastructure). In addition there are two transverse or cross-cutting themes: The Coherent Region and the International Perspective. The strategy identifies 38 development goals. Together with the RUS, five other strategic documents were also drafted by the regional administration in order to supplement the RUS. They were: The local Agenda 21 strategy, a Learning Strategy, a Cultural Strategy, an International Strategy and a Strategy for Youth Education. Only the local Agenda 21 strategy is mandatory, and it was not possible to integrate it in the RUS.

This process would seem straight forward. However, it proved not to be. It was very complicated and filled with internal conflicts within the regional administration as well as external conflicts, especially in relation to the municipalities via KKR. At the end of the process the municipalities made clear that they saw the strategy as the regional councils' strategy and not a strategy for the municipalities to follow. The municipalities did not develop any ownership of the strategy, and they wanted the strategy to "cause as little damage as possible", as stated by the KKR. Without municipal ownership, the strategy could not be implemented because after the reform the municipalities possess all the implementation power. The regional strategy was made, but with no practical consequences for regional development. The regional planning department and politicians were very disappointed. Everybody agreed that this process was no success.

The next period of strategy- making (RUS 2) started in 2010 after an election where a new regional mayor is elected and newcomers among regional and municipal politicians join the process. The regional council and KKR make a joint decision of making a proper collaboration in order to work together on solving the problems of the region. Both parts now recognise the necessity of the collaboration and their mutual interdependency.

At the same time changes in the regional administration were made as to organisational structures, leadership and competences. The administration tried to find a balance between a matrix and project organisation with specialised units promoting expert knowledge in different areas. The object was

to solve the problem of lack of horizontal cooperation but still provide highly specialised knowledge in the regional planning process. Some employees left the organisation and the new ones contributed with competences in process- and project management etc, collaboration skills etc. The new mayor was very much in favour of the new strategic and coordinating planning role and he made the changes needed to match this new role.

While the first process was characterised by an open invitation to participate in the process, the new mayor decided to concentrate strategy development on existing knowledge from the first process (and not make a new open process) and then work closely together with KKR to develop ownership among the municipalities as this had proved to be the major barrier for the strategy to work in practice. Four meetings with municipal politicians were arranged at different locations in the region with the municipalities as hosts and the region as visitor, and the regional administration and politicians became acquainted with the local politicians' views in matters of regional importance. Input from these meetings can be found in the final RUS 2. A collective steering group between the region and the municipalities still functions and the regional council can now contact the municipalities directly. The steering group has developed into a proper collaboration network between region and municipalities, based on trust.

The new RUS is very short, one document containing an action plan and selected cross-cutting themes such as climate, collaboration, green growth and education where a larger group of regional actors were involved and agreed on the strategy. The steering group and the KKR accepted the second RUS before the hearing period in late 2011. KKR felt that the process functioned well and that the regional council now listens to the municipalities, that the regional planners have learned how to facilitate regional activities and that they use their specialised knowledge in a collaborative and not authoritarian manner. The KKR finds the cooperation very fruitful and important for the further development of the region.

The regional administration now spends time on developing a lot of other strategic links and relations in the region, bringing otherwise separate actors together through network facilitation. It has become one of the most important tasks in the regional department. Examples are network between small businesses, between business and health, between educational institutions, important climate actors etc. The region has also started to concentrate on other strategies besides the RUS. After the first RUS the region, state and municipalities in cooperation worked out a Climate Strategy and later on the region facilitated a collaborative process resulting in a common Education Strategy for the region, bringing various actors together. The Education Strategy is seen as one of the most important strategies in the region. They also succeeded in making a strategy for the regional public infrastructure in a collaborative process. The different strategies play in concert but do not form an overarching and comprehensive strategy for regional development.

If we analyse this process more closely we find interesting information about both barriers and enhancement of pluricentric coordination.

## ***Barriers for and enhancement of pluricentric coordination***

The barriers we find by asking the question: what went wrong in the first RUS process? The driving forces we find by asking what made the second RUS process successful ?

Looking at the first RUS process which failed in making a strategy any instance was willing to follow and implement, virtually only barriers are found for pluricentric coordination.

First of all, the regional authority had severe difficulties in changing (and accepting) their governance role after the reform in 2007. The regional council went on to establish the regional administration as a traditional functional and specialised bureaucracy. It soon became obvious that the planners responsible for coordinating work with the Regional Development Strategy had great difficulties in coordinating across functional administrative areas in the administration – hence the result mentioned above with strategies from each department in the region as part of the RUS. The Growth Forum secretariat was placed in the department as well, but cooperation was not possible. Each department operated separately in contributing to the common strategy and the Growth Forum Secretariat operated completely on its own. Vertical coordination was the dominant and only form of coordination and it became a barrier for both horizontal coordination within as well as pluricentric coordination outside the regional administration. During the first period of the RUS development a lot of time and energy was used on making administrative daily work match the new governance situation and on making the horizontal coordination work within the administration. Furthermore the regional planning department also felt the need for new competences to implement the new collaborative planning role. They were first and foremost specialised planners with little experience in creating collaboration, project- and network management, story-telling etc.

Secondly, the regional administration had difficulties in collaboration with external regional actors. The regional planning department knew they had to cooperate in this governance situation and they did open up the strategy making process (aided by process consultants) especially at the beginning of the process where they involved other regional actors ending up with the central themes as a structure for the RUS. This was an explicit effort to make a collaborative process but they still saw themselves as the highest authority, inviting the other participant and there was no explicit strategy for link making possibilities in order to make the strategy work in practice. After this first stage of gathering suggestions from other regional actors, the planning department then proceeded with a closed process again, going on to finish the strategy by themselves. Furthermore they developed several other strategies without involving others. Other-party involvement hereby changed from participation to information. Most of the regional planners still thought of themselves as the most competent in the matter of unfolding a regional strategy based on the external input. Story work never really became part of the process because it was not viewed as important by the regional planners. Other regional actors were disappointed because they were under the impression that they were to be involved in the unfolding of the strategy, Thus, it was in this process that the major

conflicts between the KKR and the regional planning department occurred. Mistrust and disrespect dominated from then on.

In general, the regional politicians and planners found it difficult to collaborate with others, especially the municipal actors, as equal partners resulting in constant conflicts about specific planning issues. Here the municipalities felt that regional administration tried to overrule them and interfere in municipal matters in a “top-down” authoritarian manner. An example: At the formal meetings between the region and the municipalities in KKR, the regional mayor placed himself at the top of the table with the municipal mayors along the sides, and he chaired the meetings very strictly as to decisions, without any discussions and informal talk. The meetings were tense and filled with conflicts. A “governmental” and authoritarian conduct in pluricentric governance situations did not work – it was counterproductive. The making of several supplementary strategies without external involvement at all also provoked the other regional actors.

The process also revealed that power struggles and conflicts are part of a pluricentric coordination process. The municipalities did not want the RUS to succeed. In general, the municipalities opposed the whole idea of a regional development strategy. They saw only the need for the Business Development Strategy made by the Growth Forum, in which they are represented. The municipalities in the region decided jointly through KKR Zealand, that a steering group consisting of the responsible regional managers and a few municipal executives had to follow the process very closely, and that the region was not allowed to contact other municipal planners without permission from this steering group. In this group every sentence in the strategy was discussed and fought over. The steering group became the scene of power struggles between the region and municipalities. At a certain time there was a crisis meeting between the top politicians and administrators in the region and KKR to solve the conflicts and get the process moving. This illustrates the difficulties in making a pluricentric planning process work when one of the central actors does not want to cooperate and when the process is dominated by power struggles. For the process to succeed regional actors have to experience the necessity of participation – the interdependency - and they have to agree to follow decisions made together. This did not happen in first RUS process.

The first RUS illustrate a situation in pluricentric coordination where there is a fight between the region, KKR and Growth Forum about being the most important meta-governor. The region wanted to use the RUS as a means to become this meta-governor. The municipalities accepted the region as a link-maker in the process but not as the story teller about regional development. The region did not develop a strategic and selective link-making to make the strategy work in practice, and they wanted to tell the one important story themselves, without employing story work to bind the regional actors together. They saw the polyphony of stories as a problem and wanted to integrate all stories/strategies in one.

The second RUS process illustrates the result of a learning process gained from the first RUS process. If we look into the second RUS process, which started in 2010, we find very clear elements of pluricentric coordination in practise. A major change has taken place in the strategic planning

process and the result is a RUS and other strategies supported and implemented by other regional actors.

First of all one of the major obstacles for a collaborative process was removed: The unwillingness to cooperate and make it work in practice. The first regional mayor who demonstrated a traditional hierarchic authoritarian behaviour and never really accepted his new role was replaced by a new regional mayor, who accepted and promoted the new role. The municipalities decided to work with the region and not against it, and both KKR and the region used the lessons from the first process about what not to do. The KKR and the region realised and accepted the interdependency between all regional actors needed to solve the regional problems. It points to a very important aspect of pluricentric coordination: the experience of the necessity of collaboration and of the interdependency between the actors has to be present, stressed and sometimes created in the coordination process.

Secondly a new form of organisation in the administration and new competences among planners were developed. For pluricentric coordination to work it requires special organisational settings and competences and the regional administration has started developing their organisation in that direction. It is an ongoing process but we clearly see the first steps of the new governance role being institutionalised in structures, procedures and competences.

Thirdly the regional administration started to make selective and strategic link-making work. While the first process included a broad participation of regional actors (whoever wanted to come), the second RUS process concentrated on developing ownership at the political level in the municipalities as the most important actor to make the strategy work in practice. Furthermore the region realised the potential in bringing people and resources together in new constellations to make them meet, talk and get to know each other as the first step to facilitating new ideas, strategies and solutions. Sometimes the region only stages the collaboration sometimes they participate to influence the agenda.

Fourthly, the regional administration has started to story work even though this is found as the most difficult task in the new role. A major factor here is that the new mayor is engaged in this task, he already possesses competences in this direction and using them at the political level. An example: at the formal KKR meetings the regional mayor has placed himself among the municipal mayors. The meetings now consist of dialogue and decision meeting with time for informal talk and discussions of common themes suggested by the region or the municipalities. In general a lot of effort has been made in the region, both at the political and administrative level, to create a sense of common “faith and destiny” in the region as the regional mayor explains. By staging this process the regional planning department has started to make proper story work, accepting the existence of a polyphony of stories: they are trying to glue different stories together and relate different stories to one another in strategies without striving for one comprehensive and overall story-line or strategy. Where the first RUS focused on the problems in the region as defined by the regional administration, the

second RUS made a story line focusing on the resources and possibilities in the region as defined not by the region, but in a collaborative process.

Looking at this planning process in region Zealand, we clearly find a change in the governance situation from a struggle between several public actors to become the meta-governor towards an interactive co-production of meta-governance in the region through pluricentric coordination. This is by no means an easy process and it is still filled with conflicts and power struggles. In some areas the (power) relationship between the actors has been settled for a while, and it is part of the process to discuss the governing role of different actors in each case of coordination and collaboration. In some instances it is accepted that the region should take the lead, in others the Growth Forum takes charge, and in other cases the region and KKR have joint leadership etc. There is no conclusive settlement of power relations and positions. There are plenty of differences and opposing positions in this planning process. But today they are expressed and discussed more openly and thoroughly; discussions and strategic decisions are made about potentials for coordination and collaboration in different issues. Some conflict issues are left for others to solve (maybe hierarchy is needed), in some a longer time perspective is agreed on in order to allow time for building up more consensus; others are taken in and fought about in public, ending in a majority decision and with the hope that the others will follow voluntarily. The capacity for selectivity combined with common story work is essential in dealing with differences and diversity in a constructive manner.

## **Conclusion**

In several European countries the authority of a regional public planning institution is restricted. Typically the regional authority has to work together with other regional actors to make plans and strategies for the regional development. It has become a fragmented regional governance situation. In Denmark a structural governmental reform in 2007 placed 5 new regions in this position. This raised the question on how it is possible for a regional authority to still be an influential actor in the planning processes. The article addresses this problem by introducing the concept of pluricentric coordination as a moderate form of integrating actions, plans and strategies. The article illustrates the difficulties and potentials of pluricentric coordination through a case study of “a coming into existence” of a new Danish region, changing its role from a hierarchic planning authority to a strategic and coordinating planning authority. The task of the new region was to make a non-binding Regional Development Plan. The process illustrated that in the region the barriers to making a strategy supported and implemented by other regional actors were related to former hierarchic mental maps and role perceptions, organisational obstacles, lack of new planning competences and major power struggles. The driving forces for pluricentric coordination were the development of a common understanding of the necessity for collaboration among regional actors, organisational changes in regional administration to make room for more horizontal coordination and cross sector cooperation, new planning competences, and a major effort in strategic link- and story making work.

In region Zealand they have come a long way in defining and constructing their new role as an influential governance actor in a fragmented governance situation. It has not been a fast, quiet and smooth process of change. Rather it has been a very long, hurtful process filled with conflicts and struggles. The change was forced upon the governance actors by the formal institutional change in the structural reform, and a lot of the actors opposed the change which made it more difficult than if the change had been voluntary. But the change also touched upon strongly institutionalised traditions within regional planning, making the change a change in “hard ware” (fundamental norms and values) and not only software (methods) for the planners and politicians involved. Keeping in mind that the regional actors were considered to be the losers in the structural reform it has been hard work leaving the old norms and values, procedures and routines behind and inventing a new role and new governance means for the regional authority. Recently the existence of the regional level has again been contested and its role is being evaluated by the state. We do not know how long it will exist but the experiences of making pluricentric coordination work in practice is an important lesson for everybody in a similar governance situation.

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