

Article

# Changes, Problems, and Challenges in Swedish Spatial Planning—An Analysis of Power Dynamics

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**Abstract:** During the past few decades, the Swedish spatial planning system has experienced numerous problems and challenges. In particular, there have been changes in legislation and an increased neoliberalisation of planning that gives private actors a larger influence over the planning processes in Sweden. In this article, we analyse these changes through the lenses of collaborative and neoliberal planning in order to illuminate the shifting power relations within spatial planning in Sweden. We analyse the changes of power relations from three dimensions of power based on interviews with different kinds of planners throughout Sweden. We show that power relations in the Swedish spatial planning system have shifted and that neoliberalisation and an increased focus on collaborative planning approaches have made spatial planning more complex in recent decades. This has led to a change of role for planners from actual planners to collaborators. We conclude that market-oriented planning (neoliberal planning) and collaborative planning have made it more difficult for spatial planners in Sweden to work towards sustainable urban futures.

**Keywords:** spatial planning; power relations; neoliberalisation; Sweden

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## 1. Introduction

Spatial planning is a complex process in which many intertwined issues are dealt with and touched upon. This includes things like the provision of housing, the layout of urban spaces and urban or metropolitan structures, as well as planning for transport systems. The consequences of spatial planning processes impact upon issues related to welfare (e.g., segregation, accessibility, and quality of life), travel patterns, and the conditions for using different means of transport and the urban space [1–3].

When it comes to urban transport, the car has the greatest impact on human mobility and has affected the spatial layout of cities to a great extent. The proportion of car journeys is high, but motorised transport is an unsustainable form of mobility that often marginalises other more sustainable forms of transport such as bicycling. Moreover, the choice of transport mode that people use can also be impacted by spatial planning [1,4], and thus urban form can have an impact on people's travel behaviour [5]. Consequently, spatial planning plays a vital role both in the development of a sustainable transport system and more generally in the development of sustainable cities and metropolitan areas.

Spatial planning is used in this article as an umbrella concept covering various forms of planning that are typically distinguished as urban land use planning or transport planning. In turn, these forms of planning cover distinctly different, albeit interrelated, planning processes. In theory, the Swedish planning system grants far-reaching power to public actors such as local-level governments (which control key land-use planning instruments), the state through the National

Transport Administration, and regional governments that are responsible for transport infrastructure planning [6]. However, evidence from a broad body of literature (e.g., [7–10]) shows that the formal characteristics of the planning system only provide limited insights into how spatial planning is conducted and do not address the forces and power relations that are at play within the decisions that influence the development of urban land use and transport system structures. In order to create more sustainable cities, it is important to analyse how these power relations affect the outcome of spatial planning and what challenges might be connected to the changes of power dynamics. Thus, in this article, we investigate the current situation for spatial planning in Sweden, how power relations have changed, and what kind of issues are related to those changes.

In this paper, we draw on the theoretical perspective about power relations by Lukes [11]. Furthermore, our analysis relates to planning theories, such as collaborative planning [7,12] and neoliberal planning [9] in order to conduct an analysis of how power relations influence the conditions for spatial planning in Sweden. The following questions are addressed:

- What do the roles and the possibilities look like for planners involved in urban development and transport and mobility planning in Sweden?
- What kinds of formal and informal structures influence the power dynamics between planners, politicians, and developers?

The questions will be addressed through the analysis of interview material (described in the method section) and set in relation to planning theory.

Thus, here we try to make the power dimensions visible in order to develop a deeper understanding of the processes at work in Swedish spatial planning. This can contribute to a better understanding of the outcomes of planning processes.

### *Methods*

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the changes in Swedish spatial planning, empirical data was collected in the form of interviews with urban and transport planners in Sweden. A total of eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with planners in the City of Malmö, the City of Norrköping, and the City of Umeå; regional planners in Scania; one real-estate development firm; and urban/transport planners from the Swedish Transport Administration and the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning. For the semi-structured interview we developed an interview guide with themes and question, which we followed during the interviews. This technique enables an interview situation with rather open questions, which gives the interviewee the possibility to give longer answers. The interview guide was adapted to each person interviewed in order to create a guideline that corresponded to the person's profession. The themes centred around the latest development in urban and transport planning, collaboration with different actors, politics and policies, and sustainable planning. The interviewees were chosen randomly, but we tried to cover both larger and smaller cities in different geographical areas in Sweden and to cover both the regional level and the national level. The interviews lasted about 35 min on average, and the structure of the interviews was based on different topics and themes that might be important for spatial planning. Straightforward questions were avoided so as to leave room for the interviewees to develop a broad and reflective answer. The interviews were conducted between January and March 2014. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated by the authors following the normal methods in qualitative research [13]. In addition, documents and reports from the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the County Administrative Board of Stockholm, and the Ministry of Finance were used as secondary data. Those documents were used to verify certain aspects for the interviews and to develop a better understanding of the current planning situation in Sweden.

When conducting qualitative research, the emphasis is on gaining an in-depth understanding of the complexity of certain issues by interpreting the collected data and the social relations and processes that might appear in the data [14–16]. The fundamental understanding of the research conducted

in this article comes from critical theory. The approach is hermeneutic, which means that it builds on interpretations of the empirical material. Therefore, finding an objective truth is not the aim of such research; rather the aim is to undertake a critical investigation of certain issues. Furthermore, the empirical data should not be seen as representative of planners in Sweden, but should offer an in-depth view of spatial planning in Sweden from different perspectives. It is important to understand that critical hermeneutic research is an interpretation of data and reality, which offers new insights, but no universal truth [17,18].

## 2. Theoretical Point of Departure

There are different dimensions of power relations, which have to be seen in the complexity of planning and should not be limited by choosing to focus either on the structures or the stakeholders [2,11]. Because power works differently in three dimensions [11], a broad focus on planning theory is needed to fully understand the power relations at work in Swedish spatial planning. When only focusing on either structures or actors, dimensions of power relations can be overlooked, and, thus, it is difficult to gain a deeper understanding of spatial planning. One would miss a deeper understanding of the structural effects of power when only focusing on actors, but one could miss the importance of one or more actors when only focusing on structures. This is why both perspectives together offer a deeper understanding of the power relations at work. Planning has to be seen as a complex structure of power relations, and these relations affect the social relations between the stakeholders that are involved in the planning processes. These power relations change through time. In order to develop a deeper understanding of these social and power relations, one has to understand what kind of power relations can be created. Here, we draw on the work of Lukes [11] and his three dimensions of power. In short the three dimensions are:

- 1st dimension:

**Decision-making power** can be observed in planning and political decisions that affect different people. It is revealed through political action and very often it is seen in conflicts between these actions and the actors or people that are affected by them. These conflicts can sometimes be observed in planning documents or debates about decisions, but also, for example, through protests and public debates.

- 2nd dimension:

**Non-decision-making power** can be observed in discussions between planners, politicians, and other actors about, for example, agenda setting, which provides some control over what is decided. This is typically one of the ways that planners exert power in general, because they quite often do not have the right to make certain decisions (for example budget decisions). Therefore, planners exercise power through agenda setting and discussions with other decision-makers.

- 3rd dimension:

**Ideological power** is not behavioural as are the two others. The third dimension points out that power can work through ideology embedded in social institutions and in economic structures. Ideology can shape desires and beliefs, and the third type of power may be at work despite apparent consensus between strong and weak parties. This means that planning decisions might be affected by ideologies embedded in the planning organisation or society as a whole and affects other actors and agencies without planners being aware of those issues in their own work. This makes the third dimension of power very effective.

According to Lukes [11], power is most effective in the ideological dimension (3rd dimension) due to the lack of knowledge that power is being exercised over a person or a decision. It seems that

planning quite often is affected by such power relations that are very difficult to observe, for example in [2]. This becomes especially apparent when looking at planning through the lens of neoliberalism. Here, economic structures have influenced planning in a direction of which the outcomes have been criticised by many commentators, for example in [19–22]. With regard to neoliberal planning, the outcome of planning has been affected by market thinking and economic structures that are almost invisible to planners but affect them to a significant degree [9]. Lukes sees power relations as evolving through social relations and interactions, and this is connected to the notion of collaborative planning [7] (see also below). Through the complexity of relations between stakeholders and agencies, power relations are formed that have different effects on the planning processes and the outcomes of spatial planning. Thus, power itself has to be seen as relational. This view is also supported by Allen [23] who also sees power as relational and as developing through social relations. This means without social relations, no power can exist and no power relations can be developed [23]. This means that planners, unconsciously, make decisions that, for example, promote motorised modes instead of sustainable modes [2].

Within planning processes, all three dimensions of power are at work and have an impact on planning practises, processes, and their outcomes.

### 3. Planning Doctrines

Different ways of describing planning processes have emerged during the last 20 years. In this article, we will mainly relate to the following two planning doctrines:

- Collaborative planning (e.g., [7])—A way of describing the changes of the planning practices and what that entails. Collaborative planning sees planning as collaborations between different actors and sees planning as a form of consensus decision making.
- Neoliberal planning (e.g., [9])—An ideological critique of the changes of political economy. A view of describing changes in planning, which derive from economic structures and are thus market-driven.

The power relations that are formed within the planning processes between the different actors can be analysed through the lens of collaborative planning, which captures the complexity of planning in modern societies. Through the lens of neoliberal planning, the underlying ideology and economic structures can be analysed. Collaborative planning is also closely connected to communicative planning, since collaborative planning sees planning as a communicative form of decision making and strives towards consensus. According to Healey [7,12], planning should be understood as a form of urban governance that takes place in a very complex institutional setting that is affected by social, economic, and environmental structures and relations. This complexity is important to understand if one is analysing planning in general and the outcome of planning in particular. In this complex environment, planners have to find collaborations in order to achieve the goals set up by politicians. These collaborations do not necessarily involve real-estate developers or other private companies, but private actors are nonetheless involved rather often. Moreover, the collaborations could also involve politicians, citizens, or other public agencies such as other departments within the municipalities' administrations [7,12].

Thus, from a collaborative planning perspective, urban governance and planning often involve struggles between many different actors and their ideas of what is needed and what should be done. These actors can be companies, planning offices, politicians, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as neighbourhood associations or environmental groups. All of these actors might have different interests in the outcome of planning, and this makes the planning process complex. Moreover, planners then have to handle all the different views on what the planning outcome should be. The different actors involved in the planning processes often have diverse social preconceptions that guide their actions, decisions, along with other aspects, and this social diversity also affects the power relations in which the planning processes evolve and occur. From a collaborative planning

perspective, planning can be understood through the “in-between”, meaning the interactions between actors, social relations, structural forces, interests, and daily processes in governance and planning. In order to fully understand the processes behind planning decisions, it is important to analyse the different collaborations, social relations, and power relations that are at work. Here, it is also important to take broader socio-economic and political structures into account because these structures can have an impact on which collaborations are being formed and what decisions are being taken within the planning processes [7,12].

Collaborative planning can be considered in relation to Lukes’ [11] 1st and 2nd dimensions of power. Through collaboration, planners engage in different power relations. The analysis of the different planning processes means that power relations between the actors involved within these processes can be revealed. For example, if a city plans to develop a certain area for housing but the real-estate developers are not convinced that the plan would work for them to sell apartments, the city might have to change the plan. Through such a process, one actor will have exercised power over the planning process in order to fit their needs. These forms of power relations might not be revealed in the official planning documents, but they can be revealed through an interview study.

Researchers have argued that planning during the last 20 years or so has become more and more affected by neoliberalism (see, for example, [19–21]). According to Harvey [19], neoliberalism is a theory of political economy within which it is believed that free-market politics and free, creative entrepreneurship will lead to greater human well-being. This theory builds on private property rights, free trade, and individual freedom, among others. Neoliberalism’s effect on planning becomes visible in that the needs of private actors and their influence over planning have become more and more predominant. As Tasan-Kok expressed it:

*Neoliberalisation manifests itself as a ‘prevailing pattern of market-oriented, market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring’ [19] (p. 51). The neoliberalisation of social, economic and political processes pervades urban development, planning and governance discourses and practices, and pushes them in a market-oriented direction [ . . . ]. [22] (p. 1)*

Neoliberal planning can also be seen as focusing on the entrepreneurial aspects of development rather than the regulatory aspects [7]. Consequently, it has also been argued that one important aspect of neoliberal planning is that private actors have gained power, and thus the planning processes have changed. This was observed by Harvey [10] when he described the change in urban processes from managerialism to entrepreneurialism. According to Harvey, cities were planned to a greater extent in cooperation with private actors in order to encourage economic growth and local development. Whereas previously, planning had dealt with facilitating services that benefited the local urban citizens. This shift to the more market-driven planning doctrine of neoliberalism has meant that planners have lost power over the planning processes and the actual outcome of planning to the private sector and to the interests of actors such as real-estate development companies. Harvey [10] argued that this signalled a shift in urban governance from managerialism to entrepreneurialism, meaning that market-driven ideas increasingly steer urban planning and decision making.

According to neoliberal planning theory, the regulatory aspects of spatial planning must create a market environment that ensures that the private actors are able to develop and realise their ideas for cities and/or urban areas. Consequently, the way cities are planned today is intertwined with the market’s demands for economic development. Therefore, it is important that planning be undertaken in close relation to private urban developers. The power relations that are formed at different levels through this public-private partnership and the planning processes that result from these relations can be analysed through the neoliberal lens of political ideology [9,24].

The effects of neoliberalism on planning and society are embedded in economic structures, which are difficult to observe. Thus, one can talk about the 3rd dimension of power described by Lukes (2005), and these neoliberal economic structures have affected the planning processes and given certain actors more power over spatial planning than others. Therefore, changes in power relations are very



hard to track down, and planners might not fully understand what has changed and why planning has become different. Here, more theorising on spatial planning and different power relations is needed in order to fully understand the changes in spatial planning that have taken place in recent years.

Næss [8] describes a problem within the collaborative planning literature in that it focuses almost solely on actors within planning, and he argues that different structures also influence the outcome of urban planning, or in the case of this paper, spatial planning. This is also why we chose to include neoliberal planning—as a theoretical point of departure for this paper. These different economic and social structures affect both the actors and the planning processes, and thus it is important to theoretically frame the research of this article both within neoliberal planning and collaborative planning. Thus, the overall theoretical framework of this article is based on Lukes' [11] three dimensions of power in order to increase the understanding of the empirical data collected. Since this article deals with spatial planning, a stamp has to be made within planning theory. As Næss [8] suggests, to bridge the gap between collaborative and neoliberal planning, we chose to use both in our analysis to better understand the empirical data and the power relations at play in Swedish spatial planning.

Næss [8] directed a relevant critique towards the view of power in literature on collaborative planning which has inspired our work. Naess argues that the view that power cannot be possessed but is only relational is problematic, especially in urban planning. Property rights, development rights, as well as formal planning regulations and mechanisms (such as comprehensive plans and detailed development plans) are examples that illustrate that some actors do indeed possess powers which others do not [8]. While this critique might be reasonable—and some people do exercise power over others through property rights or other means—in our view, power relations only occur in the social relations between people, and power can only be exercised within these social relations. The means through which power is exercised, however, are very important in analysing how actors can exercise power over others. Here, connections to our theoretical point of departure from Lukes [11] can be made (see previous section).

#### 4. Spatial Planning in Sweden—How Are the Power Relations Distributed?

Previous research has already shown how the three different dimensions of power described by Lukes [11] have an impact on planning processes [25,26]. In the analysis below, we show how the three dimensions of power also play an important role in spatial planning in Sweden.

##### 4.1. The 1st Dimension: Formal Structures—A “Planning Monopoly” with Limits

The Swedish administrative system formally consists of three levels—the national level (the state), the regional level (counties), and the local level (municipalities). The Parliament and the national government guide land-use planning through legislation and policymaking, for example, the Planning and Building Act and the Environmental Code [27]. Another state-level actor with significant impact on spatial planning is the Transport Administration, which is responsible for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure through the national road and railway networks [6].

In terms of formal structures, the Swedish planning system awards substantial power over land-use planning to the local level. The Swedish Planning and Building Act [28] states: “It is a municipal affair to plan the use of land and water according to this Act” (authors' translation). The 290 municipalities in Sweden control the formal instruments for land-use planning, including the comprehensive municipal plans (which are mandatory but not legally binding) and the detailed development plans. Consequently, it can be argued that from a formal perspective, the municipalities possess a “planning monopoly”. Theoretically, this means that municipalities have the power to plan what should be built and where and when it should be built. However, it is evident from a number of studies (e.g., [27,29]) that municipal planning decisions in practice are the result of interactions between many different stakeholders. From a power perspective, it can be argued that the municipal “planning monopoly” comes with a number of caveats that in practice greatly limit the possibility for

municipal politicians and planners to impose their will in planning processes. A planner from the City of Umeå talked about that issue. Although he was first quite convinced that the planners have the power over planning, he became more reflexive after a while:

*Overall, I think I have quite a lot of influence generally. I and the City of Umeå have a monopoly on planning. . . . I think that we probably have the power needed to implement things . . . Then, of course, planning should be according to law, it must be tested against other parts, and the state has some role to play as well, one might say, and the individual interests and I mean more, individual interests, they have very little leverage, but this is of course, just as planning legislation says, one important aspect in planning, and these interests have to be coordinated with our general goals. (Interview Planner City of Umeå 2014, Appendix A)*

Since 2004, the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (Directive 2001/42/EC) has been implemented in the Swedish Environmental Code [29]. Accordingly, consultation with authorities, for example, the County Administrative Board, as well as other stakeholders, including trade and industry groups and private citizens, is required by law for municipal plans or programs that are likely to have a significant environmental impact. While it is far from evident that these consultation processes play more than a ceremonial role in actual planning decisions [30], they are nonetheless a formal requirement of the municipal planning monopoly.

Another formal restriction with significant importance is municipal ownership of land. Here, connections to theories on collaborative planning can be made. Planning today in Swedish municipalities means collaborating between many different stakeholders, and this was confirmed in the interviews carried out for this study (Interview Planner City of Norrköping 2014; Interview planner Swedish Transport Administration 2014; Interview planner National Board of Housing, Building and Planning 2014, Appendix A). One planner in Stockholm described spatial planning as follows:

*And then in addition to the purely physical, . . . , disposition of land and water, spatial planning also very much involves the processes surrounding it... Coordinate the interests of different actors and to discuss with the public, for this is the democratic mandate that we have, as well as to communicate with the politicians. (Interview Planner City of Stockholm 2014, Appendix A)*

Municipal ownership of land is, of course, important because the amount owned by the municipality, and how much of that is available for exploitation, are key variables for influencing development. Caesar [31] found that 12% of Swedish municipalities owned all land with planning permission and that 75% of the municipalities owned some land. However, in terms of area coverage, municipal land ownership varies considerably. A study of the situation in Stockholm found that some municipalities owned land with planning permission covering less than 5% of the municipal area, and in other municipalities it covered over 80%. However, large parts of the municipality-owned land often consist of streets and parks or land affected by various restrictions that prevent exploitation [32]. Caesar [31] did, however, find that the municipalities in the three main metropolitan areas of Sweden (Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö) own considerable amounts of land with planning permission.

Thus, power relations can quite easily be traced back in the planning documents and through interviews. According to Lukes [11] framework, these kinds of 1st dimension power relations are quite straightforward and easy to observe [11]. Many of these power relations are created through legislation in Sweden and can be observed and analysed through studies of planning documents. How this collaboration between stakeholders actually plays out is not always documented and can thus be harder to trace. There might be informal structures between planners, politicians, and developers that are not observable through document studies. Therefore, the 2nd dimension of power relations is embedded in these informal structures, which are described below. Moreover, planners seem to see themselves as coordinators of the interests of several different actors, and thus connections can be made to collaborative planning theory as described in the previous section, see [7,12]. The collaboration between the actors can make spatial planning more complex, and because several interests have to be

dealt with, the planning outcome might not serve a sustainable future but instead serve the interests of the most powerful actors. Such a situation can be considered in terms of neoliberal planning [33], which is dealt with in Section 4.3.

#### 4.2. The 2nd Dimension: Informal Structures—Power Dynamics between Planners, Politicians, and Developers

The interviews conducted for this article emphasised two dimensions of power dynamics in planning—the relationship between planners and politicians on the one hand and the relationship between public actors and private actors on the other. As one planner in the City of Malmö explained:

*We have no power because we don't implement anything. But we have influence on planning. Power lies with the politicians who decide on budgets, and with those who will then implement the plans, the technical committee, builders, and real estate developers. (Interview Planner City of Malmö 2014, Appendix A)*

Moreover, some interviewees pointed towards the fact that a key characteristic of urban planning is political involvement, which is common and widespread in Sweden. Obviously strategic planning decisions are in essence political and, as emphasised by the quotation at the beginning of this section, decisions on budgets have powerful implications. Several interviewees also expressed the notion that the importance of strategic-level planning has increased in recent years. A planner from the City of Norrköping expressed this the following way:

*The comprehensive plan has received greater importance in the last few years, and we have strengthened the link between long-term planning and day-to-day practice concerning which planning permissions are given and which development plans are prioritised. (Interview Planner City of Norrköping 2014, Appendix A)*

The interviews also stressed that political intervention is common in decisions concerning details, such as parking regulations and street design (for instance, the allocation of road space between different transport modes), and the politicians have quite a lot of power over spatial planning, not least through the budget (Interview planner City of Umeå 2014; Interview planner Region of Scania 2014; Interview planner City of Malmö 2014; Interview planner City of Stockholm 2014; Interview National Board of Housing, Building and Planning 2014; Interview real-estate development firm 2014, Appendix A).

It can thus be argued that one aspect of change in recent decades is more political involvement in planning. A potential reason for this is that urban planning issues have become increasingly politicised in step with the ongoing urbanisation trend whereby problems concerning issues like housing shortages, traffic, and segregation have become central issues on the political agenda. This probably has to do with the fact the cities today play a more important role in a country's economic development, but also in neoliberal planning. Here, private stakeholders are supported by politicians in developing the cities with flagships and other landmarks [33].

As shown in the previous section, Swedish municipalities have extensive powers in terms of the 1st dimension of power. In theory, the “planning monopoly” gives municipalities' almost complete control over development plans. However, they cannot determine that something will physically be built on the areas that they suggest. If the plans are not perceived as attractive by a real-estate developer, there will probably be no exploitation of the area. Thus, private actors in the development industry also have substantial influence over land-use planning (e.g., [27]). As a planner at the Swedish Transport Administration puts it:

*There are of course many actors in the business who are talking about spatial planning today. We are therefore negotiating about planning much more today than before. There is a wide diversity in the parties who are negotiating solutions . . . and it is more complex today. (Interview planner Swedish Transport Administration 2014, Appendix A)*



In some cases, this could limit the potential from the outset to ensure the desirable development of urban and regional structures that could support a decrease in car use, and the potential for such impacts is dependent on other actors such as private land owners (Interview Planner City of Stockholm 2014, Appendix A).

The relationship with developers seems important in today's spatial planning in Sweden, but such informal power structures are not found in planning documents and are thus not obvious when planning is analysed. These relationships concerning the 2nd dimension of power relations are only uncovered through interview studies such as those carried out for this article. These informal relations are also signs of collaborative planning as described in Section 2. In today's Swedish spatial planning, various relations between different actors influence spatial planning processes and outcomes. This might lead to compromises between the actors and thus to solutions that are not always the best ones in terms of issues of sustainability and sustainable transport systems. These power relations are quite hard to track and make visible and thus lead to undemocratic planning processes. Planners in Sweden seem quite aware of how these power relations affect the planning outcome, but they do not seem able to change these relations into more sustainable and more democratic forms of planning. Lukes [11] sees the 2nd and 3rd dimensions of power as being more effective than the 1st dimension, thus it can be concluded that these forms of power are not only more complicated to analyse, they are also more complicated for the actors involved to change.

Connections to collaborative planning theory and neoliberal planning can also be made here. The informal structures that are developed through the formal structure described in the previous section lead to planners feeling that more power is given to real estate developers, and this makes the planning processes complex and more difficult. This complexity is also an issue in analysing the situation of the planners through the lens of collaborative planning theory. Healey [7,12] views this complexity with planning to be problematic because it forces planners to make planning decisions that are not always good for the whole public sphere but might be more in the interest of specific actors. However, Healey has been criticised for the absence of a power relation perspective. Thus, we have included that perspective by drawing on Lukes [11] as described above. Based on the findings of the interviews, it can be argued that the strong interest in urban development issues in recent years means that other actors, such as politicians, private sector real estate developers, and consultants, are involved in agenda setting. This can be interpreted as a circumvention of the potential for planners to exercise the type of power described by Lukes' [11] second dimension. At least it is clear that today many actors take an active role in shaping the urban planning agenda.

#### *4.3. The Hidden Structures of the 3rd Dimension of Power*

The approach to development and strategic land use acquisitions can vary greatly between municipalities. In Stockholm, a study found that 7 of the 26 municipalities in the county had strategic land acquisition policies in place in order to purchase land for future development or to make strategic land swaps [32].

Some municipalities, however, also had clear political directives stating that they should not own land for development [32]. This highlights the ideological dimension of approaches to development. Political directives prohibiting active land-use policies are an obvious sign of a neoliberal approach to planning that greatly limits the potency of the municipal planning monopoly [9]. This also illustrates how planning decisions are affected by ideologies embedded in the planning organisation. The role of planners in a municipality owning a lot of land, with a political leadership encouraging strategic land acquisitions, will clearly be different to that of planners in a municipality with a political leadership actively opposing public ownership of land. In the latter case, a municipality with shrinking publicly owned land, the economic structures that affect urban development will become very influential. As described above, the complex relations between the planners and the developers lead to a shift of power towards the developers. This is reinforced when the municipality does not even own the land that should be developed, or when the political leadership of the municipality advocates a neoliberal

approach to planning. Here, the economic structures can be seen as the 3rd dimension of power. Through the neoliberalisation of planning, as described by Baeten [33] and Tasa-Kok and Baeten [9], the economic structures affect the outcome of planning. However, these structures are very hard to grasp, and thus they are very effective in exercising power over the planners. In certain cases in Swedish urban development projects, such power relations have become quite clear, for example, in the case of Hyllie in the city of Malmö. This was a large scale urban development project, where private stakeholders, supported by the political regime, created a new city district. The planning of Hyllie put private market interests first, for example, in terms of housing provision for higher income groups instead of housing for the majority of poorer people in Malmö. Moreover, the planning of the external shopping centre Emporia counteracted the sustainability goal of the city of Malmö and put private interests first [33].

Another aspect of the neoliberalisation of spatial planning in Sweden is the increasing dominance of consultancies. Many municipalities today use consultancies for executing several tasks of spatial planning. This can be observed in different aspects of urban planning in Sweden and elsewhere, for example, in planning larger infrastructure projects or in comprehensive planning projects (see [34–36]). In Sweden, the planning departments are often assisted in their work by consultancies, especially in smaller municipalities that do not have the manpower to carry out all the planning tasks [27]. Through this, a sort of commercialisation of spatial planning takes place that leads to structures where the municipalities sometimes do not even have enough knowledge to assess the solutions that the consultancies offer. Here, power relations between companies, developers, and planners occur that are structured around the neoliberalisation of spatial planning in Sweden. This is also connected to the collaborative planning aspects discussed previously in this article, but it has in our opinion more to do with the hidden structures of power through the economic structures of neoliberal planning and thus with the 3rd dimension power. Moreover, Loh and Norton [36] found that the use of consultancies can affect policies towards smart growth in a negative way, which leads to the question of the legitimacy of using consultancies in spatial planning. Loh and Norton [36] do not directly touch upon the issue of power relations, but through linking today's spatial planning in Sweden together with Lukes' three dimensions of power and the neoliberalisation of the planning system, it can be argued that power is increasingly shifted from the official organisations for spatial planning, which are democratically legitimised, towards privately owned companies that do not have any democratic legitimacy.

Since planners today in Sweden need to collaborate with developers and other private organisations in order to foster urban development, this is an indication of a shift in power relations. Moreover, the political interest in planning is high today in Sweden, and according to the planners, politicians exert power through setting budgets and agendas for the planners as described above.

Paradoxically, with more political interest in planning as a tool for solving problems (e.g., housing shortages and traffic congestion) on the one hand and neoliberalisation of spatial planning on the other hand, planning has become both the solution and the problem in several urban areas in present-day Sweden. The power of the real-estate developers was expressed by planners in several cities in the interviews (Interview Planner City of Malmö 2014; Interview Planner City of Nörrköping 2014; Interview Planner City of Stockholm 2014, Appendix A). However, the developers might think differently on this matter, as the person interviewed from a real-estate firm said:

*It is more like lobbying. We will of course say look here what opportunities there are, show them good examples, or go on a study trip somewhere where we know that our idea works very well...But we really have nothing to say and it's entirely up to the building and technical committees. (Interview real estate development firm 2014, Appendix A)*

Nevertheless, the neoliberal or economic structures, as well as planning traditions, affect spatial planning in Sweden today. A planner in the region of Scania said:

*Then it is probably so that the market, a fairly conservative market that is, follows stereotypes. And here the market actors [development firms] think they know and understand what people want.*

*This probably controls planning a little too much sometimes. Here also old traditions and things that linger are of importance instead of focusing on what the next generation needs and wants to develop. (Interview planner Region of Scania 2014, Appendix A)*

Furthermore, the view of the real estate company is somewhat contested by the fact that municipalities in Sweden today do need those companies in order to satisfy the needs of housing for the inhabitants, among others. If the plans and policies drawn up by the municipalities do not correspond to the needs of the real estate companies, they can decide not to build at all. Thus, the planners are forced to make changes to the plans so that they correspond to the needs of the companies. As one planner from Stockholm said after being asked about the role of private real estate companies:

*They [the real estate developers] are essential for us. We can of course sit and plan however much we want, but unless they are willing to build nothing happens. We are of course in a dependent relationship with them in the sense that one must come up with a structure or a plan that is interesting for them to build in. So this sets the limit on what requirements we can make when it comes, for example, to parking and building volumes and stuff like that. (Interview Planner City of Stockholm 2014, Appendix A)*

A planner from the city of Malmö describes the situation as follows:

*It has to do with lobbying and such, but overall it has to do with the fact that the real estate developers want to develop their ideas and what they want and those developers are often private companies . . . who have their shareholder's profit as their main goal. This is how it works . . . But here the ideas between our official view on how the municipality should be developed does not correspond with the private interests. (Interview Planner City of Malmö 2014, Appendix A)*

Thus, the building code and regulations are in place and give the municipalities power over spatial planning, but the planning has to correspond to the needs of private actors. In all, this seem to indicate that the prevalence of neoliberal planning approaches varies greatly in different contexts. In some cases, there is strong support for arguing that current practices closely mirror the neoliberal visions of the role of the public sector in planning, i.e., that the role of the public sector in urban development should be changed in favour of private initiatives. It seems that the political ideology of the municipalities' decision-makers is very important. Because planning is affected by economic structures, neoliberal ideology is impacting spatial planning to a significant degree and making planning even more complex. Also, the goals of private actors are seldom in line with societal goals. A planner from the Region of Scania puts it this way:

*Then for a company it is easy to only see the individual need that is important for the company. But it is here companies should also see the societal needs around that. (Interview Planner Region of Scania 2014, Appendix A)*

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

In light of our empirical material, it seems that the planners themselves see the fact that they have to discuss all future building projects with private actors as a challenge. If the cities want to develop certain areas, this has to be done in collaboration with developers. Here, the connection to more project-based planning is visible, reflecting Harvey's argument about planning becoming more entrepreneurial in order to get projects done [10].

By having to consider more issues (e.g., the environment, citizens' participation, housing shortages), i.e., with an increased politicisation of planning, planning in Sweden seems to have become more pronounced over the past 10 to 15 years. It can be said that planning today in Sweden is connected to fostering the local economy and at the same time working towards sustainable development. Moreover, the neoliberal turn in planning in Sweden has led to a shift in power and made the municipalities more dependent on private developers [27]. The interviewed planners sometimes

expressed frustration over having to act as coordinators or facilitators rather than urban planners. The private interests in developing particular areas are driven by profit maximisation, which might not be in line with the planners' ideals for the areas, for example, in terms of sustainable transport.

Our analysis of the power dynamics has shown that Swedish municipalities formally had a monopoly over spatial planning. Nonetheless, it is very important to understand what kind of ideological standpoint is taken within the municipality. Although the influence of economic structures is difficult to observe (Lukes' 3rd dimension of power), political decisions are influenced by ideological convictions in ways that affect the approaches to urban development, such as the approach to public land ownership. These types of decisions make the planning monopoly limited and transfer power to the private actors involved in urban development.

Through changes in legislations and economic structures, spatial planning in Sweden has become more complex. This can be observed in that more actors outside the traditional planning offices and outside of the public sector are involved in spatial planning. Looking at spatial planning in Sweden from the neoliberal perspective, the shift towards more market-driven planning has to be seen in the context of the economic situations the municipalities have to handle. Whereas looking through the lens of collaborative planning, the changes in planning legislation are more important. Through the changes in legislation, Swedish planners are forced to include more actors in the planning process, and this has transformed spatial planning more or less into a coordinating profession instead of a planning one. Through both perspectives, a picture of the changes in spatial planning emerges that can explain, at least to a certain degree, why spatial planning in Sweden does not always seem to work towards more sustainable solutions.

The changes within Swedish spatial planning can be analysed and elaborated on through both the lens of collaborative planning and that of neoliberal planning. When connecting the analysis to the three dimensions of power described by Lukes [11], it becomes clear that the power dynamics within Swedish spatial planning have shifted towards more private actors. This shift has made planning more complex (collaborative, [7,12]) and at the same time more influenced by neoliberal thinking [9,33]. The fact that planners, as shown in our analysis, sometimes feel frustrated over the situation is a sign that they have less power over the planning process than they did 10–15 years ago. The coordination of public and private interests does not always serve the public interests, but might serve the market more than the citizens of the municipalities. It seems that sometimes short term profits for private developers are more important than long time gains for the society. This is clearly a sign of a neoliberalisation of the Swedish planning system, which can easily lead to less public welfare and a larger influence of private actors' interests. We suggest that further research is needed in order to analyse and outline the effects of this shift in power relations in terms of justice and public welfare. Sweden has traditionally had a strong welfare-state, but this shift in power indicates a weakening of the welfare-state that needs further investigation.

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## Appendix A

### *List of Interviews*

Interview person at Real estate development firm 2014

Interview Planner, City of Malmö 2014

Interview Planner, City of Norrköping 2014

Interview Planner, City of Stockholm 2014

Interview Planner, City of Umeå 2014

Interview Planner, National Board of Housing, Building and Planning 2014

Interview Planner, Region of Scania 2014

Interview Planner, Swedish Transport Administration 2014

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