

Regional Policy Mobilities: Shaping and Reshaping Bio-economies in Värmland and Västerbotten, Sweden

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Introduction

- In the last decade an expanding volume of work following McCann's (2008) notion on 'policy mobilities' have been published
 - Urban regeneration, Physical planning, Transportation policy, Crime prevention, BID:s etc.
- Overall, policy mobilities research places focus on the processes, practices and resources that construct, mobilize and territorialize policy knowledge
- Initiated as critique towards the 'policy transfer' (cf. Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000) in political science, policy mobilities scholarship rests on four main assumptions (Temenos & McCann, 2013; Temenos et al, 2019):
 - Policies are mobilized and re-territorialised in socio-spatial contexts
 - Mutation of original idea when mobilization occur
 - Co-construction of place and policy as policy is disseminated
 - Not just interaction on national scale → Urban policy mobilities
 - ... a lack of studies on 'regional' policy mobilities?

“Green” policy mobilities

- Within policy mobilities scholarship, an increasing number of studies have focused on the dissemination of so-called ‘green policies’:
 - Transportation (eg. Woods, 2014)
 - Sustainable urban planning (eg. Andersson, 2016; Grandin, 2018)
 - Eco-city projects (eg. Rapoport & Hult, 2017)
 - Infrastructure (eg. Lang & Rothenberg, 2017)
- Sustainability fix (Temenos & McCann, 2013)
- “Some learn, others teach” (Mocca, 2018), and hierarchies are created in who is considered knowledgeable or inspiring (McLean & Borén, 2014) giving some policies ‘license to travel’ (Pow, 2014) while others remain ‘at home’.
- Cherry-picking, competition and altruism (Andersson & James, 2018)
- Entrepreneurial and extrospective green policy (McCann, 2013; Pow & Neo, 2015)
- **Urban context** as a **common theme**, mirroring the ‘urban turn’ (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2007) in sustainable development policy, and not on peripheral regions
- Aims to fix local problems but with a global outlook (McCann, 2017)

Critique towards green policy mobilities (after Rosol et al, 2017)

- Growth and market oriented
 - Green policies are used to revitalise and create economic competitiveness and growth
 - The environment is not a "goal in itself"
- Neo-managerial climate governance
 - What is considered "good" is defined by elsewhere, usually through rankings and evaluations
- Best practice driven
 - Focuses on things that can be put on display and be considered to provide a competitive advantage, instead of more holistic approaches
- Socially & spatially selective
 - Uneven green investments in urban spaces, creating injustice with regards to who is benefitted
 - Only the city itself, little consideration for displacement effects
- Post-democratic
 - Consensus-driven networks, post-political instead of debating environment as a political issue
- Experimental and innovative policy models
 - Trying new things and borrowing from elsewhere as a governance model
 - Being first or experimental adds to marketing values

Aim and research questions

- This paper addresses a gap in the policy mobilities literature and the lack in regional studies on how regional activities contribute to sustainable development (Gibbs, 2018) addressing the scalar debates, looking towards **regional policy mobilities** (i.e. beyond the urban scale)
- Especially in relation to green growth and bio-economy policies, a regional perspective on policy mobilities is relevant:
 - Location of the bio-economy
 - Regional development strategies, incl. strategies coming from the EU and the OECD
- The aim of this paper is to shed light on the development of bio-economy policy programs in two Swedish regions, **Värmland** and **Västerbotten** with the focus on share-ability and dissemination of so-called ‘best practice’:
 - How are these policies developed?
 - In what socio-spatial contexts are these policies circulated and promoted?
 - What features of the bio-economy policies are identified as generalizable and adoptable elsewhere?

Methods & case study regions

Data collection:

- Two separate projects
- In-depth stakeholder interviews
- Secondary sources (policy materials, brochures, newspaper materials etc.)
- Participatory observations incl. Meetings, workshops, conferences, site visits and study tours.

The case study regions

Värmland Region

- Traditional forest industry: pulp and paper, 200 firms and 12 000 employees.
- Specialising in “forest based bioeconomy”
- Triple helix collaboration; regional development authority, cluster organisation (Paper Province), university, Forest Agency and RISE (Research Institute of Sweden) Sweden’s research and innovation partner.
- Technology and innovation within a forest based bioeconomy top priority in VRIS3.



Västerbotten Region

- Traditional forestry industry: timber production and sawmills
- Specializes in multi-story housing in wood
- County board, regional administration, municipalities, businesses, R&D collaborate
- Several of showcases in the region, many ‘firsts’ eg. longest bridge, tallest house, largest bus terminal, first high school completely in wood etc.
- Regional competence in design, calculation, production
- ‘Wood priority’ planning policies in several municipalities



Results 1(3)

- How are the policies developed?

- **Värmland:**

- A mix of top down & regional consensus based. 3 main policy events, Vinnväxt initiative Paper Province 2.0 (national programme supporting growth ... in Swedish regions), the development of a RIS3 strategy VRIS3 , The academy for smart specialisation
- Path dependency, traditional forest industry in pulp and paper, dating back to the 19th century, Lobbying towards both national and international (EU-level) to use the forest biomass within production for pulp, paper and biogas.
- Localities: Location of several national test-beds for 3D-printing and lignin production

- **Västerbotten:**

- A mix of top down & locally sourced. National program became a formalized multi-level network after program closing, lead from Västerbotten alongside (already) existing business networks
- Path dependency, old sawmilling companies were early adopters to new building technique supported by path creation: municipal planning programs creating opportunities for experimental building.
- Localities: Location of national research center, regional business networks, speaks to traditional building styles and techniques
- Connects with bio-economy discourse: CO2 reduction, renewable resource – not part of original strategizing

Results 2 (3)

- In what socio-spatial contexts are these policies circulated and promoted?
 - **Värmland:**
 - Study tours, plant visits, site visits hosted by both business and policymakers
 - Network meetings & conferences, national/international, including partnerships in a wide range of networks
 - Professional training (technical colleges)
 - Political work: speeches, organizing political events e.g. “Bioekonomiriksday”, study visit on sites in Värmland, policy event on smart specialisation in Värmland directed to Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation
 - **Västerbotten:**
 - Study tours (eg. Wood house safaris), plant visits, site visits hosted by both business and policymakers
 - Networks meetings & practitioner conferences, national/international
 - Printed materials; books, brochures, commercial ads/magazines, local/national media
 - Professional training (technical colleges)
 - Political work: debate articles and speeches

Results 3 (3)

- What features of the bio-economy policies are identified as generalizable and adoptable elsewhere?
 - **Värmland:**
 - Smart specialisation á la Värmland - VRIS3 promoted as good example and best practice – how to do bioeconomy in practice,
 - The academy of smart specialisation – showcase of research projects supported by regional authorities presented in fairs, workshops and for other regions in as well Europe as other parts of the world as best practice.
 - Testbeds and experimental labs –
 - Can be a possibility to develop best practice and good examples from peripheral and rural regions, but how mobile are these policys in reality?
 - **Västerbotten:**
 - Municipal planning programs and planning ideas
 - Network collaboration format
 - “Design, calculation and production knowhow” sold through traditional export channels – business fairs, project bids, etc.
 - Reduced “policy portfolio” is being mobilized and circulated

Conclusions

- Economic growth in focus, environment becomes a tool to accelerate the value of biomass
- Innovation and technological development in already existing branches (path development) to find new innovative products – reindustrialization strategies.
- Consensus based (e.g. RIS3) – post political way of steering regional development towards a specific growth trajectory.
- Branding regions (regional industry) through policy models, networks, fairs etc.

- *Are there any differences to urban policy mobilities? Why is there a need for regional policy mobilities?*
- *Scale politics*
 - *Regional scale – examples of peripheral and rural areas, often excluded in policy mobility literature*

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Thank you for listening!