



Planning At the Edge

- aspects on inter-municipal and border related spatial
planning in a new Swedish geography

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Licentiate Thesis

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
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Cover: Part of the development site Tälleleden/Ulvsätter - a contested municipal border zone. In 2003 this area was transferred from the territory of Kumla to Hallsberg as a consequence of strategic land purchase and property mergers. See Paper I: Figures 3, 4 and 6. (photo: Thomas Lexén)

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Abstract

This licentiate thesis investigates how municipal division and local borders may affect spatial planning and the possibilities for coordination of inter-municipal and cross-border planning issues, which has become increasingly important in recent decades as a result of, amongst other things, regional enlargement and an emerging need for increased environmental consideration and climate change adaptation. The overall question, which derives from the author's many years of professional experience as a planning architect, is examined through two studies, presented in two different papers: The first paper explores the problem from a municipal perspective through a case study of two municipalities, Hallsberg and Kumla, with a long history of border related conflicts and collaborations, while the second paper examines the question primarily from a state perspective by investigating the Swedish planning system and municipal division in relation to certain recent geographical changes. Generally, the findings indicate that municipal borders are increasingly suboptimal due to the discrepancy between the emerging new geography and the "old" geography that has formed the basis of both municipal division and the planning legislation. Local geography and territorial conditions are thereby being increasingly influential to the process and outcome of spatial planning. On a theoretical note, the thesis contributes to a fuller understanding of the complex local border geography and helps to bring the discussion on planning back to a geographical, and territorial context.

Keywords: municipal borders, inter-municipal cooperation, spatial planning, bordering, border asymmetries, geography of planning, land use planning, inter-municipal planning, relational geography, soft regions, Sweden

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Planering på gränsen - mellankommunal och gränsrelaterad fysisk planering i en ny geografi

Sammanfattning

I den här licentiatavhandlingen undersöks hur kommungränser och kommunindelningen påverkar den fysiska planeringen och möjligheterna till samordning av mellankommunala och gränsöverskridande planeringsfrågor - något som blivit allt viktigare under de senaste decennierna som följd av bland annat regionförstoring samt behov av ökad miljöhänsyn och klimatanpassning. Problemställningen, som är sprungen utifrån författarens mångåriga yrkeserfarenhet av kommunal fysisk planering, undersöks i två studier, presenterade i två olika artiklar: Den första artikeln undersöker problemet utifrån ett kommunalt perspektiv genom att presentera en fallstudie av två kommuner, Hallsberg och Kumla, med en lång historia av gränsrelaterade konflikter och samarbeten. I den andra artikeln undersöks frågan utifrån ett statligt perspektiv genom en studie av det svenska planeringssystemet och kommunindelningen i förhållande till vissa geografiska förändringar som skett sedan tiden för de senaste kommunreformerna. Sammanfattningsvis pekar studierna på att kommungränserna blir alltmer suboptimala på grund av den ökande diskrepansen mellan den framväxande nya geografin och den "gamla" geografi som har legat till grund för både kommunindelningen och planeringslagstiftningen. Den lokala geografin och de territoriella förutsättningarna blir därmed alltmer betydande för den fysiska planeringen - både vad gäller process och resultat. Utifrån ett teoretiskt perspektiv bidrar avhandlingen till att föra tillbaka den planeringsteoretiska diskussionen till ett geografiskt och territoriellt sammanhang.

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Preface

This thesis was made possible thanks to the overall research project *When Municipalities set the Research Agenda - Models for Municipal Provision of Competence and Knowledge for Sustainable Building and Planning (Närkomm - När kommunerna sätter forskningsagendan)* - a research project funded by the Swedish research council Formas and the seven participating municipalities (Hässleholm, Kristianstad, Lomma, Malmö, Staffanstorp and Östra Göinge), carried out in cooperation with the Skåne Association of Local Authorities (KFSK) and the Region of Skåne. The overall aim of the Närkomm-project was to increase collaboration between academia and practice and to study the organizational impact that may result from municipal officials conducting part-time research, in parallel with continuing their regular work. Four doctoral students employed by three municipalities were included in the study. On an individual level, the research topics were developed based on the doctoral students' individual educational background and professional experience, and in accordance with the strategic challenges identified within each municipality.

For my part, the Närkomm-project has given me opportunities to, as a municipal doctoral student, be able to immerse myself in an area which I have repeatedly encountered during my years as a professional planner, and which I have been interested in for a long time. An area that I believe has attracted far too little attention in the Swedish planning debate - namely the municipal division and the municipal borders' possible impact on spatial planning and development. So, during the years 2016-2020, I have had the privilege of being able to investigate this topic through doctoral studies, on a part-time basis, in parallel with my regular work as town architect at the municipality of Staffanstorp.

These years have been a very inspiring and, of course, sometimes also frustrating time that has been valuable both for my own personal development and, I hope, for the organizations and colleagues around me - both in practice and in academia. Besides contributing with new knowledge about municipal borders and planning obstacles, I have hopefully been able to contribute by adding a more academic perspective and a greater curiosity about research knowledge in general to my municipal workplace. I also hope that I have succeeded in encouraging my colleagues within academia to acknowledge and perhaps value practitioner experience more, and thereby contributing to a closer and more frequent future research collaboration with practice. Because, without a doubt we have a lot to learn from each other, and I believe it would be of great societal benefit if the academy approached the practice to provide better opportunities to identify the most pressing societal problems and to be able to ask the most relevant research questions, and vice versa if the practice approached the research to be able to absorb new knowledge to translate into practice more quickly - a need that is likely to become even more important in these times of increasingly rapid change.

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List of publications

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text:

- I. Lexén, Thomas & Qviström, Mattias (2021). Negotiating asymmetric borders in an emerging soft region. *European Planning Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2021.1895081.
- II. Lexén, Thomas (submitted manuscript). Inter-municipal Spatial Planning in a New Geography - disclosing discrepancies between the legal framework and a new geographical context.

Paper I is reproduced with the permission of the publisher.

The contribution of Thomas Lexén to the papers included in this thesis was as follows:

- I. Both authors were involved in the writing process and contributed to all parts of the paper. As first author I was responsible for undertaking the major part of the empirical research that was carried out as a case study including interviews, field work and document studies.
- II. As sole author I was responsible for all parts of the paper. The study is based on document studies with empirical material from public documents and geographical statistics in combination with secondary literature from political science. In organizing and writing the paper, I received valuable comments from my supervisors Mattias Qviström and Ingrid SarlövHerlin.

1. Introduction

This thesis is investigating the conditions for border related and inter-municipal spatial planning in a Swedish context.

The overall starting point for the work is the belief that spatial planning is basically a good thing - an important tool and a necessity for democratic political powers to manage and organize the spatial dimensions of societal development, and a vital means to design our common future and to achieve overall aims such as environmental and sustainability goals. In this regard the thesis work takes its general point of departure from the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (EC 1999) and the large amount of literature that recognizes spatial planning as of great importance for the possibilities of dealing with the increasingly alarming climate change and for enabling a sustainable development.

Thereby this thesis also acknowledges spatial planning as a way to “*promote a societal development with equal and good social living conditions and a good and long-term sustainable living environment for the people in today's society and for future generations*”, as it is stated in the first paragraph of the first chapter of the Swedish Planning and Building Act (SFS 2010:900). The second paragraph, however, imposes a (unreasonably?) great responsibility on the Swedish municipalities as it states that: “*It is a municipal matter to plan the use of land and water according to this law*” (ibid) - an obstacle of crucial importance for the problem formulations and the very origin of this thesis.

1.1 From a practitioner's perspective

Do territorial demarcation and municipal borders have an impact on spatial planning and development? And if so, how? During my years working as a spatial planner I have noticed that the local border zones are approached in two rather contradictory ways within the municipal organizations.

On the one hand, the border zones are viewed with indifference, as territorial outskirts detached from all municipal interests. This viewpoint comes to expression when, for example, an official, when handling building permits, chooses not to visit an actual building site since it is located “far away” and because “no one is ever going to see it”. The same arguments are sometimes used by political committees when deciding not to comment on consultation proposals on, for example, the establishment of wind turbines in a neighboring municipality, in close proximity to their own border. Overall, such a viewpoint and repeated (non-)actions could presume to lead to physical imprints by affecting what is built and where. While these observations are only based on my experiences from working in five municipalities in southern Sweden, I do believe they have a wider reach, and it may not be an unfamiliar reflection for spatial planners in general that for example wind turbines and windfarms sometimes tend to outline the local border areas as outposted guardians of the municipal frontiers. The same seems to go for the establishment of larger warehouses, logistics centers and external trade centers which are often to be found along highways in close proximity to municipal borders.

On the other hand, it seems like municipal organizations may also consider the border zones in a quite different way: Not as outskirts and certainly not detached from interests. On the contrary, cases and issues within border zones may under certain conditions seem to demand long periods of reflection and considerations of interests, and are thereby more complicated and evolve more slowly compared to cases in other parts of the territory. From my experience this seems to occur in border areas located within, or near, densely populated places. My experience derives from planning processes and other inter-municipal or sub-regional collaborations, such as planning forums and professional networks, and from land-use related discussions with neighboring municipalities, landowners and developers.

In this thesis it is this second aspect of the municipal border areas that is in focus - namely borders as aggravating for border related and inter-municipal spatial planning, with the risk of impeding the implementation of overall goals and policies and the development of overarching and cross-border public interests such as, for example, new housing areas or a school near a railway station, connected green areas or coordinated storm water management.

It is obvious that matters that involve balancing of interests that cross municipal borders presume coordination and occasionally certain collaboration between the municipalities involved - a collaboration which is not always at hand or even desirable. The municipalities involved may have different political agendas, and on the civil servant level, collaboration may be regarded as complicated due to differences when it comes to time schedules, routines, steering culture and so on. During my years as practicing planner I have even met prejudice and lack of confidence regarding competence and ability to work together across the border - both between officials and between politicians - as obstacles that complicate potential inter-municipal planning collaboration.

In discussions with landowners and developers, I have often encountered frustration over the experienced limited opportunities for development in border areas. Sometimes developers have even perceived the inter-municipal hassles as so complicated and time-consuming that proposals are withdrawn, projects closed and the potential investments redirected to other locations.

An example of another kind of investment that is apparently discredited due to administrative boundary hassles is the publicly funded general cycle path network, with its potential to connect towns and settlements located in different municipalities. When it comes to the planning, projecting and building of general cycle paths it is the state, via the Swedish Transport Administration (Trafikverket), which has the main responsibility and covers half of the total financing, while the municipalities concerned are expected to account for the other half. But such an arrangement demands coordination of resources between the municipalities and in my experience these kinds of projects are very often difficult to organize and implement since it seems

almost impossible to synchronize overall aim, time schedules, budgets and work efforts with three or more actors involved in the process.

During my working years I have also come to realize that both the border zones and the very territory itself is of great importance - and in fact of a much greater importance to the political powers than might be realized from an official's perspective. This became obvious to me when a neighboring municipality, in their consultation proposal for a new comprehensive plan, had selected an area for urban development that crossed the border and stretched further into the municipality where I was working at the time. This was done with good intentions of prudent land management since the area in question was situated close to a railway station and thereby suitable for transit-oriented development. The responsible planning architect had even previously had a meeting with me and a fellow colleague where she presented the idea before the proposal was published, and at that time we all agreed on the idea. But at the time when the proposal went public, it did not take long until the politicians within my municipality reacted by contacting the responsible planner and clearly explained the inadequacy of drawing plans within other municipal territories than her own. The mistake we as planners made here, was that we did not firmly establish the idea with the politicians before the proposal went public. That mistake effectively silenced continued thoughts of inter-municipal planning actions for a long time ahead, and clearly demonstrated the political concern regarding territorial matters. In retrospect it may seem obvious, even to a non-political official, that the territory is always of great political interest since it covers a geographical area consisting of land - land with the potential of accommodating municipal residents (which is the very foundation of the municipality) and land as a prerequisite for our very existence and enabler of further development.

In summary, the above-mentioned experiences and observations from practice indicate that territorial demarcation and municipal borders do have an aggravating effect on spatial planning and urban development, with the risk of barrier effects, sub-optimization and deteriorating conditions for solving planning issues that need inter-municipal and regional solutions.

1.2 Formal planning conditions

It is the municipal planning and geography that are central to this thesis and the contextual conditions presented in this section offer a brief summary of what has been presented in the two papers. The purpose of this section is thus only to introduce the context to those who have not read the papers, not to add any further analysis.

1.2.1 Planning system

Spatial planning in Sweden is above all a municipal concern. It is the municipalities that are expected to plan and govern where, how and when urban development may take place. Building permits are granted pursuant to legally binding detailed development plans, which in turn are based on a more general and non-binding, municipal-wide comprehensive plan (SFS 2010:900). Like several other Nordic countries, Sweden lacks a governing regional planning level, and the regional planning that does occur is voluntary, except for the region of Stockholm and (since 2019) the region of Skåne (Blücher 2006; SFS 2010:900). National and regional interests are expressed in policies and strategic documents that are to be considered primarily in municipal comprehensive planning. The state has an advisory and controlling role within both comprehensive and detailed development planning, and through the County Administrative Boards (CAB) the municipalities are provided with advice as well as being reviewed. When municipalities are in the process of developing a new plan, the CAB have the obligation and authority to intervene and, when it comes to detailed development plans, even cancel the plan if, amongst other things, *“the regulation of such matters as the use of land and water areas relating to several municipalities is not appropriately coordinated”* (SFS 2010:900, Chapter 11, Section 10, unofficial translation). The premise of these legal provisions is that all boundary-crossing municipal interests should be noticed and investigated jointly by the concerned municipalities (SOU 2018:46). It is relatively uncommon for insufficient inter-municipal coordination to lead to state interventions by a CAB. Over the past ten years hardly eight percent of the municipal comprehensive plans reviewed have had comments on such insufficiencies. However, the majority of these comments did not refer to municipal interests but rather matters of national interest in need of inter-municipal coordination (Boverkets 2008-2019).

1.2.2 Municipal autonomy and cooperation

At present, Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities distributed in 21 counties. From an international perspective the Swedish municipalities are large, in terms of both area and population, and the average municipality has around 35,000 inhabitants (SCB 2019). The current municipal division is the result of two rounds of extensive mergers, where the number of municipalities was cut from 2,500 to 278. The second round of mergers, completed in 1974, was carried out in accordance with scientifically developed principles, developed by human geographers, aiming for the municipal division and the new local borders to match the functional regions as far as possible (Erlingsson et al. 2015; Bergman 2013). The idea was to merge areas that were considered to belong together in residential, labor, traffic and commercial terms, around a central urban area (Nielsen 2003).

The municipal autonomy has to some degree increased even further following the last mergers. This is due to the reevaluation of the state-municipal relationship that was initiated in the late 1970s by a host of sweeping reforms aimed at making public administration more cost-effective and at modernizing the relationship between the state and the municipalities (Gossas 2006). This has resulted in a successive shift from a traditional hierarchical to a network-based governance, involving decentralization, deregulations and reduced state control. For the municipalities this has led to both increased elbow room as well as responsibility. The state, from now on, to a great extent governs through policymaking and goal control and by promoting and setting the conditions for inter-organizational cooperation - a cooperation initiated and organized voluntarily by the municipalities when necessary (Gossas 2006). The aim of promoting cooperation has been to equip the municipalities to assume the still growing responsibility for managing welfare and the increasingly important transition towards a sustainable development - but also to counteract the “barrier effects” generated by municipal division and administrative boundaries (Gossas 2006; Proposition 1984/85:216). Over the last decades the state has also continued to promote cooperation by implementing new regulatory adjustments to stimulate and further facilitate cooperation - most recently in the new Local Government Act that came into force in 2017 (SOU 2015:24; SFS 2017:725). The efforts have yielded results: Since the end of the 1980s, there has been a massive increase in the amount of inter-municipal

cooperation. There is no complete inventory, but according to a 2002 survey conducted by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner), all municipalities participate in various forms of cooperation, and on an extensive scale (Anell & Mattisson 2009). Cooperation takes place in all areas of municipal responsibility, but predominantly in those of technical services and the sectors of healthcare, social care and youth education (Gossas 2006; Anell & Mattisson 2009).

1.3 The problem

Since the time of the last division reform, the municipal responsibilities regarding spatial planning have increased. This is, besides the decentralization mentioned above, mainly due to the shift towards a more deliberative approach and a greater focus on environmental concerns introduced in the Planning and Building Act (PBL), which came into force in 1987. Since the 1990s, environmental and climate issues have been increasingly important and this is reflected in, for example, a successive strengthening and clarification of links to the Swedish Environmental Code (Miljöbalken) in case law, and the aggrandization of global environmental and climate concerns to public interests introduced in the new Planning and Building Act in 2011 (Proposition 2009/10:170; SFS 2010: 900). Climate change adaptation and environmental issues have become even more important over the last decades and there is both planning research and practice indicating that these key challenges of contemporary spatial planning require regional and inter-municipal solutions (Busck et al. 2008; Paasi 2009; EC 1999; Proposition 2009/10:170; SOU 2005:77; SOU 2015:59; Proposition 2017/18:266).

Even so, as a consequence of decentralization and distinctive network governance, there is a tendency that the state no longer takes responsibility for the implementation of such overarching and long-term concerns as mentioned above, and instead leaves it to municipalities, and other individual actors in collaboration, to take initiatives to solve the overall planning challenges that the state pays attention to (Gossas 2006).

And since recent research on the outcome of Swedish planning indicates that overall municipal and regional goals and policy compliance may be

downgraded in municipal planning in favor of planning actions that are more financially favorable in the short-term (Hrelja 2011; Mäntysalo et al. 2011; Zakhour & Metzger 2018), there might be reasons to suspect that there is a risk that overall national goals and policies might also be downgraded within municipal spatial planning.

Cooperation between municipalities does also occur regarding spatial planning - but on a relatively small scale compared to other sectors of the municipal responsibilities (Hulst & van Montfort 2007; 2011; Gossas 2006; Anell & Mattisson 2009; Thomasson 2017). And even if municipalities in Sweden do, to some extent, collaborate regarding spatial planning, there are both research and public inquiries indicating that planning cooperation is primarily conducted at an overarching level and does not address matters that require prioritization or resolving conflicts of interest (SOU 2005:77; Lindstenz 2008), or fails because of conflicts of interest, political disunity and competition (Gossas 2006). The same tendencies appear in other European countries as shown in studies of, among others, Hulst & Van Montfort (2007; 2011) who claim that collaboration tends to take place in planning forums where decisions can be made by consensus and the local autonomy is not threatened.

From the above reasoning it follows that:

- The key challenges of contemporary spatial planning require regional and inter-municipal solutions.
- Coordination and implementation of overall crucial planning issues are, due to decentralization and network governance, left to voluntarily initiated networks of local actors - primarily the municipalities.
- Overall goals and policy compliance are often left behind in municipal planning in favor of more local and short-term favorable goals.
- Municipal cooperation regarding spatial planning is less common than cooperation in other municipal sectors and does not address matters that require prioritization or resolving conflicts of interest.

This brief summary puts the spotlight on the municipalities and the importance of their ability to coordinate and implement overall goals and strategies and to perform cross-border planning actions when necessary. And where could such ability reveal itself more clearly than when regarding land-

use and planning matters in proximity to municipal borders? If spatial planning within municipal border areas is more problematic and unable to deliver desirable outcomes it may imply problems in achieving overall societal goals, such as for example sustainability goals, and may bring a risk of sub-optimization and failure to make use of public resources. This is especially important for countries such as Sweden and the other Nordic countries that have a strong municipal autonomy when it comes to spatial planning.

1.4 Aim & research question

An overall aim of this thesis is to explore and gain knowledge regarding how municipal division and local borders may affect spatial planning and the possibilities for coordination of inter-municipal and cross-border planning issues.

A better knowledge about this relatively unexplored topic may benefit both planning practice and research by providing better understanding about abilities and difficulties concerning inter-municipal spatial planning. Better possibilities to identify problems and create tools for municipalities, as well as the national planning system, to handle and to take responsibility for issues of planning and land use in border areas will hopefully improve the opportunities for, for instance, a more efficient and desirable spatial development, less need of transportation and a better use of overall resources and infrastructure investment.

The generally formulated question - *How do municipal division and border location affect the possibilities for spatial planning and urban development?* - was further evolved through case, method and theory in each paper.

Paper I poses the question - *How do municipalities meet the obligation to coordinate interests that concern two or more municipalities (PBL 3 chap. 10 § 4 p.) and especially in situations where the municipality border coincides with the urban fringe?*

Paper II departs from the question - *How are the conditions for inter-municipal and border related spatial planning affected by the successive geographical changes that have occurred since the country's current municipal division took place?*

The two questions complement each other since they target the general question at two different institutional levels - the municipal and the state. They also complement each other as they enable investigations of the border phenomena on two levels of abstraction: The first question opens up for studies of how the municipal border and border related planning challenges are enacted in municipal planning practice, and in a given local context, while the second question allows for examinations of the general legal framework and its capacity for facilitating cross-border planning actions in relation to certain general geographical changes. By combining these two complementary questions it is possible to draw overall conclusions from the two studies that reach further and give a fuller understanding of the general question.

2. Fields of theory

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation used to scrutinize and understand the local border problematics in the light of the research questions described in the previous sections.

This thesis is conducted within the discipline of *landscape architecture* which is a multi-disciplinary field that embraces natural and social sciences, art and technology, as well as applied fields such as design and planning, geography, ecology and environmental psychology. To be more specific, this thesis positions itself in the academic field of *landscape planning*, a specialization in landscape architecture, concerned with the planning and management of landscapes - landscapes of both natural and cultural character, rural as well as urban. Even so, the word *landscape* is noticeably absent, both in the papers and in this thesis framework (see Council of Europe 2000, for a definition of landscape). The reason for this is that it is not the landscape *itself* that is the subject of this research, which it could have been if this had been, for example, a more morphologically oriented study. Instead, it is the prerequisites that are in focus here - prerequisites necessary for enabling the planning of landscapes. And due to the character of the research questions these prerequisites specifically apply to spatial planning and border related areas.

The research questions, introduced in the previous section, accommodate both legal and institutional aspects as well as social and behavioral, but not least, the question also contains a geographical and territorial dimension - aspects often overlooked in recent planning research (Paasi & Zimmerbauer 2016). It is not possible to find one field of knowledge or just one pair of theoretical lenses suitable to understand and investigate such complex

phenomena, and instead a combination of different disciplines have been used in order to capture the aspects of border related and inter-municipal spatial planning. This thesis thus moves in the borderlands between planning theory, geography and the organizational, legal and practical conditions of municipal planning.

As a means to elaborate on the literature, according to the aim of the thesis and to its interdisciplinary character, the literature has been organized around two main themes. The first theme, *soft space*, elaborates on the spatial dimension of the problematics whereas the second theme, *inter-municipal cooperation*, concerns governance aspects related to the new geography of planning - municipal division, planning and cooperation, and its legal and institutional prerequisites. The following two sections (2.1 and 2.2) thus to some extent give an account of each research field, within each theme respectively, in order to clarify the knowledge contribution and to identify the gaps in relation to the research questions and the general problem.

2.1 Soft spaces

Even if not always articulated in this way, the question of how municipal division and border location affect spatial planning is not new to planning theorists. Philip Allmendinger, among others, states that, in this world of rapid change, contained spaces (e.g. territorial division of local governments - such as municipalities) more than ever before mismatch with the functional need for new planning spaces and planning across borders (2017, p.232). This mismatch coincides with the problems formulated which have made it interesting to further investigate the matter in relation to ***the new geography of spatial planning***. This specific literature, within planning research, pays attention to how soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries have emerged within spatial planning as a result of planning seeking new spatial arrangements, new spaces and scales, as a means to achieve its goals in a world of increased mobility, policy and network governance, neoliberal planning approaches and new challenges in providing infrastructure and social services (Healey 2007; Allmendinger & Haughton 2009; Haughton et al. 2010; Heley 2013).

Parallel to the emergence of these new planning spaces of temporary institutional arrangements and soft and fluid network constellations lay the

“old” and hard territorial borders, affecting possibilities and outcomes of such soft planning spaces. The potential collision between the need for new soft planning spaces and the “old” hard geography of local territorial borders is an important starting point for this thesis.

A relational thinking, and view of space, has since the 1990s been highly influential both within culture geography and other areas of the social sciences, as well as in the context of strategic spatial planning (Malpas 2012, Paasi & Zimmerbauer 2016). And a relational understanding of the world as consisting of, not a mosaic-like continuum of bounded territorial entities, but rather a looser web of socially constructed networks and flows, where the territorial division will never adequately define a nation, a region or a municipality, has also been of vital importance for this thesis work.

Although, a relational understanding does not diminish the importance of the territorial conditions, and in studies of border related planning obstacles, the territorial parameters cannot be underestimated. Crucial to this thesis is the assumption that planning theory, likewise *relational geography*, has - while studying soft regions and fuzzy boundaries - not sufficiently paid attention to fixed spatial conditions such as local geography and territorial demarcations. Instead emphasis is usually put on flows, fluidity, emergence and mobility, while static and stabilized space - such as territorial borders - is neglected. This strong focus on flows and mobilities has been observed by amongst others Anssi Paasi and Kaj Zimmerbauer (2016; 2019), who call for a combination of relational and territorial understanding of the region and its boundaries.

However, even if Zimmerbauer & Paasi (2019) successfully demonstrate how territorial thinking and “old” territorial borders linger within new regional geographies, the influence of local borders is largely overlooked in research on soft regions as well as in planning theory. Therefore, in order to find research which elaborates more explicitly on what a border actually *is*, one has to turn to *border studies* - an interdisciplinary field with literature derived from a wide range of academic disciplines, such as geography, anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, political science and international relations (Haselsberger 2014 p.508).

Border studies has since the processual shift in the 1990s (from *border to bordering* - see Brambilla, 2015) been dominated by a processual perspective, whereas borders are seen as a result of a continually ongoing bordering process and therefore are made as “*human constructions, produced, reproduced and justified through social practices and discourses*” (Haselsberger 2014, p.518). Furthermore, when following Balibar’s notion that “*borders are everywhere*” (1998), more recent research illustrates that borders are not only to be found at the edge of the territory, but rather all over, constituted in broader social practice and discourses (e.g. Paasi 2009; Rumford 2012). The “*borders are everywhere*” concept also means that “*borders exist at multiple sites within and between polities, that they mean different things to different people, and work differently on different groups*” and thereby are not necessarily constituted through consensus (Rumford 2012, pp.894-895). This is a relational viewpoint that harmonizes well with the ontology offered by relational geography, and the two theoretical disciplines have thus proven useful to combine in the case study presented in Paper I.

Even so, the border studies literature has for decades, even after the processual shift, been dominated by studies of nation-state borders - the national edges, national borderlands etc. Within border studies, “a local perspective” on borders often refers to local effects of nation-state borders or supranational borders such as the EU border - not on local borders as such. Studies of actual local borders thus seem to be, with few exceptions (see e.g. Ruming & Houston 2013 and Steele et al. 2013) constantly absent within border studies. But even if the processual perspective on borders derives from studies of nation-state borders, it has been applicable also for the local scale and the studying of municipal borders, and therefore been of great value for this thesis. Also some of the key concepts have been useful in this work.

However, it is not only the local border that is absent within border studies: Beatrix Haselsberger states that planning too is absent since planning theory has not been contributing to this interdisciplinary field of literature (2014, p.505, though see Ruming & Houston 2013 and Steele et al. 2013). Haselsberger’s paper, itself a welcome exception from the above stated, is an inspiring study on this topic as she offers a bridge between planning theory and border studies where she “*reviews the border studies literature*

from a planning perspective and in doing so makes it accessible to the planning discipline” and by “Unpacking borders by examining their functions helps to develop an understanding as to why borders are never ‘perfect fits’” (2014, p.505).

Haselsberger’s findings are applicable on geopolitical boundaries on different scales, even though her focus, likewise border studies in general, is mainly directed towards the nation-state border. And likewise relational geographers in general, Haselsberger, in this paper, avoids going into the local geography, or the topography, of the border which would have been interesting as an approach to further investigate why borders are never “*perfect fits*”. Instead it is the multifaceted aspects of the border as a set of boundaries (geopolitical, sociocultural, economic, biophysical) permeable for different kinds of flows that compose the relational approach in her study - not the relational geography of the territorial, hard border itself, which would have been of value for a relational understanding of the topography, materiality and history of a local border.

Another contribution to the constitutional and spatial understanding of the border comes from *Actor Network Theory* (ANT) which has offered a complementary perspective and an ontological starting point while questioning and tracing the local border as a course of events (Murdoch, 2006). This perspective offers a place-based approach, inspired by amongst others Stephen Graham & Nigel Thrift (2006), Anique Hommels (2008) and Mattias Qviström (2018) which enables examinations of the role of the geography of planning while taking into consideration how space transforms into place (or a development site, a border zone or the border itself).

2.2 Inter-municipal cooperation

Within planning theory there have been several studies exploring the interrelations between spatial planning, on the one hand, and its institutional and organizational conditions on the other - both in a European and a Nordic context (Allmendinger & Haughton 2009; Mäntysalo et al. 2011; Salo & Mäntysalo 2017; Hrejla et al. 2017). Their primary purpose has been to clarify how, and how far, the institutional frameworks affect planning processes and outcome. This is also a frequent framing regarding research

within the field of the new geography of spatial planning which naturally pays more attention to the soft spaces of planning by tracing informal networks and temporary governance configurations (e.g. Allmendinger & Haughton 2009). There seem to be very few studies, if any, within these fields that also involve the territorial prerequisites and the geography itself, for example by investigating how geographical changes alter the conditions for planning.

Even if regional and inter-municipal solutions have become increasingly important and are often referred to as key challenges of contemporary spatial planning (Busck et al. 2008; Paasi 2009; EC 1999; Proposition 2009/10:170; SOU 2005:77; SOU 2015:59; Proposition 2017/18:266), inter-municipal cooperation in practice has only been limited subject to systematic comparative research (Hulst & van Montfort 2007). Some more recent Swedish research has touched upon border related planning issues while tracing the interrelation between different levels of governance (state, regional and municipal), regarding for example the coordination of infrastructure investments and integration of transport and land-use planning, or by investigating (lack of) policy compliance within municipal planning (e.g. Rader Olsson & Cars 2011; Hrelja 2011; 2015; Zakhour & Metzger 2018). Even if these studies have targeted related planning obstacles, the inter-municipal perspective has not been in focus and there is a striking deficiency within Swedish planning research regarding inter-municipal cooperation.

The topic is however more investigated within political science and economics, the latter often from a municipal benefit perspective and often with healthcare and technical services in focus (see e.g. Annell & Mattisson 2009 and Thomasson 2017) - and not spatial planning. Markus Gossas's (2006) doctoral dissertation *Kommunal samverkan och statlig nätverksstyrning (Municipal cooperation and state network governance)* is an important contribution to the understanding of how the vast and increasing amount of inter-municipal cooperation is part of a state-led reform - a successive shift from hierarchical governing to a network-based governance steering model. The implementation has involved decentralization, deregulations and reduced state control - which has led to increased authority as well as responsibility for the municipalities. Even if Gossas's case study

of the inter-municipal cooperation of Falun-Borlänge to some degree emphasizes a geographical approach for example by illustrating the spread of the municipal collaborations with Euclidian maps and by introducing “*thin regions*”, the local geography itself is not further investigated in this study. And even if there are points of contact, the prerequisites for inter-municipal spatial planning in particular are not the focus of this dissertation.

Another set of literature that has offered a valuable complementary critical approach when tracing governance aspects related to the legal and institutional prerequisites for inter-municipal planning, was given by scholars influenced by Chantal Mouffe’s ideas on the questioning of rational consensus (2005). Her ideas have evolved within planning theory and the critical approach consists of, amongst other things, acknowledging that spatial planning contains a political and competitive dimension, and that consensus is not always obtainable (see e.g. Hillier 2003; Pløger 2004; Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw 2010; Philip Allmendinger & Graham Haughton 2012). This critical approach may be understood as a reaction to the deliberative and communicative planning discourse that has been highly influential, both to planning theory and practice, since the 1980s (Strömghren 2007; Allmendinger & Haughton 2009) - a discourse that also underpins the design and praxis of the Swedish planning legislation (Strömghren, 2007).

2.3 Theoretical considerations

As noted in the previous sections, each different research field leaves a certain knowledge gap:

- The influence of local borders on spatial planning seems overlooked in research on soft regions as well as in planning theory.
- There are only a few papers within border studies that examine the role of local borders within spatial planning.
- Territorial and local geographical parameters are largely overlooked in (Swedish) planning research regarding the planning system and institutional settings.
- Political science regarding Swedish inter-municipal cooperation rarely takes local geography and prerequisites for spatial planning into account.

- There is a lack of Swedish planning research regarding inter-municipal cooperation.

One of the things highlighted by the above, is that local geography and local borders are largely overlooked within all research fields that this thesis draws upon. That is, there are few studies with a specific focus on these issues: plenty of research, however, studies related themes, or deals with the local border implicitly, which offers at least a base for developing studies of the local border. These knowledge gaps, as well as the other *lacunas* observed are of importance for the relevance of this thesis work and will be more thoroughly discussed in the final sections *Conclusions* and *Discussion*.

The studies presented in Papers I and II have a common base in planning theory as represented in the new geography of planning. But while the first paper leans on further research on soft regions, within the new geography of planning, in combination with knowledge gained from relational geography, border studies and political science - the second paper is more heavily based on political science in order both to understand and to investigate the legal and institutional prerequisites and how these settings, sprung from another time, are reflected in the new geography.

The two fields of theory described in the previous sections *Soft space* and *Inter-municipal cooperation* enable two complementary perspectives. The first one offers an understanding of the spatial dimensions of the border and border related planning issues which include the geography, topography and the materiality as well as the relationality of the border and the border zones, development sites etc. This perspective is crucial for an understanding of the local conditions of border related planning, which are the subject of the first study, but are also of importance for the second study which regards the overall legal framework and the planning system in relation to certain general geographical changes (see Section 4).

The second perspective, *Inter-municipal cooperation*, covers literature highly relevant for the understanding of cross-border collaboration and the institutional settings, primarily in a Swedish context. This knowledge contributes mainly to the second study, but is of importance also for the first study since it has offered a fuller understanding of the general prerequisites

which are the foundation of the planning practice that is part of the context and the target of the first study.

The two theoretical perspectives thus complement and support each other, in a way that mirrors the evolved research questions in each respective study (see Section 1.4). The common ground for these different fields of research, described in the two previous sections, is that they all to a greater or lesser extent are dealing with consequences of successive geographical changes. These geographical changes to some degree coincide with the changes earlier described as the origin of the emergence of the soft planning spaces according to the new geography of spatial planning - for instance increased mobility, a shift towards policy and network governance, new neoliberal planning approaches and new challenges in providing infrastructure and social services (Healey 2007; Allmendinger & Haughton 2009; Haughton et al. 2010; Heley 2013). These geographical changes are also to a high degree the origin of the observations and problem formulation earlier mentioned as a starting point for this thesis work, and parts of them are also the focus of the second paper presented in this thesis.

Geographical changes and their impact on the conditions of spatial planning - the legal framework as well as the inter-municipal planning in practice - is thus the major trajectory of this thesis, and the different fields of theory have all been important to the outcome of the thesis work as they have offered different, and complementary perspectives on the problematics - perspectives crucial to be able to create a fuller understanding of these complex phenomena.

3. Methods and material

Both spatial planning and municipal borders are the result of human activities and thereby social constructions. Interpretation and understanding of the meaning of these complex social, and societal, phenomena, are central aspects of this thesis work. The research, which has an interdisciplinary character, is thus to be positioned within the area of Social Science with roots in hermeneutics (Johansson, 2016).

The general research question - *how do municipal division and border location affect the possibilities for spatial planning and urban development?* - inhabits a field of problems rather than a specific one (see Section 1.3 - The Problem). Since these problematics have developed from my prior experiences as a practitioner, the research questions are mainly practice-driven.

3.1 A qualitative approach

The thesis is thus based on a qualitative research approach that strives for a deeper understanding rather than explanations of direct causal relationships. Qualitative in-depth understanding is context-dependent, and prior knowledge of the context is crucial for the understanding of complex phenomena such as the problematics described in this thesis. In the study presented in Paper I, the context is the local prerequisites for inter-municipal planning and cooperation - a context that may vary a lot when it comes to organizations, steering culture, political circumstances, relations between politicians and officials, collaboration traditions, planning traditions, habits etc. (Hansson 2013; Hrelja 2015). To be able to understand how the local context - the local management and working practices - affects how

municipalities practice spatial planning and cooperation in border areas it is necessary to use methods with the ability to “*‘close in’ on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice*” (Flyvbjerg 2006, p.235). In the second study the context is found on a more overall level since this is a study of the Swedish planning system and the geographical and legal conditions for inter-municipal planning. For both studies it applies that the complex character of the phenomena demands a methodology that can produce empirically grounded, in-depth descriptions from different sources. Therefore, the case study method has been chosen since it fulfills these criteria and is suitable for studying complex phenomena in context (Yin 2009). Case studies also have a long tradition within planning research and can be seen as a pedagogical tool that produces the type of context-dependent knowledge that is important for understanding processes and expertise (Flyvbjerg 2006).

3.2 Research process

Paper I is based on a single case study conducted in Hallsberg and Kumla - two municipalities in Örebro County that have a long history of municipal border related conflicts and collaborations. The case has been chosen as it is rich in information and critical in the sense that it has been judged to have “*strategic importance in relation to the general problem*” (Flyvbjerg 2006, p.229). The study traces the inter-municipal relations and local border geography with the help of three main sources: interviews, documents and maps and plans.

The interview study consists of ten semi-structured interviews (Kvale et al. 2009) with leading politicians and officials from the two municipalities. One later additional interview with an official from the County Administrative Board was conducted to obtain an independent reconciliation of the interview knowledge gained in both municipalities. While preparing and carrying out the interviews, my own experience from practical border related planning issues was of great value - both for the problem formulation, for asking relevant questions and for the ability to understand and deepen the discussions, but also for the general understanding of the complexity of the actual case. The interview knowledge is thus to a high degree constructed through the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (c.f.

Flyvbjerg 2006; Kvale et al. 2009). The interviews were audio recorded and usually lasted for 1-1.5 hours. After the transcription, the interviews were anonymized in respect of, and in agreement with, the interviewee in order to make them feel more comfortable and freer to speak openly and truthfully, knowing that they could not be personally linked to the outcome of the interviews or the result of the study. No subsequent validation has taken place with the respondents. Instead, simultaneous validation of the interview knowledge was part of the conversation since I, as an interviewer, ensured that I understood the matter correctly by, for example, asking counter-questions, repeating the question from a different perspective, asking for further explanation and so on. This procedure is described by Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkman as the third step of interview analysis, which thus involves a simultaneous interpretation (2009, p212). The subsequent content analysis procedure was influenced by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as described by Jonathan A. Smith et al. (1999) and has been performed by both authors in order to find relevant themes and thematic connections, within and between the interviews, that are relevant to the problem and the overall research question. The interviews offered valuable insights into the local inter-municipal relations and the border related planning challenges - and how they are performed and perceived by various actors. The interviews also helped us to find new relevant public documents and to understand and verify the contents of public documents, and vice versa.

The documents studied in paper I are mainly public documents consisting of municipal comprehensive plans, detailed development plans, investigations, reports, decisions and minutes as well as official statistics and governmental reports, bills and legislation. The municipal documents have been identified primarily by searches on each municipality's website and by tracing comprehensive plans, detailed plans, policies and other governing documents, but also by the interviews where respondents occasionally suggested documents and meeting notes that might be of interest for the case. Maps and plans have been selected and analyzed in order to create a geographical understanding of the border related conflicts and collaborations that the interview respondents have described in their stories. The overall document information has been analyzed and thematically organized around themes of relevance for the case.

Paper II details a case study of the planning system and the legal and geographical conditions for inter-municipal cooperation in relation to certain geographical changes that have taken place since the current municipal division came about. The study can be considered as an embedded single-case study where the embedded units of analysis are inter-municipal cooperation and geographical changes (cf. Yin 2009, pp.46-52). The empirical material derives from sources such as geographical statistics and public documents, in combination with secondary literature mainly from political science. Due to the specific role of the municipalities in Scandinavia, the literature scanning has primarily focused on the northern part of Europe. Searches began with notions like ‘inter-municipal’, ‘cooperation’, ‘collaboration’, ‘municipal borders’, ‘local boundaries’, in combination with concepts like ‘planning’, ‘land use’ and ‘geography’. The direct search results were relatively meagre. Yet, by tracing key references a useful synthesis of literature has crystallized.

The public documents consist of Official Government Reports and Bills, Swedish legislation and statistics from the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket), while the geographical material primarily consists of statistical data from Statistics Sweden (SCB). The public documents, as well as the geographical statistics, were gathered and selected through an analytical procedure where the secondary literature as well as the author’s own experience from planning practice has been of importance in finding material of relevance to the problematics and the research question (cf. Bowen 2009). During the subsequent analysis the documentary information and the geographical data were thematically organized around themes of relevance for the case and its embedded units “*in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed*” (Bowen 2009). Validity was gained by the triangulation of data derived from the documentary analysis in relation to the geographical analysis and the secondary literature.

3.3 Methodological considerations

Primarily, there are some ethical considerations that have affected the choice of case. In consideration of risking conflicts of loyalty to my employer or fellow colleagues in Staffanstorps, or to fellow colleagues in my professional

network, I have chosen not to study the border phenomena within the southernmost part of Sweden.

The two studies have given opportunities to try some variants within case study methodology and qualitative inquiry. The study presented in Paper I is a more typical case study as it involves in-depth interviews as one of several multiple sources of evidence that, together with the document analysis and examinations of map and plans, has enabled validation through triangulation. The quality and coherence between the interview knowledge and the knowledge retrieved from documents, maps and plans has given a consistent and good understanding of the case. One potential weakness in this study is that no subsequent validation of the interview material has taken place with the respondents. This has to some degree been offset by the simultaneous validation during the interviews and the latter reconciling interview with the official from the County Administrative Board.

The study presented in Paper two differs methodologically from the first study. This is partly because it exhibits certain characteristics from an embedded single-case study - the sub-units of analysis - but also since it contains secondary literature as a source of evidence. A triangulation with higher degree of validity could have been obtained if this study had been complemented by yet another primary source of empirical material - for example by conducting a survey or a set of interviews.

The methods used in the two studies have complemented each other in a way that has been cross-fertilizing: The case study method used in the first study enables practice-based interview knowledge, which is relevant for the understanding of the actual case. But the knowledge gained is also relevant for a fuller understanding of the planning system, the very foundation of the planning practice - which is the subject of the second study. On the other hand the analyses of the planning system and its legal and institutional framework in combination with analyses of the geographical changes, as conducted in the latter study, have generated knowledge valuable for the analysis of the empirical material derived from the first study, and thereby contributed to, amongst other things, a richer understanding of the interviews.

Additionally, and regarding both studies, my own experience as a practicing spatial planner has also been of a certain importance when analyzing the empirical material. This is partly because it involves a valuable pre-understanding of the contextual settings - the planning practice and the legal conditions and effects of praxis - and partly since my previous experience has offered a skilled spatial and geographical understanding of border related planning obstacles. However, pre-understanding might also have a negative impact on the research work and these aspects will be further discussed in the last section (*Discussion*).

4. Papers I - II

This section is a brief presentation of the two papers included in the dissertation. Both papers are available as appendices in the printed form of this thesis.

4.1 Paper I: Negotiating asymmetric borders in an emerging soft region

This first paper investigates the problematics from a municipal perspective. It is based on a single case study of two municipalities, Hallsberg and Kumla, with a long history of border related collaborations and conflicts. The discrepancies between the municipalities, regarding how the border and the geography is understood, in municipal concerns and their abilities to act, and so on, are in this paper referred to as asymmetries. The theoretical starting point derives from relational geography as found within planning theory and border studies. The study also draws on (and aims to complement) previously conducted research on inter-municipal cooperation in Sweden, which has explored collaborations, primarily in sectors other than spatial planning.

The findings emphasize the need to consider the geography of local borders, to reveal asymmetries which could weaken the opportunities for inter-municipal collaboration and regional development. The case demonstrates how one municipality is active in trying to negotiate the border, whereas the other procrastinates around any actions which do not lie in their interest. By adopting a relational understanding of the border this paper also reveals how the border can be a *matter of concern* for one partner and just a *matter of fact* for the other (see Latour 2004, on these concepts). Therefore, the interest in overcoming a border is not necessarily shared, and the opinions

on why, how and when to revise a border are likely to differ. The relational understanding of the border helps to reveal such asymmetries (and power relations). Furthermore, the case of Kumla and Hallsberg shows that renegotiation of the local border feeds competition and leads to old conflicts being revived and re-created. The border renegotiation thus encourages lingering territorial and protectionist thinking. Something that, in turn, can have an impact on other inter-municipal cooperation and the relationship between municipalities and other actors in general.

4.2 Paper II: Inter-municipal Spatial Planning in a New Geography - disclosing discrepancies between the legal framework and a new geographical context

The second paper explores the question from a state perspective by examining the legal and territorial prerequisites. The paper is based on an in-depth examination of the institutional conditions of Swedish planning and municipal division in relation to the emergence of a new municipal geography. This new geography consists of three considerable changes which have taken place since the country's current division into municipalities occurred, namely:

1. Urbanization and urban sprawl. Population growth, rural depopulation, peri-urban development and urbanization leading to an expansion of urban and densely populated areas.
2. Regional expansion. Local labor markets merging as a result of increased mobility.
3. Revaluation of the relationship between the state and the municipalities, involving decentralization and a shift from a traditional hierarchical to a network style of governance promoting inter-municipal cooperation and flexible borders

The institutional conditions are specifically investigated regarding the general prerequisites for inter-municipal spatial planning and planning in proximity to municipal border areas. By presenting a synthesis of knowledge this paper aims to point out the direction for further research rather than being theory-developing, and it intends to add a geographical and territorial dimension to planning theory and political science by showing legal-

geographical aspects of how governance configurations may influence processes of spatial planning.

The findings indicate that the current municipal division and planning legislation, which are both based on a 50-year-old idea of autonomous municipalities working as functional regions, is challenged by the emergence of the new municipal geography. As a result of the successive shift from a hierarchical to a network-based governance, the municipalities are prompted to cooperate more while, at the same time, the incentives for collaboration within spatial planning are being reduced by partly untimely legislation, an asymmetric spread of municipal interests and a growing competition for new residents and business start-ups. Both the need for inter-municipal coordination of planning actions, and the competition between municipalities are underpinned by regional expansion and the spread of built-up areas. As a result, the municipal planning monopoly and simultaneous requirements for inter-municipal coordination tend to consolidate local borders and impede and paralyze planning - especially in areas close to such borders.

5. Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates how the administrative local boundaries - the municipal borders - can have a serious impeding impact on spatial planning and development. An impact that tends to increase as a result of the emergence of the new geography, which does not match the “old” geography taken for granted in PBL and manifested in existing municipal borders.

Paper I argues the need to consider the geography of local borders, to reveal asymmetries which may weaken the opportunities for inter-municipal collaboration and development in the border zones.

Paper II illuminates the importance of geography on a more general level by mirroring certain geographical changes in the current legislation and institutional settings and thereby investigating the prerequisites for municipal border related spatial planning.

Thus, besides the above mentioned border phenomena, it is the territorial and geographical perspective that is an important common denominator in the two papers - a denominator also emphasized overall in this compilation frame.

5.1 Relevance for academia

The empirical material presented in the case study of Kumla and Hallsberg is in itself is of general relevance to academia (and practice) as it offers insights and understanding about the complexity of border related planning and land use challenges. This relevance is context-dependent and thereby primarily of value for planning research within similar contextual settings, for instance the other Nordic countries. Yet, I would argue that the case is

critical and of strategic importance (Flyvbjerg 2006, p.229), since the understanding gained is applicable also in slightly different settings.

The findings presented in the first paper contribute to a relational understanding of the local border, which brings in notions of history, domain structure and morphology. This understanding opens up for a discussion on asymmetries, and for further research regarding the interplay between the renegotiation of the local borders within emerging soft regions. The relational approach should be applicable on administrative borders at various levels (e.g. regional and national borders) and therefore will be of importance for border studies in general. Even though this approach is not new within this field, the additional notion of *asymmetries* might be useful as a concept for studies within this cross-disciplinary field. The concept might, as well, be useful for research within the constituent “pure” academic disciplines, for instance geography and political science, as well as for planning research in general. The findings also contribute by bridging planning theory to border studies and thereby, like Haselsberger (2014), encourage planning theorists to acknowledge and embrace the interdisciplinary field of border studies.

Literature on deliberative planning approaches proceeds from the assumption that interests differ between different actors and that a major task for planning is to overcome disagreements by the balancing of such interests. A more phronetic or agonistic inspired literature also acknowledges divergent interests as opposing and sometimes incompatible. But the relational understanding of a local border offered in the study of Kumla-Hallsberg shows that divergences may go beyond the “classic” conflicts of interests: The historically rooted and embedded conflicts in Kumla-Hallsberg haunt the conversation in a way that, from time to time, procrastinates and excludes possibilities for negotiations - thereby making any planning or collaborative actions powerless. These are findings of relevance for planning research in general, and for (planning) research involving power relations in particular.

The study presented in the second paper indicates how municipal borders risk impeding spatial planning as a result of the emergence of a new municipal geography alongside a planning legislation based on old ideas of municipalities as functional regions.

In a broader sense the second paper demonstrates how the prerequisites of spatial planning may be investigated as a consequence of legal and governance configurations reflected in certain geographical changes. Thereby the study emphasizes the possibilities of using a geographical and territorial perspective as a starting point when analyzing legal and institutional conditions - possibilities relevant for research both within planning theory and political science. This paper also suggests that a critical planning theory approach, inspired by Chantal Mouffe's ideas on questioning of rational consensus (2005), has been of use when analyzing the institutional settings in the light of the geographical changes taking place since the last municipal division reforms. The critical approach has facilitated identification of potential legal-geographical pitfalls and thereby made it possible to reveal the consequences for spatial planning and the conditions for inter-municipal planning actions.

The overall conclusions from the two papers demonstrate the need for inter-municipal planning difficulties and potential or factual border conflicts to be understood at the interface between the geography of the specific case on the one hand, and the administrative and legislative framework and planning practice on the other. Thereby the thesis contributes with knowledge and findings that indicate that the understanding of the geography and the territorial parameters are of vital importance for research on the process and outcome of spatial planning. Thus, this thesis helps to bring the theoretical discussion on planning back to a spatial, geographical, and territorial context - a need that has been noted by relational geographers as a reaction to the flexible and fluid planning spaces previously associated with both relational geography and the new geography of planning literature. This may be of value also for border studies theory which since the processual turn has been mainly occupied by the study of borders as a socially constructed process, with the risk of underestimating the importance of the territorial parameters.

This thesis may also be of value as a knowledge base for studies and education within landscape architecture and landscape planning. Even if the impact on the landscape has not been the actual focus of this work, this thesis demonstrates how municipal borders affect the conditions for spatial planning, and from that follows that the borders have an impact on spatial

development and thereby the evolution of the landscape itself. The administrative boundaries (current as well as historical), which we may believe are invisible, contain powers that may have a crucial influence on the morphology and the physical appearance of a landscape, and thereby also may have a crucial effect on future evolution and possibilities. The overall findings are thus pointing at the importance of a fuller understanding of (local) borders for a richer understanding of landscapes.

5.2 Relevance for practice

Paper I shows that border asymmetries are likely to spur provocations and cause conflicts. Embedded and historically rooted contradictions may occasionally affect possibilities for inter-municipal collaboration in a deeper way than “plain” conflicts of interests: By preventing dialogue these contradictions procrastinate and exclude possibilities for negotiations, balancing of interests and coordination of planning actions - something that may also have a negative impact on the conditions for other inter-municipal cooperation and collaborative actions. Therefore it is of value with a relational understanding to reveal asymmetric borders - and for such borders to be understood as part and parcel of regional enlargement - both in order to facilitate inter-municipal planning actions and to improve collaboration more generally.

Paper II indicates that the emergence of a new municipal geography entails that the municipal planning monopoly and simultaneous demands for inter-municipal coordination tend to entrench local borders, and impede and paralyze spatial planning - especially in areas close to such borders. In line with this, and in order to boost inter-municipal spatial planning, the paper suggests that a more agonistic approach should permeate both the legal framework and planning practice. Open reporting and recognition of interests can prevent paralysis by unspoken conflicts, and bring about a more effective spatial planning - a spatial planning able to solve inter-municipal planning challenges.

Altogether, the study of the planning system and the legal prerequisites, in combination with the case study of the planning practice in Kumla and Hallsberg, provide a plethora of practical strategies and methods that

municipalities may use straight away, in order to overcome border related planning challenges:

- *Joint, or mutually synchronized, planning actions* on comprehensive and/or detailed planning level.
- *Inter-municipal cooperation* with joint administration and/or political committee regarding spatial planning.
- *Border adjustments based on agreements.* Division change according to the Act on changes in Sweden's subdivision into municipalities and county councils (SFS 1979: 411).

However, the above mentioned methods presuppose consensus and cooperation between the municipalities. But as stated in this thesis, consensus and coordination of interests are not always achievable. To overcome border obstacles during periods of deadlock, other methods are required. The following, slightly more provocative, methods can be used, without the neighboring municipality's consent:

- *Provocation through asymmetric planning actions.* For instance by claiming land use interests close to or within the territory of the neighboring municipality in a consultation proposal without prior coordination. The proposal, and the reaction from the neighboring municipality, will be observed by the County Administrative Boards and the question of inter-municipal coordination is raised - and thus, through state intervention, the formerly passive neighboring municipality is forced to react to the matter.
- *Strategic land purchases in the neighboring municipality.* As demonstrated in Paper I it is possible for several minor purchases of land to lead to a quite extensive border adjustment as a result of the property formation when merging properties on each side of the border - a fairly simple process if the area in question houses no residents and no formal objections are raised against the proposed adjustment (Chapter 1 § 1-3 Act on changes in Sweden's division into municipalities and county councils (1979: 411)).

While Paper I captures the drawbacks of these last strategies, they should nevertheless be mentioned as part of the municipal toolbox this thesis has identified.

6. Discussion

By highlighting and offering a deeper understanding of border related planning obstacles this thesis will hopefully contribute with knowledge leading to improvements in practice, in case law and in the planning system. Improvements that will benefit society by enhancing our ability to carry out better spatial planning with the capacity to solve overarching and cross-border planning challenges - challenges that have become increasingly important in recent decades as a result of, amongst other things, regional enlargement and an emerging need for increased environmental consideration and climate change adaptation

In this time of network governance, where more and more planning tasks demand inter-municipal and regional solutions, it becomes increasingly important to make such solutions feasible. Therefore this thesis calls for a spatial planning that is based on open and open-minded discussions, acknowledging that divergent and incompatible interests are equally legitimate and that consensus is not always achievable in every situation.

Despite the previously stated emerging need for municipalities to be able to solve inter-municipal planning challenges, there is a lack of Swedish planning research regarding inter-municipal cooperation and the conditions for cross-border planning. This thesis work aims to reduce that knowledge gap by offering certain understanding and findings of value to the planning research community, and hopefully also to arouse interest for further studies within this increasingly important field.

In the Swedish political debate, further municipal mergers have not, since the time of the last mergers, the late 60s to early 70s, been discussed as a

potential way of overcoming border related obstacles. On the contrary the debate has been permeated by a great respect for relatively strong municipal autonomy, and by a general assumption that an increase of inter-municipal cooperation has a capacity “*to at least partially cure not only the adverse effects which inevitably arise at each administrative boundary but also certain existing shortcomings in the division itself*” (Proposition 1984/85:216, p.14). The findings presented in this thesis open up for a broader discussion regarding whether “*partially cure*” is still sufficient when it comes to overcoming border related planning obstacles. To some degree the findings contrast with the current planning practice and the Swedish legislation, which is based on the assumption that inter-municipal planning matters will be jointly investigated and solved by the municipalities on their own initiative. Such planning tends to presume symmetrical relations and open disclosure of interests - conditions not always attainable. The findings thus call for a planning legislation that takes into account the asymmetry of municipal borders - for instance by giving the CABs, or a regional planning body within the Regional Counties, a clear mandate and incentives for observing and raising planning matters that need inter-municipal coordination. This though requires another perspective from the regional authorities as the regional perspective will likely not discover local asymmetries. As demonstrated in Paper I, the asymmetries entail that the border and the border related problems are enacted differently - the two municipalities do not share the same border. Neither does the region see the same border since the regional authorities enact the border on the basis of a regional rationality. In order to fully understand the border asymmetries the regional authority needs *seeing like a municipality* (cf. Valverde, 2011; and 2009, on scales) - and not only as one municipality: In order to understand the local border asymmetries the regional authorities need to understand the border and the border related problems from the different perspective of all municipalities involved - including the local geography and all different interests, stakeholders and power relations, involved.

But the question is whether a better understanding and mandates for regional authorities to raise demands for crossborder planning actions are enough? A further elaboration of the findings may come to the conclusion that both the planning practice, the legislation, and perhaps even the local territorial demarcation, need to be adjusted in order for the society to adapt

to the new prerequisites that have evolved due to a successive spread of built-up areas, regional expansion and distinctive network governance where coordination and implementation of overall crucial planning issues are left to voluntarily initiated networks of municipalities and other local actors.

However, certain changes in the planning system have recently been implemented: A new amendment, inserted in the Planning and Building Act in 2019, states that indicative regional spatial planning is mandatory in the counties of Stockholm and Skåne (SFS 2010:900; Proposition 2017/18:266). However, the aim of this non-binding regional planning is not to interfere with the local planning autonomy (Proposition 2017/18:266, p. 36), and as this legal obligation to conduct regional spatial planning also applies to only two of the country's 21 counties, this minor change in the planning system might not be overly important for resolving the border related planning issues that this thesis highlights.

Further research

The conclusions from this thesis work call for further planning research that takes into account the local geography and territorial conditions - parameters of special importance within emerging soft regions. One possible theoretical starting point for further research on this topic could derive from combining relational geography and agonistic planning theory. Such a combination of theoretical perspectives could be useful for the exploration of, amongst other things, the interplay between the renegotiation of the local borders. This could also be a useful combination for further studies on embedded and historically rooted conflicts, such as those revealed in the case-study of Hallsbég and Kumla. As these conflicts haunt conversations and prevent dialogue, and thereby make any collaborative action powerless, they are likely to pass under the radar in studies that draw on a deliberative planning theoretical perspective.

A practitioner's reflection

Finally, some reflections regarding some special concerns and challenges that may face the professional practitioner when performing temporarily on the playing field of academia.

Practical experience and pre-understanding are great assets when it comes to formulating relevant societal challenges or identifying a problem area. It

is also of value when it comes to understanding the societal context, to perform in depth interviews and to be able to understand interview knowledge and triangulate different types of empirical material etc.

However, regarding pre-understanding, it is fully understandable, and a bit peculiar, that one's own prior practical experiences are not directly at hand as empirical material to the researching practitioner, and must not be confused as such. It is peculiar since I, as a researcher, may interview practitioners, planners, politicians etc., in order to collect interview knowledge. I may analyse the transcriptions, draw some empirically grounded conclusions, and finally present them as findings in a peer-reviewed paper. Thereby the practical knowledge has been transformed into scientific knowledge. The funny thing here is that I, the very same person, may also, as a practicing planner be part of an interview study conducted by other researchers - and thereby contribute to the knowledge transfer of my own, from practice gained, knowledge, from practice to academia. Naturally I cannot do that transformation on my own, as one person - it would at least be very problematic from both a methodological and an ethical perspective. Even so, the experience of knowing something from practice, but not knowing what academia knows about that specific matter, may cause some frustration and a feeling of carrying water to the river.

Pre-understanding can also be thought to lead to a more gentle kind of bias - for example through affecting the power symmetry between the researcher and the interviewees (cf. Kvale et al. 2009, p.49) and thereby, for example, influencing the interviews (unconsciously) by directing conversations towards confirmation of what one as a practitioner already thinks one knows. Or by analysing empirical material with a strong and given pre-understanding that may make it difficult to see connections other than those you already know. But on the other hand - the researcher is never in an alienated position and there are always pre-understandings and preconceptions involved - even for professional researchers, active entirely within academia.

A more general challenge that I think you may experience, as a researching practitioner, regards the difficulty that occurs when you come to the academia with a practitioner-driven problem and *then* start looking for a theoretical context to place the problem into. I imagine that it might be easier

to find the proper theoretical framework if the problem is generated within academia as part of an ongoing scientific discussion - already given a certain theoretical framework. On the other hand, research conducted from practitioner-driven problems may have the advantage of being of a more prompting relevance for practice, hopefully leading to faster changes and societal improvements.

To end, a few lines about another peculiarity that the attentive reader has probably already observed by now: The main subject for this thesis work - local borders and local geography - is actually absent or largely overlooked within all previously mentioned research literature that this thesis draws upon. This could be an indication that the subject for this thesis is not relevant to these theoretical fields, or that the problem formulation and the research question are not adequately posed. This may of course also be a confirmation that this topic has not been researched before, at least not with this subject as a starting point. If so, it might also be an indication revealing that academia may have "blind spots" allowing certain problems and potential research topics to slip through the net, and therefore needs a closer collaboration with practice in order to capture the most societally relevant questions. This conclusion supports the intention, and verifies the need, of the overall research project *Närkomm* which amongst other things aims to increase collaboration between practice and academia, and also has made this thesis possible.

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