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Regional City: conceptual and analytical framework

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Abstract:

For an increasing number of people the daily life operates simultaneously at two scales – a superstructural scale (the Regional City) and a sub-structural scale (the local place). ‘Local places’ refer here, foremost, to smaller settlements and towns throughout a region, rather than subcentres and explicit parts of a metropolitan centre. A Regional City provides a framework that contributes to shape local places physically and socially, and, at the same time, the physical and social character of various local places build-up and constitute the Regional City. Hence, a Regional City is recognised as a product of interdependencies between the regional level and local places. However, the concept Regional City is not clearly defined and its characteristics are rather vague, especially due to difficulties to establish these interdependences; therefore it requires further theoretical interpretation. The aim of this paper is to contribute to a further understanding of the Regional City and its characteristics. The analysis of the Regional City is based on some assumptions, e.g. (i) its development is unbalanced due to tensions between social and regional interests, and, thus, local places within the regional city are asymmetrically reproduced and transformed; and (ii) it is individually perceived depending of how different activities are performed on both regional and local levels. The first assumption is partially discussed in the context of empirical observation from the Greater Stockholm Region (Mälardalen Region) in Sweden.

1. Introduction and background

The ongoing conceptual dissolution of urban and regional studies has challenged traditional understanding about cities’ structure and how they relate to each other. Previously cities were conceived as complicated systems which were represented and explained in urban and regional studies through two basic forms: *the internal structure of cities*, e.g. a city is structured around a central business district, and *the external relation of cities*, e.g. organised as national urban systems (Taylor & Lang, 2004). Nevertheless, these forms no longer correspond to the current economic, political and social development. Cities’ structures and their relationship have shifted from complicated to complex systems and, thus, demand new explanatory forms.

Regional City is one of many labels that emerged to describe what has been going on *in, between and over* cities. Thus, this article is an attempt to contribute to a theoretical basis that support an interpretation of what a Regional City is as well as to determine its practical implications. In doing this it is important to discuss how current economic, political and technological forces have been reshaping regions, and, thus, generating new spatialities. Consequently, the article also addresses the need to review the concept of scale which has been much discussed given current societal changes, and, therefore, has influenced the understanding of territorialities¹ such as place and space (Paasi, 2002). This discussion aims at provide my foundation to analyse the Regional City under a dialectical perspective between social and physical aspects, which reproduce and/or transform one another.

Technological innovations have allowed flows of information, knowledge and money to circulate across the world quickly, contributing to intensify the ongoing, but previously slow,

¹ According to Paasi (2009) territoriality ‘is an expression of control of people. Territoriality is not constant but a political, spatially selective strategy that can be exercised or not’

process of compression between time and space (Harvey, 1989). It has supported processes of economic decentralisation and globalisation enabling the emergence of new geographies where physical and political boundaries are no longer as important as before (Sassen, 1991; Castells, 1997). These shifts have contested usual concepts such as scale and territoriality resulting in new forms of spatialities.

The most apparent example of rescaling regions is the establishment of the European Union which has its roots in international concerns in respect of global flows of (xxx) trade and a common political and economic development in Europe. Common market strategies, aiming at counteract negative effects of globalisation and pledge competitiveness, have impacted the European territory, which is conceived as *'the new dimension of European policy'* (ESPD, 1999: 7). Then, based on policentric morphological and political postulates, concepts such as cohesion, competitiveness and sustainability are translated to territorial policies, generating new spatialities such as Functional Urban Areas (FUA's).

The ideas behind FUA's frame the European space under a functional logic. Urban areas are clustered according to their ability to provide effective conditions for individuals, enterprises and communities to perform their activities. FUA's provide the European functional map that indicates the efficiency of the territory in terms of competitive and/or complementary advantages at the urban and regional level. It recognizes global flows logic by allowing delimitation of functional areas over administrative boundaries. The main argument behind this framing is that it is expected to lead to a more rational and strategic planning and visioning (ESPON 1.1.1, 2005). However, it deals only with half of the problem. Even though FUA's acknowledges dependence between global and regional scales it neglects the local perspective. It is basically a top down process based on a geographical scalar logic, and its determination is more quantitative than qualitative. Cities within a region are considered as consumption and provision nodes but the social reproduction through institutional, political and cultural complexity is disregarded.

Furthermore, it implies that individual's daily lives are influenced by a number of competing regional frames, which are mostly settled according to economic interests guided by competitiveness (reference). In this sense regional spatial policies could be seen as reaction to global market forces that in many cases are manifested in changing regional landscapes through infrastructures investments, i.e. motorways, railways, aiming at improvements of accessibility. A blind spot in this discussion is, however, how the transformation on the regional level affects local places, in physical and social senses, e.g. in regards to development of built structures and the social use of local and regional environments.

The political aim to enhance 'functional regions', with larger job markets accessible to the population by means of better transport infrastructure, might have negative effects in some local places, whereas others in the same region will benefit from the development. One side effect of better transport facilities is that competition between different localities most likely will increase, as a greater number of local places will come up for consideration when people and companies choose between possible locations. Improving regional accessibility may also enhance sprawl once it enlarges individuals' choices to live and work in different places. It also implies that the amount of traveled kilometers per capita is likely to grow considerably. One may argue that better regional transport infrastructure enhances economic and social interaction between different places stimulating a balanced economic growth. On the other hand, it might as well cause negative impacts for some places. For example, small towns might become 'dormitories' of larger centers, which most likely will polarize economic activities, and, thus, harming economic and social performance in minor centers.

Consequently, it is also necessary to identify how regional planning goals and resulting infrastructure investments have an effect on individual's social practices, in the form of behavior, preferences and values concerning e.g. (LOOK AT THE APPLICATION shopping, etc.). It is imperative to determine how individuals' social practices affect the local places in physical and social perspectives. To deal with these questions it is, then, necessary to verify how regions are individually perceived. This reasoning acknowledges that reproduction and transformation of places within a Regional City is function of how individuals can stretch her/his territorial boundaries through their social practices. Thus, the social practices influences a Regional City's configuration from a bottom up perspective.

Hence, the aim with this article is to address, through the concept of Regional City, the planning gap between regional infrastructure development and individuals' daily life experiences. The article is based on two assumptions about Regional City. First, its development is unbalanced due to tensions between social and regional interests, and, thus, local places within a Regional City are asymmetrically reproduced and transformed. Second, it is individually perceived depending of how different activities (i.e. social practices) are performed on both regional and local levels.

Following this introduction the paper is arranged in four more sections. Section 2 presents some theoretical arguments that justify the need to build up the concept Regional City. Based on a literature review, section 3 discusses the two assumptions in relation to planning. Section 4 presents some empirical observation about few cases in the Mälardalen Region. A tentative socio economic analysis is performed based on data, before and after the implementation of Svealand line. Thus, the analysis is taken merely as indicator of the effects of improvements of regional infrastructure has on local places. Section 5 discusses the results, some limitations and suggests further research to deepen the discussion of both assumptions.

2. Theoretical points of departure: What is a regional City?

Regions used to be commonly understood as an intermediate level between national and local scales. However, increasing mobility and its resulting networks of flows have affected this state-based logic, and thus instead placed regions as important 'unities' to compete in international markets (Paasi, 2002). It has lead to a complex network of government and non-governmental actors, that beyond to share economic institutional governance also allowed more direct interaction between global and local scales.

Globalisation processes have put regions under competitiveness' rationale (e.g. global cities) in which urban agglomerations are usually seen as engines for economic development. In particular, they are seen as fields (sites) of economic flow, information and sociability that support the economy. Thus, according to this reasoning, regions might be able to sustain international competitiveness, by creating '*the necessary kinds of economic social and physical structures which facilitate and complement the deepening of globalisation*' (Held at all, 2003). However, this might also mean that it generates and intensifies conflicts between global and local demands. At the same time that communities are affected by top down political decisions they also influence the outcome of these decisions through their social practices.

Regions, then, can be seen as '*result of processes taking place at and across various scales*' (Paasi, 2009). Thus, regions are arenas in which competing interests and discourses from different scales (international, national and local) meet, interact and influence each other. So, globalisation has generated '*proliferation of scales and scalar complexity rather than any*

simple replacement of national scales by a global scale of action' (Amin, 2002: 387). It has affected the essence of territorialities, here nominated as place and space.

Place and space are usually seen as separated and dualistic contradictory parts (in-here & out-there; intimate & intrusive; lived & abstract) (Amin & Thrift, 2002). However, in the same way that scale (e.g. global and local) has become diffuse and boundless are place and space diffuse concepts, because both coexist in the same territorial scalar dimension. For example, a railway can be seen as defining *space* because it provides *regional* or even *global* connections, depending on the territorial extension of its links (e.g. cities within a region or cities between countries). But the railway affects also the understanding of *place* because it interferes in the character of the different cities which are linked by the railway. It might for example, influence urban configuration of local places (e.g. sprawl or compactness) as well as change the local life by increasing inhabitant's choices of commuting. So, what defines place and space is the actions that individuals perform continually in the territory and the relations that they knit in their daily lives, through the pattern of their actions.

A Regional City is assumed as an example of spatiality of globalization especially due to its high level of mobility. Modern transport infrastructures that connect different places within a region have come to develop in many regions (e.g. Randstad in the Netherlands). Investments in regional transport infrastructure aim at exploit regions' competitive advantages by supporting and boosting circulation of people, goods and information. Thus, the investments could be seen as a territorial expression of globalisation. The morphological arrangement of different cities linked through transport network infrastructure is a precondition for a Regional City. The network enhances that individual's daily life operates simultaneously at two scales – a super-structural scale – the Regional City – and a sub-structural scale – the local place, allowing individuals to live and work in different places throughout a region. This arrangement challenge traditional concepts of scale and territorialities.

Both place and space become relational (Amin, 2002), and depend on how individuals, through their actions, shape (reproduce and transform) territorialities (place and space). To describe and comprehend these relations demand a topological and relational logic that acknowledges '*a reading of spatiality in nonlinear, nonscalar terms, a readiness to accept geographies and temporalities as they are produced through practices and relations of different spatial stretch and duration*' (Amin, 2002:389).

Thus, the reasoning above suggests that typical properties of scale, such as size and hierarchy, are unable to describe per se spatialities of globalisation. To understand the reproduction and transformation of territorialities it is necessary acknowledge the *relation* between infrastructure conditions, *institution and individuals*. Consequently, it suggests that territorialities are only partially physical but, in fact, entirely relational because institutional and individual *action* is what actually configures territorialities in itself (Murdoch, 1998:361).

In sum, a Regional City is a concept that aims at contributes to an understanding of the reciprocal reproduction and transformation of territorialities from the perspective of institutional and individual actions, considering existing infrastructural conditions. It is assumed that a Regional City provides a framework that contributes to shape local places physically and socially, and, at the same time, the physical and social character of various local places build-up and constitute the Regional City. Consequently, a Regional City is recognised as a product of interdependencies between the regional level and local places (Calthorpe & Fulton 2001). The next section discusses individual and institutional perspectives within a theoretical framework which supports the assumptions about the Regional City.

3. Planning tension: regional policies and daily life experiences

It has been argued that globalisation has changed territories' dynamics in spatial, economical and social terms (Amin, 2002). A Regional City is seen as a territorial expression of globalisation. Its spatial arrangement a number of cities linked by efficient transport network boost flows of people, money and goods. The development of a Regional City through infrastructure investments aim at increasing mobility within the region and strengthen the regional attractiveness and competitiveness in the global economy. To medium metropolitan areas such as Stockholm the enlargement of labour markets becomes an alternative to produce the required set of economical, social and physical infrastructures which might support the competition with larger metropolitan areas. In this sense a Regional City assists and complements globalisation processes.

Taken this into consideration, this section discusses the reproduction and transformation of territorialities within a Regional City from infrastructural, institutional and individual perspectives. It should be noted here that 'reproduction' refers here to continuation of a current pattern and 'transformation' to substantial changes. However, the concepts should not be considered as contradictory, since certain aspects of a given territory could be transformed, whereas, at the same time, other aspects are reproduced.

The following discussion is partially based on the analytical framework proposed by Held et al, (2003). In their framework globalization is depicted through spatio-temporal and organizational dimensions (see Figure 1).

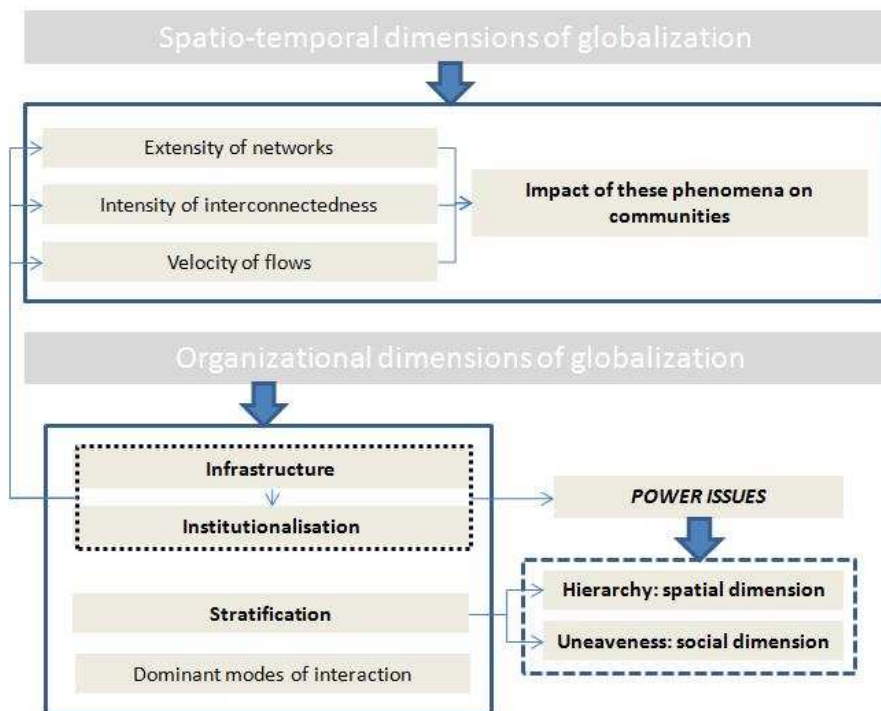


Figure 1: Analytical framework
Source: Based on Held, et al (2003)

The spatio-temporal dimensions acknowledge extensity, intensity and velocity as characteristics that portray historical forms of globalization and its effects on local communities. The extensity of networks is related to the proliferation of activities (social, political, economic) across boundaries. The intensity of interconnectedness indicates the magnitude of interactions and flows between different places. The velocity of flows is a consequence of both extensity and intensity. Thus, growing extensity and intensity imply an

accelerated dissemination of flows (ideas, goods, information, capital and people). These three characteristics impact in different ways particular communities. The authors also argued that increasing extensity, intensity and velocity of global interactions contribute to blur the boundaries between global and local, such that *'the impact of distant events is magnified while even the most local developments may come to have enormous global consequences'* (Held et al, 2003:55).

The organisational dimension approaches globalisation process from a bottom up perspective. Characteristics such as infrastructure, institutionalisation, stratification and dominant modes of interaction are determinants to configure the extensity, intensity and velocity of global interactions.

However, both, infrastructure and institutionalisation are greatly associated to power issues. Power regards to *'the ability of social agents, agencies and institutions to reproduce or transform their circumstances, social and physical, and it concerns the resources which underpin this capacity and the forces that shape and influence its exercise'* (Held et al, 2003:58). This definition suggests that power is relational because the political outcome of power's exercise is determined in the context of the capabilities of parties. And also, that power is structural *'shaped by and in turn shaping the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups and the practices of organizations'* (Held et al, 2003)

Power issues, in this framework (Held et al, 2003), are addressed through patterns of stratification. Stratification acknowledges the relational aspect of power through *'hierarchy'* and the structural aspect through *'unevenness'*. Hierarchy refers to asymmetries in the control of access to an enmeshment in global networks and infrastructure, while unevenness denotes the asymmetric effects of globalization on the life chances and well being of people classes ethnic groups and the sexes.

Modes of interaction refer to the political regime in which the exchange of flows happen (imperial, coercive, cooperative, competitive, conflictual and the primary instruments of power for example, military vs economic instruments).

Even though this framework is designed to assess the historical impacts of globalisation it offers an interesting perspective to analyse the Regional City, because it addresses *'globalization'* impacts acknowledging organizational characteristics of communities. Thus, it might be a way to evaluate how improvements in regional infrastructures, which facilitate flows within a region, affect local places. This framework, applied to a Regional City, suggests that the impact of regional investments on local places depends upon their own infrastructural conditions and institutional capability which might assist or limit the extensity, intensity and velocity of interactions within the Regional City.

Thus, the Regional City borrows from this framework the following

These concepts translated to the Regional City context suggest that *hierarchy* might refer to asymmetries related to local places' association in networks and flows within the Regional City. *Unevenness* relates to asymmetrical effects that regional improvements in transport infrastructures produce on individual's life (Held, et al 2003). Thus, while *hierarchy* depicts the spatial, political and economic condition of local places within the Regional City, *unevenness* provides evidences about how territorialities are conceived from the perspective of individuals' social practices. Hierarchy might be described by the interrelation between accessibility's levels, demographic changes and labour market as well as planning decisions at regional and local levels. Unevenness might be defined by individuals' social practices performed within the Regional City.

Thus, this reasoning provides a frame to analyse the Regional City from the perspective of local places. Different local places react differently to increased mobility (extensity, intensity and velocity of interactions within the Regional City) depending on their own *infrastructure conditions and institutional capability* which might reveal local places' hierarchy within the Regional City. At the same time, the reasoning acknowledges personal perspectives through individuals, behaviour, perceptions, valuation and use of places within a Regional City. The assumptions about the Regional City are further discussed in the following items, taking into account this framework.

Assumption 1: Hierarchy within regional city: infrastructure and institutional capability

'Regional city's development is unbalanced due to tensions between social and regional interests, and, thus, local places within the regional city are asymmetrically reproduced and transformed'

The study of Regional Cities relies on a perception that both regional and urban structures can be described as complex systems (Hall 1992, Herbert & Thomas 1994). Thus, alteration in any of their parts will affect the whole system. This reasoning gives the basis to describe and evaluate the interdependence between the regional and local structures. Then the study take a starting point in regional science, which depicts the regional physical structure through settlements size relations, location of infrastructure nodes and connectivity between different places (see e.g. Isard 1975, Kresl & Fry 2005).

The *hierarchy* is expected to give a hint about impacts of regional infrastructure investments on different local places within the Regional City. *Hierarchy* will reveal spatial differences, demographic change and economic development, commuting patterns, labour markets. In addition, few local places within a Regional City should be investigated in regards to their own infrastructure conditions, in order to assess their *'reaction'* (reproduction and transformation?) considering regional infrastructures investments.

Hierarchy is complemented by local places' institutional capability which will be analysed in two aspects: proactive and reactive. It aims at depict how local governments have influence on regional decisions (proactive) as well as evaluate how local governments *'reply'* through local polices to regional infrastructure developments (reactive). This assumption deals with the distribution of resources in the Regional City and, thus, touches upon power issues.

It might focuses on emerging trends such as governance, spatial planning policy and environmental change. For example, the *'shared responsibility'* of planning (state + stakeholders) has lead to increasing competitiveness between regions, which has polarizing instead of balancing the development, supporting growth in the most competitive regions. It has lead to unsustainable social consumption in some regions due to, increasing prices (housing, infrastructure) and growing pressure on environmental resources. Then spatial policies provide infrastructures in order to mitigate these development pressures. Therefore, planning policies instead of being an instrument that enhance equality corroborate with the permanence of inequalities and capital accumulation (Raco, 2007).

However; hierarchy doesn't cover how the transformation on the regional level affects local places in social sense, e.g. regarding the social use of environments, which is approached in hypothesis 2.

Assumption 2 – Unevenness: effects of regional infrastructure investments on individual’s life

The Regional city is individually perceived depending of how different activities are performed on both regional and local levels.

The Regional City acknowledges that the ‘urbanity’ has been regionalised. Improvements in regional transport infrastructure stretch individual’s choice in regards to places to live, work, recreate and participate in civic activities. Thus, a *regional citizen* emerges from the commuting potential between regional and local structures, affecting the dynamic of these structures and, thus, perceptions about place and space. So, unevenness is understood as a concept that depicts the Regional City through individual’s social practices within the region.

An integrated sociological approach (Ritzer 2008; Sayer 1992, Giddens 1984 and Habermas 1987) comprises the idea that large scale social and physical structures constrain and enable individual and social activities. The Regional City relies on the approach that individual and social activities are an outcome of various processes based on needs and desires, which, however, are dependent on individual, social and physical prerequisites. Thus, local places can be seen as reproduced through activities like e.g. local shopping, local recreation, participation in the local labour market and local communal activities. Moreover, local places could be understood as a synthesis of these activities and the physical environment and the social context (Ahrentzen 2002).

It suggest that within the Regional City, the characteristics of local places and the individual prerequisites enable and constrain peoples’ activities locally and thereby also have an effect on social use of the local physical environments. Thus, the development and attractivity of local places can be evaluated through studies of social activities and peoples’ use of physical environments.

Table 1 shows how the assumptions about the Regional City might relate to some of the characteristics suggested by Held et al (2003).

Table 1: Interrelations between Regional City assumptions and characteristics of regionalization

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Asymmetrical development</i>		<i>Individually perceived</i>
<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Infrastructure</i>	<i>Institutional capacity</i>	
<i>Hierarchy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess the reproduction and transformation of local places within the Regional City considering regional infrastructure (demographic changes, labor markets, employment, commuting, etc.) - Analyze local places own infrastructure reproduction and transformation towards regional infrastructure developments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addresses planning issues such as distribution of resources within a region; - Explore planning and implementation processes of regional infrastructure developments; - Analyses how local governments react to regional policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investigate in what extend regional planning strategies includes and/or exclude the effects on individual daily life;
<i>Unevenness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ‘regional citizen’ emerges from the commuting potential between regional and local structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investigate how individuals’ opinions are considered in planning issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuals act differently within the Regional City generating particular demands. - The regional citizen perceives differently the Regional City through his/her practices and relations of different spatial stretch and duration.

Next section explores partially the first assumption in the context of empirical observation from the Greater Stockholm Region (Mälardalen Region) in Sweden. It analyses few aspects that might indicated some of the effects that regional infrastructures have on local places.

3. *Mälardalen: a Regional City?*
Some empirical observation based on four case studies

This section in part explores the first assumption about a Regional City. It describes demographic changes and commuting patterns in four municipalities of the Mälardalen Region. However, it is recognized the need to deepen the description in regards to regions’ economic structure, labor market, real estate market, built environment and regional accessibility in order to verify the unbalanced development within the region.

In the future is expected to map the overall development in the region, based on descriptive data of different local places “before” and “after” the investments in new transport infrastructure.

3.1. *Introduction*

Mälardalen Region is constituted by *five* counties: Stockholm, Uppsala, Örebro, Södermanland and Västmanland. The biggest county is Stockholm with 26 municipalities and population of almost 2 million inhabitants. Stockholm is followed by Örebro with 12 municipalities, Västmanland with 10, Södermanland, 9 and Uppsala with 8 municipalities.

However, Mälaren Valley is seen more as a functional region then properly an administrative one. Within, the Swedish administrative system regions are recognized as counties, there is not a region of this size Sweden. But Mälardalen is established as a region in regards to functional relations between the different counties such as flows of people, information, goods, labour markets, housing, etc. The Figure 1 shows the Mälardalen Region.

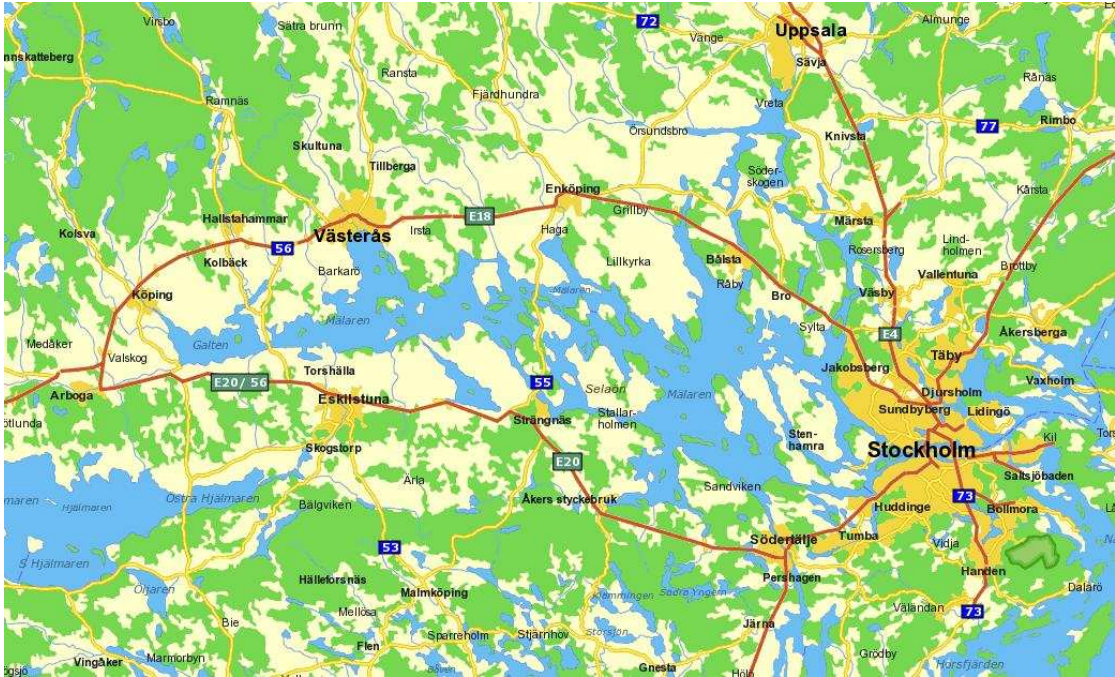


Figure 1: Mälardalen region
Source: <http://kartor.eniro.se/>

3.2. *Results*

In this section labour markets and commuting patterns are briefly discussed in the context of Mälardalen region.

4. *Concluding discussion*

This paper tried to set theoretical basis to discuss the Regional City as well as determine its practical implications. A Regional City was recognized as a spatiality of globalisation, (develop)

Even though some discussions need deepening, I argue that a step towards a more consistent concept about the Regional City has been made in this paper.

However, its practical implications were superficially explored. Even though the empirical observations of four municipalities in Mälardalen Region have showed that (develop), much more should be done in order to fully explore and test the assumption that the *'Regional city's development is unbalanced due to tensions between social and regional interests, and, thus, local places within the regional city are asymmetrically reproduced and transformed'*. As previously said it is necessary to deepen the description in regards to Mälardalen's economic structure, labor market, real estate market, built environment and regional accessibility, in order to have a broad picture, which might provide basis to identify the differing processes that have impact on and are effects of changes within the Regional City.

Further developments of this assumption should also contemplate the institutional capability of local places in deal with regional transport infrastructures. In combination with document studies (e.g. regional and local development plans), interviews will also be performed with local and regional planners concerning their perceptions and ideas of local places in the context of regional development. This information might provide insights in regards to how regional policies are formulated. It should as well answer the following questions: In which extend cities within the Regional City influence the proposition of regional policies? How are the institutional relations between local and regional levels? In which extend local places' identities are acknowledged in regional policies?

Other aspect that must be investigated is unevenness, which seems to be the most important considering the theoretical perspectives adopted in this study. A Regional City is a social construction because it emerges from social practices, and, consequently it acknowledges a bottom up process in which the regional citizens play a key role. Thus, an evaluation of physical environments and social activities from the perspective of local/regional citizens is very important. To gather a deeper pre-understanding of prerequisites and processes that results in various social activities, focus group interviews with local/regional citizens will be used. The interviews will cover the citizens' preferences concerning their local physical environment and local social activities vis-à-vis other parts of the Regional City. Mental maps might as well be used to evaluate the perception of individuals in regards to their environments. In addition, questionnaires should be constructed and directed to residents. Questions will concern the respondents' perceptions of physical and social qualities in the local places, as well as their individual use of the physical environment, e.g. their local shopping, recreation, and communal activities in relation to other possibilities offered in the Regional City.

A methodological challenge, however is that the practical meaning of the Regional City requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The challenge relies on how to build integrated indicators in order to depict different perspectives of the Regional City (develop)

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