

“This will not be a problem in the future, when we all have electric cars”

A sustainability perspective on planning practice of external commercial areas. A case study of three municipalities in Stockholm, Sweden.

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Master Thesis Series in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science,
No 2012:020

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University
International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science
(30hp/credits)



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A sustainability perspective on planning practice of external commercial areas. A case study of three municipalities in Stockholm, Sweden.

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A thesis submitted to Lund University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science, May 2012.



LUND UNIVERSITY

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Abbreviations

EC	Swedish Environmental Code, Swedish national legislation
PBA	Planning and Building Act, Swedish national legislation

Abstract

Swedish national legislation and environmental objectives state that cities should be planned in a coherent and sustainable approach, and in a way that limits the need for private cars. External commercial establishments are often brought up in the discussion of sustainable urban planning, since the locations result in urban sprawl and an increase in car traffic. This study examines how municipalities discuss the case of external commercial establishments in planning policy and how the municipalities incorporate sustainability and national environmental objectives into planning practice of commercial areas. Based on the findings, this study aims to suggest how municipalities could improve their work in sustainable urban planning. The method used is a triangulation with literature analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews, mainly with municipal planners and politicians, and document analysis of municipal planning documents such as comprehensive plans and detailed development plans in three municipalities in Stockholm County.

The study indicates that there is too much focus on economic development in commercial establishments and aspects of social and environmental sustainability are put behind. The problem is that there is a discrepancy in how municipalities discuss sustainable urban development and commercial establishments in the policy documents compared to the outcome. The concept of sustainable development is often discussed in very general terms, which results in lack of tools and measures for incorporating the concept of sustainable development in planning practice.

The conclusion is that municipalities need to define the concept of sustainable development more concrete and detailed in their policy documents to be able to have clear sustainability aims in their planning practices. Using already existing indicators connected to national environmental objectives and aims as planning tools could facilitate the work to obtain the goals. As another support to the municipals, regional planning has to develop to limit the risk of a too narrow and local planning perspective. Municipal planners also have to define their role more clearly and adapt to functioning as coordinators in a complex web of stakeholders.

Keywords: *sustainable urban development, external commercial establishments, retail parks, shopping centers, local governance, municipalities, urban planning, spatial planning, planner's triangle, sustainability conflicts*

Word count: 15 168

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank professor Oksana Mont for supervising me in this work. Your knowledge and critical eye have been vital for the outcome of this study. Your patience in replying all different kinds of questions and providing me with guidance contributed substantially to this research.

Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to the respondents in the study. You are the most important contributors to the outcome of the work, and I truly appreciate that you gave me your valuable time.

Thanks also to the environmental planning unit at the County Administrative Board in Stockholm for allowing me conduct the study in collaboration with you. Connecting the study to the reality was very fruitful, as well as taking part of your interesting and professional work.

LUMES, and especially Ingegerd and Stefan, definitely deserves a special acknowledgement. Without the inspiring environment, lively discussions, never-ending enthusiasm and your constant support and encouragement, my years at LUMES would have been a lot less rewarding and fun.

I would also like to thank my fellow classmates. Since I have the opportunity to have participated in two batches, I now have many friends across the world that share my views on environmental issues. Bearing that in mind will strengthen and support me in my future career.

My family and friends, and especially Kalle, also deserve to be mentioned here. Your full support and constant faith in my capabilities gave me the extra power necessary to finish such a project.

Last, but not least, (although youngest and smallest) I would like to address to my son Ivar. I'm sorry that mummy has been very busy this spring. I will make it up to you this summer, and I hope you will understand that it was for a good cause.

Stockholm, May 2012

Evelina

1 Introduction

The phrase “*sustainable development*” is widely used in national environmental objectives, the national strategy for sustainable development and in municipal urban planning policy documents. This study focuses on external commercial establishments¹, and how the municipalities discuss sustainability in the planning of commercial areas. The analysis will lead to recommendations on how the municipalities could act in the future to ensure an urban development in line with national sustainability objectives.

The expansion of external commercial establishments has developed rapidly since the 60's. Shops are often located in external areas along highways and roads outside city centers and separated from housing areas. Cars and parking spaces often dominate the structure of these areas and the big-box architecture of the facilities seems to have little in common with the visions in the national objectives, which include a decrease in car traffic and limitations of transport needs (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2011). The largest retail park in Stockholm, *Kungens kurva*, has 15 million visitors annually. With 6000 parking spaces free of charge the area attracts customers in 27 000 cars per day, which contribute to CO2 emissions and pollution (HUI research, 2009 and Huddinge, 2010). According to a study made by *Swedish Road Administration*, 80-90% of the visitors at external retail parks go there by car and the average route back and forth from home is 30 to 50 km (Vägverket 2006:83).

External commercial establishments take more and more of the market share. Today, one third of everything that is consumed in Sweden is purchased in a shopping center, and the turnover is increasing faster in this area than in other retail sectors (HUI research, 2005). The location of shops in external areas is a matter of accessibility and equity. Since 1996, more than 450 population centers have lost their last convenience stores, and the amount of grocery stores has decreased from 36 000 in the 1950's to approximately 6000 today (Boverket 2005). This has negative impacts on the social cohesion in the area and for people who do not have a car (Boverket 2005, Guy 2009).

There has been a lively debate the past 10-15 years in Sweden and Europe on how external commercial establishments affect traditional city centers and their ability to preserve attractiveness and ensure a lively central city environment. The environmental objectives in Sweden propose multi-purpose areas but external commercial establishments are often single-use facilities with little activity after closing hours. National goals state that new buildings should make positive contributions to the existing environment, and architectural quality and aesthetical values should be accounted for (Boverket 2005), which is seldom the case for these types of big-box constructions. An important environmental concern is also that these types of facilities are often built on virgin land of high agricultural quality, which may be an issue in the future in terms of ensuring food security (Boverket 2005). There are hence many different factors that have to be taken into account when planning and granting planning consent for these types of facilities.

¹ “External commercial establishments” refer to all types of retailing that are located outside traditional city centers and housing areas and which the outdoor environment are dominated by cars, e.g. shopping centers, shopping malls, retail parks, big-box retails, stretch malls and power centers. The concept is further presented in section 3.5.1

The study is conducted in collaboration with the environmental planning unit at the County Administrative Board of Stockholm, but the opinions expressed in the work are my own and do not represent their standpoints.

1.1 Problem definition

Sustainable development is a complex concept and all three perspectives on sustainability – economic, environmental and social – have to be considered in the planning process. National environmental objectives, such as *A Good Built Environment*, *Clean Air* and *Reduced Climate Impact*, and objectives in the *Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Development* will be challenging, or even impossible, to achieve with the difficulties municipalities face in prioritizing sustainability issues.

Planning for a sustainable urban development is a delicate issue. When designing a planner's role in municipalities, the varying requirements imposed by businesses, citizens and society have to be taken into consideration while ensuring that environmental goals are given needed priority and weight. The urban planning process includes many dimensions such as infrastructure, environmental aspects, consumption habits and societal cohesion. The way the term sustainable development is applied in daily practice of municipalities and the difficulty for them to prioritize environmental goals in the light of economic development affect the potential to reach national environmental objectives. It is thus interesting to study how municipalities incorporate the concept of sustainability into planning practice.

1.2 Goal

The goal of this study is to understand how municipalities discuss, interpret and apply the concept of sustainable development, as outlined in national objectives, in their planning documents and strategies with regard to planning for commercial establishments. The study will investigate challenges faced by municipalities in fulfilling national goals for sustainable development and further analyze potential pathways for reducing the identified challenges. In order to fulfill the goal of the study, specific research questions will be analyzed.

1.3 Research questions

- How do municipalities interpret and incorporate sustainability objectives and different sustainability perspectives with planning strategy and praxis, with regard to commercial establishments?
- What conflicting sustainability perspectives are the municipalities facing in the process of establishing external commercial areas, and how do they prioritize between them?
- How could municipalities work in the future to ensure a sustainable urban development in line with national environmental objectives?

1.4 Scope

The scope of this study is three municipalities in the Stockholm County. Huddinge and Nacka were chosen because they together have four of the five largest shopping

centers/retail parks in Stockholm County². Värmdö was chosen because of its rapid external commercial establishments, which are a well-known example in Stockholm (Söderlind 2011). Proximity to central Stockholm was also an important factor when choosing municipalities, which facilitated conducting interviews. Figure 1-1 below shows a map with the locations of the different external shopping areas in the municipalities selected for this study.

Figure 1-1 Map of Stockholm with the external commercial establishments in the selected municipalities



Source: Lantmäteriet through Hitta.se

1.5 Intended audience

The findings may be interesting for those working with urban planning in a local/regional perspective, with a focus on sustainability issues, infrastructure and transport development as well as on issues regarding social cohesion and societal development in relation to urban planning. It may also be interesting for authorities on a national level working with sustainable urban development and the national environmental objectives.

² According to amount of retable square meters (HUI Research 2009).

1.6 Disposition

Chapter 1 describes **the problem** and the research questions addressed in this study.

Chapter 2 provides the **methodology** used to collect data to address the research questions.

Chapter 3 provides a **background** to urban planning- and environmental objectives in Sweden. It also provides the characteristics of local governance in Sweden and a background to commercial development in Stockholm.

Chapter 4 presents the **theoretical framework** for this study, based on earlier research in a Swedish- and international perspective as well as on information gathered from Swedish authorities.

Chapter 5 **analyzes** the data collected in the interviews in the realm of the research questions and the theoretical framework presented in chapter 4.

Chapter 6 is a **study evaluation and a reflection** about research design and generalization of results. The chapter also provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter 7 **summarizes the main findings** in this research.

2 Methodology

This chapter explains the methodological approach in this study and discusses metatheoretical starting points and methodological considerations in order to show research transparency and premises.

2.1 Ontological and epistemological starting points

The presumption of the research method used in this study is a hermeneutic approach where the central idea is that the analyst of a text, or an interview, must seek to bring out the meanings of information from the perspective of its author or respondent (Bryman 2008:532). The specific situation where the text (e.g. a policy document) was formulated reflects the outcome of the wording. Sensibility regarding the accuracy of the documents must be taken into account. Some of the policy documents analyzed in this study were written ten years ago, when sustainability issues were not as high on the agenda as today.

In an epistemological perspective, the researcher has an important role in defining and interpreting the information gathered in the research. The interpretation can never be fully distinguished from the presumptions and experiences of the researcher even if the researcher always should aim for unconditional understanding of the issue (Bryman 2008:532-533). Special consideration has been taken to these conditions in the interviews in order to avoid biased interpretation.

2.2 Methods for data collection

This study is a qualitative case study conducted through a triangulation of methods in order to increase the research reliability with crosschecked findings.

2.2.1 Literature analysis

This study begins with a literature analysis in order to show how the topic has been studied earlier. Since the field is relatively unexplored important works in more general urban planning theories have also been included. The majority of the literature has naturally been focused on urban planning in a Swedish perspective with regard to national preconditions, written in Swedish or English. A theoretical framework based on the findings in the literature is presented in chapter 4.

2.2.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In order to understand how municipalities work with commercial planning in practice, semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted with mainly municipal planners and local politicians. A list of approximately 30 questions was prepared prior to the interviews. The list of questions is presented in appendix B. Specific questions based on the analyzed municipal document have also been prepared for each respondent. The interviews were conducted in Swedish and most of them were recorded and can be provided upon request. The respondents are presented further in appendix A. Complementary questions have also been posed to municipal planners through e-mail and phone to get clarification when necessary. These informants are also presented in appendix A.

The study does not specify which respondent provided the information presented in the analysis, since individual opinions are of less importance in the study. The main focus is on how the municipality acts as a whole. Not specifying each respondent in the analysis affects the transparency in this study, but it is for the cause of getting a clearer picture and more honest reflections from the respondents. (Compare to the argumentation presented by Esaiasson 2007:290).

2.2.2.1 Selection of respondents

Ten respondents have been interviewed from the three selected municipalities, and additionally two municipal representatives have answered questions through e-mail and phone. Three interviews were not included in the analysis, since they did not contribute substantially to the work. Through the municipalities' home pages key persons were identified among municipal officers working with planning issues, and local politicians in leading positions in the committees responsible for urban planning issues. After their interview all respondents were asked to propose another relevant respondent according to the continued snowball sample selection (Esaiasson 2007:291) and some of the recommended persons were included in the study.

Unfortunately, the elected representative in Värmdö municipality did not agree to be interviewed in this work. Despite several phone calls and e-mails to the chairman of the Urban Planning committee, the interview invitation was left unanswered. The head of planning in Nacka municipality did not agree to be interviewed either but answered a couple of questions by e-mail. These circumstances result in an analysis that is more focused on Huddinge municipality than initially intended.

Two respondents from the business sector were also interviewed in order to share their perspective on municipal planning practice. One leading Swedish expert on shopping centers and one representative responsible for sustainability from a large real estate company with a focus on shopping centers and commercial areas were interviewed.

2.2.3 Document analysis

Several municipal documents have been analyzed in this study in order to understand how municipalities discuss sustainable urban development with regard to commercial establishments. The documents are municipal comprehensive plans and other strategic documents as well as granted detailed development plans and planning consents. The municipal commercial policy in Huddinge was also included. Important issues regarding sustainable urban development not included in the documents are also analyzed in order to clarify whether important factors have been left out (Esaiasson 2007:237ff).

Applied research from Swedish authorities such as *Boverket* [National Board of Housing, Building and Planning] and *Vägverket* [Swedish Road Administration] were also included in the study in order to understand how the subject has been studied earlier in a Swedish context.

2.3 Methodological considerations

Since this study is dominated by data collected from qualitative in-depth interviews, the external reliability of the research may be limited in terms of replication. As Bryman (2008) argues, external reliability is a difficult criterion to meet in qualitative research since it is impossible to “freeze” the specific circumstances and replicate the same interviews (Bryman

2008:376). However, semi-structured interviews can bring more depth and greater understanding into the study and therefore are useful in this specific case.

What concerns the external validity of this research, the way the findings in this study could be generalized across other municipalities is limited. The study only focuses on three municipalities and the answers are the subjective positions of individual respondents. A larger study is needed to reveal tendencies at the national level. Since this research field is relatively unexplored, there is a limited amount of specific literature that can be used in this study. There is also a lack of quantitative statistics and data that may have contributed negatively to the research validity.

There is a risk that the interviews conducted for the study are biased, due to the respondents and how the interviewer may influence the respondents. The respondents may exaggerate the sustainability work in the municipalities and the awareness of the issue due to their interpretation of the intentions with the interviews. (Esaiaasson 2007:301) There are possible ambiguities due to the fact that the answers were given in Swedish and then translated into English. The chosen respondents may not be the best people to respond to the questions and the researcher cannot know in advance if they are key stakeholders or primary/secondary stakeholders (Esaiaasson 2007:291).

Analyzed policy documents only contain intentions and objectives, not their actual accomplishments in urban planning, and could thus not be used to confirm planning practice. Policy documents tend to be *nice wordings* but are more or less connected to reality. The documents are a good complement to interviews to get the complete picture of the case. Before each interview with municipal representatives current comprehensive plans and documents were studied and each interview started with specific questions and a discussion of their specific planning documents.

3 Background

This chapter provides background information about national legislation and objectives on urban planning and the existing planning practices and tools in local authorities, along with a brief overview of external commercial development in the Stockholm area. The illustration in figure 3-1 below shows how national policies and legislation are interlinked in the municipal planning process.

Figure 3-1 Illustration of the planning process in relation to national legislation and policies



Source: Translated version of the illustration presented in *Vägverket (Swedish Road Administration) 2008:20*

3.1 National policies

3.1.1 Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Development

The Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Development was first adopted in 2002 and amendments were added in 2006. One of four focus areas is *Building Sustainable Communities*, which includes municipal planning, regional development, infrastructure and housing etc. The document is connected to the national environmental quality objectives. (Swedish government 2005) The strategy explicitly brings up external commercial establishments when stating:

“...city planning and infrastructures must facilitate and reward sustainable behavior on the part of individual citizens. In concrete terms, retail outlets and recycling centres must be located near residential areas...” (Swedish government 2005).

3.1.2 National environmental quality objectives

Sweden's environmental objectives describe state and quality of the country's environment in a long-term sustainability perspective. The objectives support actors in their efforts to secure a sustained environment. One of the sixteen objectives has a particular influence on planning activities. The objective *A Good Built Environment*, states that:

“The built environment will provide aesthetic experiences and well-being and offer a wide range of housing, workplaces, services and cultural activities that give everybody the opportunity to live a full and stimulating life, while reducing everyday transport needs.”

“Cities are planned in a coherent and sustainable perspective on social, economic and environmental issues. (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2011)

The goal is to achieve the objective during the lifetime of one generation but the Environmental Protection Agency wrote in a follow-up in March 2012 that that is unlikely to happen (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2012).

3.2 National legislation

3.2.1 Planning and Building Act (PBA)

The PBA aims to promote societal progress towards equal and good living conditions and a good and long-lasting sustainable environment. It further states that planning shall promote a purposeful structure and aesthetically pleasing design and built-up areas. It shall also aim at promoting good living conditions from a social point of view and a built environment that is accessible and usable for all groups of society. PBA states that municipalities have to account for environmental and climate aspects in their planning work (SFS 2010:900).

A key paragraph in the PBA states that the municipality should take public and individual interests into account when deciding issues of location. The municipality should consult stakeholders and interest groups and the municipality is responsible for taking their interests into account (Boverket 2005).

3.2.2 Swedish Environmental Code (EC)

Specific environmental criteria in the planning process are defined in the EC. The purpose of the code is to promote sustainable development and to state management of land and water areas. The EC stipulates that an environmental impact analysis should always be made for the detailed development plans that “*are expected to have a considerable impact on the environment and health*” (DS 2000:61). According to the County Administrative Board (2007), this should probably be done prior to granting planning consent to every external commercial establishment build due to the vast environmental impacts related to traffic. However, this is almost never done (County Administrative Board 2007).

3.3 Regional planning

The County Council in Stockholm is the coordinator for regional planning in Stockholm County. The current planning document *RUFS 2010* discusses the planning objectives for the area and the main idea is to develop regional cores in the county in order to relieve the city center from pressure and increase attractiveness also in areas outside the city center. The

regional cores should be built upon retailing and business as the main attractions. *Kungens kurva* and *Sickla köp kvarter*, which are two of the shopping areas examined in this study, are both designated regional cores. (SLL 2010, 2011)

Many different actors from both academia and national authorities share the opinion that regional planning has failed and need to be rearranged in order to function as an important tool for regional development (Kärholm & Nylund 2011, Söderlind 2011, Boverket 2005:19).

3.4 The role of municipalities

3.4.1 Municipal planning monopoly

The municipalities have a planning monopoly stated in the PBA, which makes them fully responsible for planning the use and construction of property within the municipality. The municipal planning monopoly, introduced in 1947, is one of the fundamental principles in the Swedish system of local self-government. The principle of local self-government is strong in Sweden. Decisions should be made close to the citizens in order to ensure the best outcome based on local conditions (SFS 2010:900).

3.4.2 Tools for urban planning

3.4.2.1 Municipal comprehensive plan

The PBA requires every municipality to have an up-to-date comprehensive plan that covers the entire municipality and sets out the course for the long-term development of the physical environment. The document is not legally binding but should function as a guideline for further planning in the municipality and its aims should be connected to detailed development plans and building permits. Consultations regarding the plan are made with other municipalities, citizens and other governmental and municipal referral bodies. (SFS 2010:900 and Kärholm & Nylund 2011) Specific area for development could also be explained further and more detailed in a *Detailed Comprehensive Plan*. (SFS 2010:900)

3.4.2.2 Detailed development plan/planning consent

The planning consent is the permit that the municipality grants the landowner to allow construction on a specific piece of land or change use of land or building. The consent includes a specification on what type of activity the land is aimed for. It also specifies the type of business in case of commercial development, such as *not bulky goods, only retailing in individual buildings* or *retail but not groceries* (Huddinge 2002)

The consent is issued for five to 15 years (SFS 2010:900), which means that venues constructed today may have been granted consent many years ago when the concept of sustainable development was not as apparent as in urban planning today.

3.5 External commercial development in Sweden and the Stockholm region

3.5.1 External commercial establishments

The definition *external commercial establishments* will be used for all types of commercial facilities that are located in areas outside city centers and housing areas. The facilities can be shopping centers, malls, retail parks and big-box retail facilities etc. The common attribute is that they are situated in an area that is natural to reach by car (Boverket 2005, County Administrative Board 2007). The type of goods sold in the stores is not included in the definition. It could be groceries, retail or bulky goods. The physical distance is not important either since many external shopping centers and commercial areas are located on the outskirts of the city, not far from housing areas, but with a physical barrier such as a larger road which makes the location difficult or unattractive to reach by bike or foot (Boverket 2005, Söderlind 2011).

The public space in these areas is often relatively unattractive due to its characteristics of large-scale facilities and big-box stores with an outdoor environment that is dominated by parking spaces, as shown below in figure 3-2.

These areas are often supported by public transport although its use is not promoted by the infrastructure and therefore it has not become the primary means of transport (Boverket 2005, Söderlind 2011). Certain types of retail establishments such as furniture stores and stores with bulky goods are of course suitable for an external location because the location facilitates transportation and storage (Boverket 2005, County Administrative Board 2007 and Söderlind 2011).

Figure 3-2 Outdoor environment at Kungens kurva



Kungens kurva with an outdoor environment dominated by big-box stores and parking areas that is typical for external commercial areas. Source: Holger Ellgaard, Wikimedia Commons

External commercial establishments represent the opposite of city center shopping, which is retailing and commerce in traditional city center blocks along roads and squares and mixed with housing, offices and cultural institutions etc., or grocery stores located in housing areas close to where people live. These types of multi-purpose areas are the aim in national sustainability objectives since they increase the social cohesion and promote growth and

development by increasing attractiveness of the city (Boverket 2005, County Administrative Board 2007).

3.5.2 Beginning and emergence

The E4, the main highway through Stockholm, was constructed in the 1960's to maintain the constantly growing number of cars in the city (Bergman 2008). The city was planned in postmodern perspective with a focus on cars and the urban sprawl was constantly increasing. The road planners did not have commerce or retail in mind when planning the highway but after its opening retailers started to locate along the road and its intersections. Cheap land and easy access to transportation was two main reasons. External stores also received exemptions from the statutory opening hours that existed in that time. As opposed to stores in city centers, external stores were allowed to be open also on Sundays, which increased their competitiveness (Bergman 2008:88-90).

In the 1980's the external shopping exceeded the city central shopping, and the stores started to form larger shopping areas instead of single stores. The development was connected to the rise of individualized consumption and that people had more free time and more money to spend (Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011). This development was faster and had a greater impact in Sweden than in the rest of Europe (Bergman 2008:91). After a short break in the expansion due to the financial crisis in the early 1990's, the development accelerated again in the late 1990's with large investments in many parts of the city. The competition of shopping in city centers became more and more apparent and as a response to the development interest organizations for retailing in city centers were developed to form a united interest in preserving lively and vital city centers (Bergman 2008:118, Söderlind 2011, Boverket 2005).

3.5.3 External commercial establishments today

The external commercial establishments were earlier focused on groceries and bulky goods but in the beginning of 2000 many retailing companies with products such as apparel and sports equipment were established in external areas as well. Today one third of everything that is consumed in Sweden is purchased in a shopping center and the turnover is increasing faster in this area than in other retail sectors (HUI research, 2005). The picture, described by Bergman, is that municipalities give real estate companies generous rights to expand, maybe mainly in order to attract other establishments in the area (Bergman 2008:181).

The development seems to be even faster and more expanding at the moment. Several new retail parks and shopping centers are built and expanded every year in Stockholm County. Only two of many examples are a new mall of 100 000 square meters, which has recently been granted planning consent (Mall of Scandinavia 2011), and *Kungens Kurva* shopping area, which the municipality has plans to further expand with 240 000 new square meters intended for retailing (Huddinge 2010a).

4 Theoretical framework

This chapter begins with a description of commercial development in a planning perspective, followed by a presentation of sustainable planning in a broader perspective. The planners' role in sustainable planning practice will also be treated.

4.1 Commercial development in an urban planning perspective

Commercial and retail development in urban planning theory is a relatively unexplored research field, especially in the realm of sustainability science and sustainable development. However, several seminal works in the field have emerged the last years which of many covers a Swedish perspective.

Kärrholm and Katarina Nylund (2011) discuss the evolution of Swedish retail spaces and are critical toward the evolution when they state *“retail is one of the most important, but often underestimated, drivers of urbanization”* and *“that the development of retail still has not found a proper treatment within contemporary urban planning”* (Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011). Policy changes in terms of more or less regulation may not be the right solution even though that is the case in many other European countries which have adopted legislation and policies against external commercial establishments (Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011). Sweden already has these laws in PBA and EC, but is apparently unable to use them: *“Sweden today seems to be a country in transition, where the relationship between retail organization and public sector planning [...] now seems to be in a crisis”* they sum it (Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011).

The relationship between real estate owners and municipalities shows how regional planning often is too weak or completely missing out. The real estate owners and shopping center developers are more often engaged in regional networks than municipalities and are thus more powerful in negotiations than municipalities. The municipal planners are more focused on a local level, and often feel that they are in no position of turning down commercial initiatives, since the shopping center might be located on the other side of the municipal border if they say no. There is thus a competition between the municipalities to attract establishments and thus job opportunities (Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011).

In order to reach the national environmental goals *Good Built Environment*, *Clean Air* and *Reduced Climate Impact*, car traffic is an interesting aspect and the amount of travelled kilometers is also one of the indicators used for evaluation (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). Kärrholm & Nylund discusses twelve external commercial establishments investigated in a study by the *Swedish Road Administration* (2008) and are surprised that none of them made estimates of the expected CO₂ emissions caused by the establishments. Many of the municipalities also drew the (incorrect) conclusion that the traffic would decrease with new establishments. The reason for this, argue Kärrholm & Nylund, is that there is a widespread misunderstanding that people always use the shopping center closest to their home, which also British researcher Cliff Guy (2009) highlights as the misconception in the UK. Instead, consumers tend to frequent the shopping center they find the most interesting, which has resulted in an increase in travelled distance related to consumption with 50% since 1994 (Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011). In cases where municipal planners conducted a traffic investigation prior to approving commercial establishments, the investigations only covered the very local area of the center. The reason for that is that the environmental impact assessment obliged by the PBA and the EC legislation only covers the

local area. The increase in traffic in a regional and more comprehensive aspect is thus left out (Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011).

Jerker Söderlind (2011) argues in his two-volume work³ that the municipal planning has, after the oil crisis in 1973, increasingly been replaced by private exploitation in a market-dominated society without comprehensive plans or governance. The planning monopoly has weakened since both planning and implementation increasingly have been taken over by private actors. Real estate developers often buy land to speculate and then they present a proposal for construction that the municipality accepts or rejects (Söderlind 2011:161). Commerce and retail are often located at the city edges, mainly due to two reasons according to Söderlind. One: *Predictability*, e.g. many customers will pass by on the highway and there is enough land for future expansion, and Two: *Freedom*, e.g. exploitation can be made without conflicts from citizens or property owners, and there are few environmental requirements (Söderlind 2011:162). The paradox, Söderlind argue, is that the market society *freedom*, in a urban planning perspective, results in the same kind of planning as with strict modernistic planning governance, with different societal functions divided in the city structure. Independent real estate developers aim for quality only within their own land, which results in lack of a comprehensive approach (Söderlind 2011:166).

The overall strategies and the comprehensive plans set the frames for commercial development (Söderlind 2011). The tendency is, which is also acknowledged by Kärrholm & Nylund (2011) that municipalities do not see this connection, or that governmental agencies acknowledge the fact, but have a solution to the problem that is to return to older planning strategies where legislation and planners set the rules and dominate the process (Söderlind 2011:27). Boverket [The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning] published a work called *Shopping matters! – Retailing and sustainable urban development* in 2005 and the County Administrative Board in Skåne published a guide for sustainable commercial development in Skåne in 2007, which also emphasize the importance for a strategic and holistic approach to commercial establishments and for the importance of acknowledging retailing in sustainability work. Boverket argues that the responsibility for the [unsustainable] development lies in the hands of commercial business. As Boverket argues: “*In recent years large-scale commercial establishments have not always been able to take the existing urban environment into consideration*” and “*the scale of the new buildings and the retailers need to rationalize rarely corresponds to the requirements of aesthetic quality set by the Planning and Building Act*” (Boverket 2005:17). This formulation insinuates that retail business act counterwise to planning intentions and that they are the ones responsible for the negative development that is described. The fact is that businesses and municipalities act together and decide on the development and there is not one single stakeholder to “blame”. The municipalities should, according to Boverket, retake their responsibility and their mandate to strictly plan the urban environment and “think first” and “dare to show the consequences” before accepting an attractive offer from business developers (Boverket 2005:35). The County Administrative Board (2007) discusses regional planning as a vital part of the solution, since commercial establishments in smaller municipalities to a large extent also affect city centers in nearby municipalities (County Administrative Board 2007).

³ The work is a non-peer reviewed two-volume book, written by a well-known Swedish researcher at Swedish Royal Institute of Technology. He is one of the Swedish researchers who is the most familiar with this issue. However, his own opinions are often very critical towards contemporary planning, and he is not afraid to state his opinion clearly. I have decided to include his work in this study after all with this reservation, due to the fact that the book is almost the only work fully covering the Swedish commercial establishments issue in a municipal planning perspective.

Vägverket, *Swedish Road Administration* (Now called the *Swedish Transport Administration*) published three reports in 2003-2008 on external commercial establishments and their impact on city center retailing and the environment, mainly with a focus on transport issues and CO2 emissions. They discuss the phenomenon in the same perspective as Boverket, and state that “*studies show that establishment of external commercial areas is a contradiction to national environmental objectives and sustainable development*” (Vägverket 2003:1). They also emphasize that regional planning has an important role in monitoring the development, since establishments often result in competition between municipalities in order to ensure working opportunities (Vägverket 2003:2, 18).

In UK, researchers Michelle Lowe and Cliff Guy both have studied the development of shopping centers and Very Large Stores and how they affect traditional city centers. Cliff Guy (2002) explains how major retailers have had to adopt new strategies in order to overcome resistance from local authorities and national commercial planning policy, which often includes arguments that the stores regenerate suburban areas and employ locally and that the companies thus should be granted a planning consent. Other arguments often included are increased competition and lower prices and the improvement of customer choice, he adds. The argumentation is hence the same as in Swedish examples, in which economic aspects seem to be prioritized. He further identifies a tension between the use of major commercial investments for urban regeneration and the conventional approach to commercial planning as to protect the economic viability of town centers (Guy, 2002). Guy discusses sustainable transport choices in consumer shopping (2009) in a study that shows that commercial planning has little effect on the mode of transportation, since taking your car to a retail park is a rational choice that is difficult to change with only planning policy (Guy, 2009). Hence a more holistic approach to this issue, which incorporates also consumer choice and behavior, may be necessary.

Michelle Lowe (2000) focuses on external retail parks, but in relation to traditional city centers and states that it is time to take external commercial establishments and their urban forms seriously and further investigate how they affect the city structure in a holistic approach. She argues that they may be the new towns of the 21st century, which set the agenda for where social interaction takes place, and thus are important when discussing urban social sustainability (Lowe, 2000). This is something that Söderlind (2011) also brings up, especially in the discussion of *Sickla köp kvarter* in Nacka municipality, which he calls a privately owned city center (2011). This puts a certain pressure and responsibility to ensure accessibility to all on the company that owns and develops the land.

4.2 Sustainable urban planning

Sustainable urban planning is a very broad concept that has to be defined into the different aspects of sustainability in order to function as a tool for planning practice. The concept can be interpreted differently depending on the context. The issue is widely covered in literature throughout the world by academia and a range of different institutions such as OECD (2001), UN HABITAT (2009), and Swedish *National Board for Housing, Building and Planning* (Boverket, 2010) among others. Boiling down the essentials is not an easy task. This section attempts to explain the concept and its vital attributes relatively comprehensively.

The theory of sustainability planning is a long-term approach to decision-making, as oppose to a shorter time frame common today where the economy sets the frames (Wheeler 2004). The expanded time frame is implicit in the word “sustain”, Wheeler argues. The problem is that local government operates in a relatively short time frame, with planning documents

covering 5-20 years, at the same time as the local politicians often consider only the period until the next election, e.g. 1-4 years (Wheeler 2004). He proposes that much longer perspectives are needed that take into account human and ecological well-being even a hundred years from now. Sustainable urban planning also has to include a more holistic outlook than traditional planning, meaning that planning specialties, such as housing, transportation, land-use and environmental quality, which have traditionally been treated separately, now have to be incorporated into one single sustainable planning practice (Wheeler 2004:34-36).

In the UK, researchers Philip R. Berke and Maria Manta Conroy evaluated 30 comprehensive plans and the way that the concept of sustainability was discussed and incorporated into the plans. Their study shows no or little difference in the outcome independent on whether the comprehensive plans used the term sustainability or not (Berke & Conroy, 2000). This is also something that Scott Campbell (1996) discusses, while arguing that planning is not sustainable only by stating it in the planning documents. On the contrary much beneficial environmental work takes place without ever mentioning the word sustainability (Campbell 1996).

Edward J. Jepson Jr. (2004) explains the lack of full integration of planning and the way that affects the incorporation of sustainable development aspects in the process. The problem, he argues, is that there are two different and competing world views on sustainability – expansionist and ecological. Expansionist worldview views human systems growth as virtually unlimited, due to the incredible human capacity to innovate, utilize and adapt. The idea is closely connected to neoclassical economic perspective. Ecological worldview on the other hand holds that there are limits to the environmental ability to support human development. As long as the expansionist perspective dominates, it is unlikely that sustainable development can emerge as an effective framework for public policy Jepson explains. The solution he proposes is to merge these two worldviews into one framework, which may be the key to achieve consistence between theory and planning practice (Jepson, 2004).

4.2.1 The different aspects of sustainability in urban planning practice

This section aims to describe each of the three sustainability aspects in an urban planning perspective in order to explain the concept in more detail.

4.2.1.1 Urban social sustainability

Equity and social sustainability is by far the least developed concept within sustainable urban planning. Equity goals are often poorly understood by decisionmakers and groups that stand up for these issues are often the civil society which have no or little power to change the structure (Dempsey, Bramley, Power, & Brown, 2011). This is nevertheless a key factor in relation to urban planning, since the development imposes a risk to take an undesirable turn when these issues are neglected. Many larger cities throughout the world suffer from problems of segregation, gentrification and social problems related to housing issues. Inequities have often been built into the decision-making process, since many of lower-income or minority groups have not been involved in the process (Wheeler 2004:60-65).

Postmodern planning processes have partly compensated this problem by introducing consultations, citizen dialogues and *Reverse Planning Process*, which means that the politicians and municipal officers ask the citizens where and how to build, instead of letting them

comment on a finished proposal (Wheeler 2004:62 and UN HABITAT 2009:57). The new role for planners, which is described below in section 4.2.2 is also a response to this issue.

4.2.1.2 *Urban environmental sustainability*

Environmentally oriented principles related to sustainability of urban areas mainly include a compact urban form and transit orientation, which both saves open space and reduces car use. Pollution prevention, restoration of ecosystem components within the city is also treated in this aspect. On a practical level, environmental goals connected to planning imply developing as much knowledge as possible in order to ensure a positive development of the urban environment. The expansion of the city and the use of virgin land are also within the environmental challenges of urban development (Wheeler 2004:55) and this is something that often is visible in the location of external commercial establishments.

4.2.1.3 *Urban economic sustainability*

Environmental goals and economic development are traditionally seen as clashing concepts. The main problem is the difficulty in putting a monetary value on the environment, which treats the environment as externalities in the economic equation. Another problem in the current economic paradigm is that (environmental) regulations may be seen as eruptions in the free and market based economy. Answers to these issues could, according to Wheeler, be “full-cost accounting”, “polluter pays principle” or even the precautionary principle (Wheeler 2004:56-59).

4.2.2 The planner’s role in sustainable urban planning

Urban planning practice requires constant trade-offs and balance between different stakeholders and their interests as well as ensuring that groups with limited means are recognized in the planning process (Wheeler 2004 and UN HABITAT 2009). The planner has an important role in ensuring the balance, and she could never steer too much towards either sustainability perspective. Scott Campbell (1996) describes the role for the planner and their priorities as the theory of “Planner’s triangle” (Fig. 4-1) with three corners of fundamental planning priorities, and the conflicts that may emerge in relation to a different approach to the priorities. A compromise between the three corners may result in sustainability in the center of the triangle, depending on the definition of the concept. The inherited conflict, as with basically all discussions on sustainability, is what the concept means and how to achieve it (Campbell 1996).

Figure 4-1 Scott Campbell's (1996) "Planner's Triangle"

Planners address three fundamental priorities:
And three resulting conflicts..



Campbell's triangle with three corners of sustainable development and the possible conflicts that may occur in relation to the different aspects of sustainability. Source: Campbell, 1996

Campbell argues that sustainability needs to be refined and incorporated in a broader understanding of political conflicts in planning principles, since conflicts that occur often relate to misunderstandings arising from different language used in different disciplines (Campbell 1996:1). The planner must reconcile conflicting interests in terms of growing economy and distribute the wealth fairly at the same time as the ecosystem is protected (Campbell 1996:2). However, he continues, the discussion is often limited to battles of traditional types such as “jobs versus the environment” (Campbell 1996:1). His idea is instead to use the triangle of sustainability as a lightning rod to focus the conflicts. “*The more it stirs up conflict and sharpens the debate, the more effective the idea of sustainability will be in the long run*”, he sums it (Campbell 1996:2). However, in reality planning often tends to only represent one particular sustainability goal, while neglecting the other two (Campbell 1996:2).

The triangle he presents shows not only conflicts, but also the potential complementarity of interests, which he sees as an area where planners can be especially creative in gathering and coordinating stakeholders and interest groups. The three corners of the triangle represent different perspectives on the city. The economic development planner sees the city as where consumption, production and distribution take place and where space consists of highways and market areas. The environmental planner, on the other hand, sees the city as a consumer of natural resources and a producer of waste. The space in the city consists of ecological space as greenways and river basins. The third perspective represents the equity planner, which sees the city as a location where conflicts over the distribution of resources and opportunities takes place. Space in the city represents communities, neighborhoods and organizations (Campbell 1996:3). Campbell’s solution is that one single planner should incorporate all these aspects in the planning process in order to obtain sustainable urban planning.

Conflicts may arise in the tension between the three corners in the triangle. The *property conflict*, between economic growth and equity, arises from competing claims and uses of property (Campbell 1996:4). The tension lies in the different approach of governmental perspective in ensuring a built environment that is open to all citizens, contrary to private companies and their intentions with building e.g. a shopping mall that mainly would attract a certain (financially strong) group. The *resource conflict* is defined by its tensions between the built city and its undeveloped wilderness, which is symbolized by the “city limits” (Campbell 1996:4). The boundary is not fixed and is thus a boundary that constantly can be, and are, challenged with further city expansion on green areas (Campbell 1996:5). External commercial establishments are especially interesting in this conflict, as they are often built in the outskirts of the city and often on virgin land (County Administrative Board 2007). The *development conflict* lies between the poles of social equity and environmental preservation, and the conflict lies in the difficulty of assuring both aspects (Campbell 1996:5).

4.2.2.1 The planner's role in practice

Campbell defines the planner's role in theory, but the real challenge is to adopt the theory in practice. What role does the planner have in the daily work at the municipal office? Kärholm & Nylund (2011) explain the post-modern view of the role for planning as network or negotiation planning, where the planner is increasingly given the role of following up on decisions already taken, rather than being the experts responsible for investigating the best alternatives. The welfare state is decreasing and more neoliberal planning strategies often manage to bypass traditional planning routines (Kärholm & Nylund, 2011). Both PBA and EC legislation offer tools for restricting and governing commercial development, but the tools are seldom used to actually hinder or change the development. Instead, the democratic instruments of planning are outplayed by international actors (in terms of real estate owners and shopping center developers) and strong consumer groups, which makes the planner's role as coordinator and facilitator even more important (Kärholm & Nylund, 2011). This is an issue that is also brought up by Wheeler (2004:51), Jepson (2004:13) and by UN HABITAT (2009:64-65). The planner's role in practice is also covered and investigated in applied research by *National Road Administration* and *National Board of Housing, Building and Planning*, but their response to the problem is rather to return to the old planning theories than to acknowledge the new role for the planner (Kärholm & Nylund, 2011).

5 Analysis

5.1 Planning policy document and their interpretation of sustainable development with regard to commercial establishments

This section presents the municipalities, their characteristics and their commercial establishments. It also analyzes how the concept of sustainable development with regard to commercial establishments is discussed in the municipal planning documents.

All three municipalities mention the importance of sustainable development in their comprehensive plans, and they emphasize local city centers as vital for social cohesion. Commercial areas are rarely mentioned explicitly in the policy documents, and it shows that commercial establishments have not been seen as a prioritized strategic issue in urban planning policy. The connection to the national environmental objectives and sustainability aims is often difficult to find. Instead, the term is used very generally and broadly, or very focused on environmental sustainability, which several examples below show. All the three municipalities show discrepancies in practices and have approved buildings and activities, contribution of which urban sustainability could be questioned. This has been done despite objectives stated in their planning documents, both in terms of aiming for a reduced need for transportation and in terms of ensuring sustainability according to national environmental objectives. Table 5-1 below presents national planning goals compared to the outcome in the municipal planning intentions and planning practice of external commercial establishments.

Table 5-1 Consideration of national planning goals in the planning practice of external commercial establishments

National planning goal ⁴	Visible in the planning documents			Visible in the planning practice of external commercial establishments		
	Nacka (Draft Nov. 2011)	Huddinge ÖP 2000	Värmdö ÖP 2010-2030	Nacka	Huddinge	Värmdö
Built areas which facilitate and reward sustainable behavior on the part of individual citizens.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partly (Sickla is the easiest commercial area to reach by public transport)	No (External commercial areas which mainly require access to car)	No (External commercial areas which mainly require access to car)
Connect municipal planning to national environmental objectives and sustainability aims explicitly in comprehensive plan	In plan from 2002, but not in the new draft	No	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A
Incorporate regional planning document (RUPS) in comprehensive plan	Yes	No	No	N/A	N/A	N/A

⁴ Connected to the planning process as stated in PBL, in national environmental objectives *A Good Built Environment, Clean Air and Reduced Climate Impact* and in the *Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Development* as presented in the background (Chapter 3)

National planning goal	Visible in the planning documents			Visible in the planning practice of external commercial establishments		
	Nacka (Draft Nov. 2011)	Huddinge ÖP 2000	Värmdö ÖP 2010-2030	Nacka	Huddinge	Värmdö
Built areas provide aesthetic experiences and wellbeing.	Yes	No	No	Yes, (Partly in Sickla, which has retail and culture in old buildings)	No (Retail only in big-box stores)	Partly (Retail mostly in big-box stores)
Cities are planned in a coherent and sustainable perspective on social-, economic- and environmental issues.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (Economic issues dominating)	No (Economic issues dominating)	No (Economic issues dominating)
A built environment that is accessible and usable for all groups in society.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, partly in Sickla	No (External commercial areas which mainly require access to car)	No (External commercial areas which mainly require access to car)
Retail outlets that are located near residential areas.	Yes	Yes	Yes (Mentions this explicitly in own section)	Yes (But with physical barriers)	Yes (But with physical barriers)	Yes (But with physical barriers)
Good living conditions from a social point of view.	Yes	Partly	Yes	<i>Difficult to assess</i>	<i>Difficult to assess</i>	<i>Difficult to assess</i>
Take public and individual interests into account when deciding location.	Yes	No	No	No (Commercial areas developed by business and the market)	No (Do not follow aims in comprehensive plan)	No (Commercial area on land designated for industry)
Municipality has an up to date comprehensive plan.	Plan from 2002 but new draft available	Plan from 2000 but new plan in pipeline (no draft available)	Yes (2010-2030)	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>

Source: Municipal documents, interviews and on-site assessment

5.1.1 Värmdö municipality

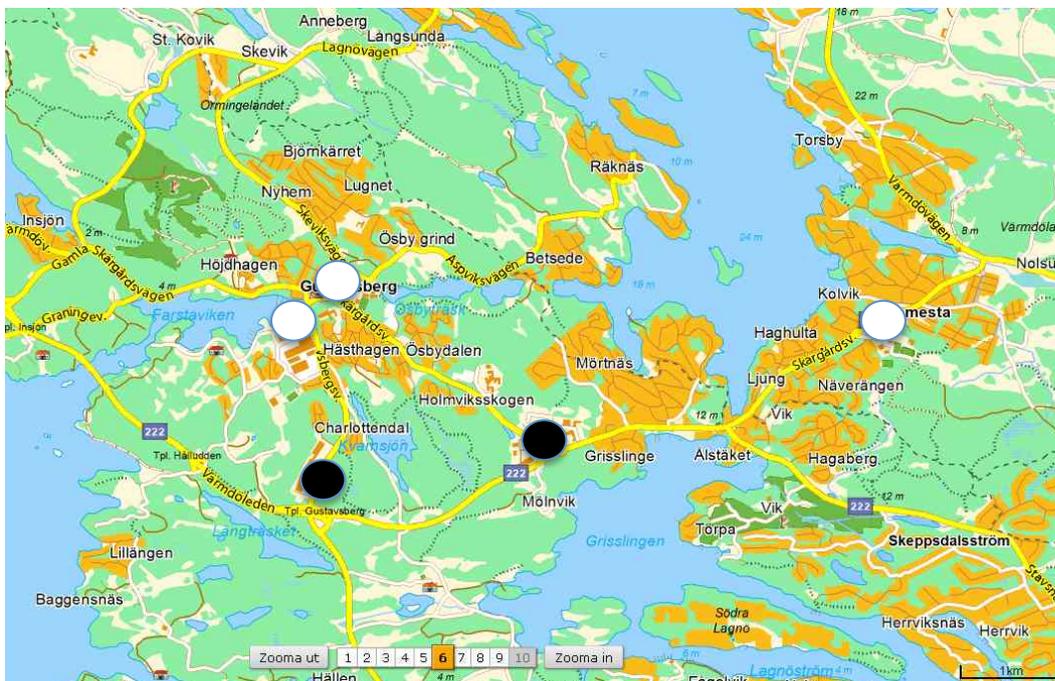
Värmdö has almost 39 000 inhabitants and is located east of Stockholm. The municipality partly consists of islands in the archipelago. During summer time the inhabitants more than triple, due to the large amount of summer residences in the municipality. This puts a certain pressure on infrastructure and municipal planning, as well as on commercial establishments in the municipality. The municipality has two different committees that handle infrastructure and urban planning: The Urban Planning committee and the Construction, Environment and Health Protection committee (Värmdö 2011c).

5.1.1.1 Commercial areas in Värmdö

Gustavsberg center, which is the closest to a city center in Värmdö, does not have a traditional city structure with squares and small streets. Instead it was originally designed as surroundings to the large co-op department store and the municipal public transport hub. The center is today struggling with competition from two closely situated external shopping areas. A new plan for Gustavsberg in the future proposes more citylike settlements and 7000-8000 new inhabitants, which may increase the demand for city center commercial establishments in the area (Värmdö 2011a).

The commercial planning in Värmdö is severely criticized by Jerker Söderlind (2011). He calls the municipality “Los Angeles in Swedish” and “a study in an urban planning own-goal” (Söderlind 2011:161,167). Värmdö has several commercial areas, two of which are external or semi-external areas (marked with black circle in figure 5-1 below). The distance between the two semi-external areas is only 3,6 km.

Figure 5-1 Värmdö has five closely situated commercial areas of various sizes



External commercial areas marked in black, central commercial areas marked in white. Source: Lantmäteriet through Hitta.se

5.1.1.2 Planning documents in Värmdö

The municipality decided upon a new **Comprehensive plan** in February 2012 to cover 2010-2030. The plan only mentions commercial establishments briefly and states the vision that: “Shops, libraries and local service are located in prosperous local societies in different parts of the municipality” (Värmdö 2010a) The section *Development in Värmdö* (Värmdö 2010b) also discusses retailing briefly and states that hubs and centers should be planned denser in order to facilitate public transport and to ensure a demand for local businesses. None of the sections discusses external commercial establishments or how to develop the existing commercial areas in the municipality.

The chapter *Strategic issues* (Värmdö 2010c) brings up the concept of sustainable lifestyles and climate mitigation but does not connect it to commercial areas in either section. It mentions that housing should be located in a way that minimizes the need for cars, but it does not include commercial areas in the discussion, which is notable since they so clearly dominate the consumption structure in the municipality.

In Värmdö, separation of functions is still a strategy used in urban planning practice, despite national aims for multi-purpose areas. Värmdö plans several areas with only housing and services, and one larger area (*Ekobacken*) with businesses, which is located separate from housing areas along the main highway (Värmdö 2010a). Modernistic ideas with separated areas and the car as the dominant mode of transportation thus seems to be the current planning theory still used here.

The **strategic document** *A sustainable Värmdö* (Värmdö 2011b) presents ten interim objectives connected to the environment. One of the objectives is directly linked to the national environmental objective *A Good Built Environment*, and states: “*Buildings and constructions should be localized and designed environmentally friendly in order to obtain a pleasant and well-functioning society*”. As one can notice, the wordings are very general and broad and does not relate specifically to the characteristics of Värmdö. The document does not state how to achieve the goals and since the planning in the municipality obviously still favors car as the dominant mode of transportation and the aim will hardly be achieved in a foreseeable future.

5.1.2 Nacka municipality

Nacka is situated east of Stockholm and is home to approximately 90 000 inhabitants. A large share of the inhabitants lives in single-family homes. The environment and urban planning committee handles the municipal planning cases (Nacka 2011a).

5.1.2.1 Commercial areas in Nacka

*Sickla Köp kvarter*⁵ (Sickla shopping block) is a relatively new area (2005) mixed with small- and large-scale retailing, cultural facilities and offices. The area, with 160 stores as a base, attracts ten million visitors annually. The real estate company *Atrium Ljungberg* owns almost the entire area. *Sickla Köp kvarter* is a semi-external shopping center. The proximity to the large housing area *Hammarby Sjöstad* makes walking and cycling to the center possible. However, a highway and several larger roads and light-rail function as barriers in the landscape, which can be seen in figure 4-3. Large parking spaces at the center contribute to the car-dominated appearance, despite the name “shopping block”. Jerker Söderlind (2011) describes *Sickla Köp kvarter* as a “privately-owned city center” (Söderlind 2011:204), because the real estate owner dominates the area not only today but will continue to do so according to the future expansion plans. At the same time as *Sickla Köp kvarter* is the closest one could call a city center in the municipality.

⁵ An interpretation of the name would be “*Sickla shopping block*”. *Atrium Ljungberg*, the owner of the center, emphasizes the name “shopping block” as something completely different from a traditional shopping center: “It’s a place where people meet, and where shopping, dining and cultural activities are mixed”, they explain. “Block” stands in their view for personality and the impression of a small-scale traditional city center, in contrast to a traditional large-scale external shopping center.

Figure 5-2 Air-photo of Sickla köp kvarter and its surroundings



Sickla Köp kvarter marked with a large square. Nacka Forum, only 2,5 km away, is marked with a small square. Housing areas marked with dots. Larger roads and light-rail are marked as lines. Source: Atrium Ljungberg.

The other shopping center in the municipality, *Nacka Forum*, is located only 2,5 km away from *Sickla köp kvarter*. Constructed in late 1980's and renovated and reopened in 2010, this indoor shopping center of a classic type with 150 stores attracts around 5 million visitors annually. Owner is the large European real estate company *Unibail-Rodamco* (Nacka Forum 2011).

5.1.2.2 Planning documents in Nacka

Nacka's **Comprehensive Plan** is from 2002. A new plan is in the pipeline and the process is ongoing since 2009. A draft is presented on their website. The current plan (Nacka 2002) does not mention commercial establishments, except for one sentence stating that larger grocery stores should be located in areas with good public transport supply and a share of the customers within walking distance (Nacka 2002: 28).

The overall aim for the new plan is presented already in the name of the **new draft – "Sustainable future in Nacka"** (Nacka 2011). The plan discusses sustainability in a broad definition and states: *"In order to obtain social sustainability, planning must account for the specific situation of different societal groups [...] and that puts pressure on urban planning."* (Nacka 2011)

The document connects a sustainable future with decreased demand for travelling by aiming for *"commercial and work places in proximity to housing areas to lower the demand for transportation and decrease energy use."* It also states that a sustainable city structure may reduce societal segregation (Nacka 2011). One of Nacka's biggest concerns according to the document is the

risk that the municipality lacks working opportunities, which would result in an area where people only spend their night. The document acknowledges the potential development and states that the business sector and trade and industry have be developed in the municipality in order to ensure local work opportunities (Nacka 2011).

The draft acknowledges local commercial establishments located close to housing areas. *“The local stores are especially important for people who do not own a car”* it states. Local centers could also function as venues for strengthening social cohesion and encouraging meetings among different groups in society, as is proposed in the plan. The plan also emphasizes the importance of having venues where meetings can take place during different times of the day, as oppose to traditional shopping areas which are only attractive during opening hours (Nacka 2011). In this perspective, the two dominating external commercial establishments in the municipality work counterwise to this idea. Both areas are relatively empty during times when the stores are closed and the competition from these establishments decreases the possibilities for having vital local centers.

5.1.3 Huddinge municipality

Huddinge has almost 100 000 inhabitants and is situated south of central Stockholm. The municipality has two different committees that handle infrastructure and urban planning: The Urban Planning committee and the Environmental committee (Huddinge 2011).

5.1.3.1 Commercial areas in Huddinge

Huddinge holds two of the largest shopping areas in Stockholm⁶. One of them, *Kungens kurva*, is - together with the nearby *Skärholmen shopping center* - the largest shopping area in northern Europe. *Kungens kurva* is home to the world’s largest IKEA store, and the whole area attracts over fifteen million customers per year. The large number of customers puts a lot of pressure on the local infrastructure. Congestion is common and also affects the nearby national highway. The municipality has temporarily stopped future expansion in the area due to traffic congestion. A *mobility management* project was introduced in spring 2012 to encourage other modes of transportation when visiting the area. (Huddinge 2011)

Figure 5-3 Air-photo of Kungens kurva shopping area



Kungens kurva shopping area, which is dominated by large parking areas and large-scale buildings with flat roofs. Source: Huddinge municipality

⁶ According to amount of retable square meters (HUI Research 2009).

5.1.3.2 Planning documents in Huddinge

The current **comprehensive plan** (Huddinge 2000) in Huddinge was adopted in 2001 and is hence relatively outdated and old in terms of connection to sustainable development perspectives. A new plan aiming for 2030 is in the pipeline, but no draft is yet available. The comprehensive plan brings up retailing specifically and mentions that the focus in the external areas, such as *Kungens kurva*, should be retailing of “bulky goods in separate facilities, e.g. no indoor gallerias or shopping centers” (Huddinge 2000). The document also states that it is important to safeguard existing facilities and ensure *Huddinge centrum* [Huddinge municipality’s city center] to maintain its attractiveness. The plan acknowledges that commercial establishments affect the society and other societal activities such as travelling by car. The plan thus mentions commercial establishments in a much more strategic approach than the other two municipalities. (Huddinge 2000)

This different approach of Huddinge municipality is also notable in the specific **commercial policy** (Huddinge 2005), which was adopted in the municipality in 2005. Only three of twenty-six municipalities in Stockholm have adopted a specific commercial strategy. The aim with the policy is to ensure that each new establishment will be evaluated in economic, societal and environmental perspectives in order to develop retailing in Huddinge in a way that secures long-term sustainability. On thirty pages, the plan discusses retailing and commercial establishments in a strategic approach and argues that traditional retailing of for instance apparel, books and sports equipment should be located in city centers and not in external areas. The plan states that each new establishment should be evaluated in a commercial impact assessment that will be used to support municipal decisions. (Huddinge 2005)

The area of *Kungens Kurva* has a draft of a **detailed comprehensive plan** from 2010 with specifies planning and objectives for the area. The plan acknowledges *Kungens kurva*’s status as one of the largest commercial areas in northern Europe, and discusses how to secure and improve its attractiveness. The overall idea is that the area should expand with more square meters for shopping as well as with “experiences for families”. The outdoor environment should be more citylike and walking and cycling should be facilitated. (Huddinge 2010abc)

An environmental impact assessment was made on the detailed comprehensive plan on *Kungens kurva* (Huddinge 2010c). The plan acknowledges the severe effects that the area could have on national environmental objectives. The study concludes the environmental aspects:

“In sum, the consequences on a sustainable development are expected to have a significant impact on a higher level. It is difficult to limit the impact on sustainable development and climate change within the context of this detailed comprehensive plan.” (Huddinge 2010c)

As it states, the scope of global climate effect is a matter more complex than this plan, but since it acknowledges the vast consequences, one could expect the municipality to have more concerns about how to implement the ideas than they obviously have. In the same paragraph, they present arguments for adopting the plan despite these impacts by arguing:

“It could be more sustainable to expand the commercial area of *Kungens kurva*, instead of to construct a new retail park in a new or even more remote area in the region” (Huddinge 2010c).

Yes, when choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea, one may choose to expand and develop *Kungens kurva*, but that could possibly be done in a way that acknowledges all

perspectives of sustainable development. There are probably more alternatives available here than to expand Kungens kurva or to expand in an “*even more remote area*”. They continue with a reservation on the long-term environmental effects of the area by claiming:

“We will probably have better cars with lower amount of emissions in the future, other types of fuel, larger share of light-rail and probably a changed way of both transport and consumption. This would result that the significant environmental affects from Kungens kurva can be lowered in a longer perspective” (Huddinge 2010c).

However, the question of how this positive transformation would take place in the future when the urban development today does not prepare for the development remains. It is difficult to see how that type of positive development could emerge out of the blue. If the planners do not consider the need for facilitating the development, who will? Sustainable development in this perspective boils down to only a matter of emissions and cars in a very narrow interpretation of the concept.

5.2 Sustainability aspects, priorities and conflicts in external commercial expansion

This sections aims to present the result from the conducted interviews. The respondents are mainly **politicians** (*PoliticianX*) and **municipal planners** (*PlannerX*). Representatives from the **business sector** (*BusinessX*) were also interviewed to account for their perspective on municipal planning with regard to commercial establishments. The respondents will be referred to with the abbreviations presented above, followed by a number. The full list of respondents is presented in appendix A.

The structure of the analysis of the interviews follows the three different perspectives on the planning as presented from Campbell’s triangle in section 4.2.2, e.g. *economic development*, *environmental protection* and *equity and social justice*. The conflicts that occur in relation to the three different perspectives will also be described in this section.

5.2.1 Economic development

Three of the external commercial areas in the examined municipalities (*Kungens kurva*, *Mölnvik* and *Sickla köp kvarter*) have developed on their own, mainly by the force of the market (Söderlind 2011 and Planner5). As Planner5 explains, the reason is that the municipality does not necessarily own land to exploit and therefore mainly the real estate owners decide on the development. When the municipality receives development proposals, Planner5 continues, they try to ensure that both public interest and concerns for the environment are considered by compromising with the landowners.

Söderlind (2011) explains the development in *Mölnvik* as an initiative from a private landowner. The municipal planners did not realize that the area was very strategically located in the municipality and the retail park was developed on land originally allocated for industrial use (Söderlind 2011). This is also something that is confirmed in the interview with Planner2. The result is a single-use area that does not conform to national environmental objectives, and the reason is that business has been too dominant in the development of the area. Planner2 did not understand the question concerning the multi-purpose functions in *Mölnvik* as aimed for in national objectives. “*Why would someone like to live in a retail-park? That is just a boring and empty area during night-time*” (Planner2). That is the reason why the government proposes areas mixed with housing, culture and commerce. Dwellings in a retail park may

not be the answer but ensuring a lively city center in Gustavsberg rather than relocating even more businesses to external areas the development may be changed in the municipality in a positive way.

In the case of *Kungens kurva*, findings in the planning documents and the interviews also show that it is obvious that planning is modified to fit the market and the commercial expansion in the area. *Heron City*, a large mall inspired by American models, opened in the area in 2001 with cinemas, shops (mainly apparel) and restaurants. The detailed development plan and planning consent state that the purpose of the area is “*Cinemas, venues for sports activities and fitness, restaurants and shops (not groceries)*” (Huddinge, 1999). However, the concept did not attract Swedish customers and many of the shops closed. The municipality granted a temporary building permit and a large *Willys* grocery store opened in 2005 (Planner6), despite the purpose stated in the consent. The initial planning consent is still applicable, but is about to be rewritten at the moment to fit the new purpose (Planner6, Politician3). Planner6 describes it as a political decision, and explains that the real estate owners often have direct contact with the elected politicians. Granting temporary building permits are then used as loopholes to allow for business and activities that are not planned for initially. Politician3 answers to this by arguing that the real estate owners were “bleeding financially” and were left standing with a concept that was unsuccessful and resulted in empty facilities. “*The municipality had to grant them a temporary building permits for a grocery store so they would not lose any more money on empty venues*”, continues Politician3. “*But I don’t think that the traffic increased only because of this*”, he adds (Politician3). This is an argument that would be very interesting to examine further, especially since studies made by *Swedish Road Administration* show that establishments always generate more traffic (Vägverket 2008:28). “*The smaller grocery stores in nearby housing areas were already affected negatively by Kungens kurva, so one more grocery store here did not change the situation*”, Politician3 sums it.

Another example from *Kungens kurva* shows the same priority in favor of the economy. The comprehensive plan of Huddinge, adopted in 2001-12-17 states that *Kungens kurva* is suppose to be an “*external commercial area with a focus on bulky goods in large separate buildings (i.e. not gallerias)*” (Huddinge, 2000:11). Despite this paragraph, a large galleria with interior design opened in 2008. The land used for the purpose is described in a planning consent adopted in August 2002 – less than a year after the adoption of the comprehensive plan. The consent describes the purpose of the area as a “*handelsbus*” [“retail venue”] with two restaurants and thirty stores selling “*apparel in a coherent environment*”, as requested for in a customer analysis done by the real estate company (Huddinge, 2002). Although the initial idea with apparel did not become a reality, the fact is that the galleria is there, contrary to the aims in the comprehensive plan which is not legally binding but should still function as a guideline for the development. A detailed comprehensive plan is in the pipeline for the area at the moment, and the reason is “*the comprehensive plan is outdated for this area*” and that the real estate owners constantly propose new expansion plans to the municipality so they have to reconsider earlier objectives and intensions (Planner4, Planner6 and Politician3). In an economic development perspective this is something desirable, since new establishments are vital for economic development and for providing more working opportunities especially for young people, as Policician2 explains.

As Planner4 and Politician3 explained, this is a matter of competition between the municipalities in the region. The competition increases not only between the neighbor municipalities, but also between all municipalities in Stockholm, and that puts a lot of pressure on the businesses in the major retail parks and shopping centers. Kärholm &

Nylund (2011) and Söderlind (2011) bring up this aspect and discuss a developed regional planning as something that could function as a support for municipalities in this situation.

The business sector puts a lot of pressure on the municipalities, and they are often the ones who are large landowners in the municipality, which leaves much of the planning and strategic works to business representatives. In the case of *Sickla köp kvarter* in Nacka, one single company owns the whole area and is thus dominating the development. The representative (Business2) explains it as a key to success in the area, along with the strategy of the company to “*not only be a shopping center builder, but to also build societies and places where people meet*” (Business2). “*Municipalities don’t know retail*”, he explains, “*the market has to be free and we know best what works – and we know that mixing offices, housing and retail increase the attractiveness in the area and thus the turnover for us*” (Business2). Business1 agrees and confirms that Sickla köp kvarter is a success due to the successful and close collaboration between one company and the municipality. “*We will see many shopping centers trying to copy their idea*”, he predicts (Business1).

5.2.2 Environmental protection

Planners and politicians in all three municipalities “defend” their external commercial establishments by claiming that the shopping area in focus is not external, but semi-external. Several of the respondents presented a map of the area and claimed the proximity to housing areas. By this statement, they insinuate that the area is “*not as bad as it looks*” in an environmental sustainability perspective related to car traffic (Planners 2,4 and Politicians 2,3).

However, many of the housing areas pointed out on these maps are located with large barriers between them and the shopping area, as visible in *Sickla köp kvarter* on figure 5-3. Another example is *Kungens kurva*, where the E4 highway with four lanes in each direction cut the landscape between major housing areas and the shopping area. These types of barriers may result in that people who live close to the centers still take their car to reach the area despite the distance, because of the infrastructure. This is something that also is acknowledged by the *Swedish Road Administration* (2008) whose investigation shows that even semi-external establishments increase traffic to the same extent as external locations. The reason is that people consider other aspect than proximity when deciding where to consume, such as attractiveness and supply of shops and convenience aspects. One thus has to calculate with an increase in traffic, and not only redistribution of the existing levels (Vägverket 2008:28).

Planner2 stated in the case of Värmdö that: “*They [the shopping areas] are not that external. You’ll reach them in only 10-15 minutes by car*” (Planner2). The problem is that a car is still necessary in order to get there. A study made by the municipality in the development of the *Gustavsberg* area shows that almost 80 % of the travelling inside the borders of the municipality is done by private car (Värmdö 2011a). This shows that the municipal planning has not succeeded in making public transport more attractive and one reason may be that the majority of the stores are located externally and hence forces the citizens to go there by car.

The municipal planning of external commercial establishments in an environmental protection perspective has a very narrow and local perspective, maybe because of the national legislation, which states what kind of environmental aspects should be included in the planning process. This view corresponds to the perspective of Värmdö and Planner5, who argued that external shopping centers “*will not be a problem in the future, when we all have*

electric cars” (Planner5). This shows a very narrow perspective on sustainability that only connects sustainability issues with emissions from car traffic. The planning tends to focus only on direct effects in the closest surrounding to the facilities, such as noise issues and storm water treatment. Car traffic, that has a global impact on the climate in terms of CO2 emissions, are not discussed in the environmental aspects, but rather in an accessibility aspect to minimize the risk of congestion in the area.

5.2.3 Equity and social justice

The social aspect of sustainable development is not apparent in the policy documents, more than as a complement to environmental sustainability. Planner4 answers to the question about why they focus only on environmental sustainability in their work with *Kungens kurva*, by claiming that they bring up the other sustainability aspects in the new detailed comprehensive plan. However, the only thing the new plan mentions about social sustainability is as a complement to environmental sustainability. They write that sustainable traveling and increased accessibility in the area are important for environmental sustainability and adds a short sentence to state *“Increased accessibility also makes the commerce more socially sustainable.”* (Huddinge 2010a). The section *A more sustainable Kungens kurva* does not bring up any aspects of urban social sustainability at all (Huddinge 2010a).

All three municipalities argue in their policy documents and the interviews that it is important to vitalize and develop local city centers in the municipalities, since that is an important meeting place and place for purchasing for elderly and for people without access to cars. The problem is that the municipalities have little room for manoeuvre in this issue. They can desire a positive development and they can provide the best conditions, such as a local demand and potential customers, but they cannot establish businesses themselves. Instead, they are dependent on businesses and companies to see the potential in the area, which can be very difficult, or even completely impossible, with a large competing retail park or shopping center nearby. The municipal representatives do not always see the potential threat that external expansion is for local centers and could even be seen as ignorant to the issue when Politician3 argues *“the local center was already negatively affected, so one more grocery store in Kungens kurva probably doesn’t make a difference”* (Politician3).

In a very local social sustainability perspective this is very important, since the shops in smaller centers tend to be smaller chains and individual and local businesses, which strengthen the area and increase diversity in business and supply. The competing big-box facilities in external shopping areas are almost always the largest Swedish food chains, which contribute to regimentation and decrease the variety for the customers. This has also been recognized by Boverket (2005).

Politician2 argues similar in Nacka when suggesting that local centers have been affected, but that it is inevitable. *“On the other hand”*, she argues, *“have the external commercial establishments given the municipality a large share of working opportunities, especially for younger people and that is something that strengthen young people and functions as an introduction to other jobs”* (Politician2). Whether the development is positive or negative is hence difficult to predict and to assess in these cases.

5.2.4 Conflicts that arise in the tension between development perspectives

Many conflicts are visible between the different development perspectives in the chosen municipalities. The most apparent is that economic aspects most often are put above equity and the environment.

Table 5-2 Visible conflicts in external commercial establishments

Conflict	Nacka	Huddinge	Värmdö
Resource conflict (Economic development/Environmental protection)	* Commercial expansion/Increase in traffic and emissions	* Commercial expansion/Increase in traffic and emissions * Grocery store/Increased traffic * Area expansion/Wildlife preserve	* Commercial expansion/Increase in traffic and emissions
Property conflict (Economic development/Social justice)	* External commercial establishments/Lively local centers	* External commercial establishments/Lively local centers * External areas which requires car/Accessibility for all citizens	* External commercial establishments/Lively local centers * External areas which requires car/Accessibility for all citizens
Development conflict (Environmental protection/Social justice)	<i>N/A (Commercial area built mainly on brownfield land)</i>	* Wildlife preserve/Build a housing area	* Use of virgin land/Increase supply and lower prices of groceries

Source: Planning documents, interviews and on-site assessment

Both the resource conflict and the property conflict are apparent in the case of *Kungens kurva* when granting temporary building permit to a grocery store in *Heron city*. The municipality's measures answered directly, and in a short perspective, to the economic situation of the property owner. The facility was there, and had to be filled with business. The market proposed a grocery store, despite the intentions of the municipal planning consent and the comprehensive plan, and the result risks to become another tiny step away from the long-term sustainability visions in the comprehensive plan and the national objectives. The property conflict is also visible in the case of Värmdö, where the municipal city center obviously is hollowed out, due to competition of external commercial establishments. The social cohesion in the municipality is degrading and certain groups such as elderly and people without a car are affected negatively when stores have closed in the center. Same tendency is also visible, but not equally apparent, in Nacka, which also has a decrease in services and supply in smaller centers due to competition from the external commercial areas.

In the case of *Kungens kurva*, an additional resource and development conflict can be detected in the detailed comprehensive plan in which housing on virgin land on the edge of the reserve is discussed. Such a housing project is expected to maximize the attractiveness of the shopping area but at the same time it creates a clear conflict between economic interest and ecology. Approving the project would inevitably favor the economic aspects (Huddinge 2010a and Politician1). This shows a clear picture on what perspective that is prioritized in this conflict. On the other hand, one may argue that the housing increases equity and accessibility to the area, so which priority that is the most favorable is not always clear.

When the municipality argues about the importance of meeting places in the area of *Kungens kurva*, the argument used is that *meetings* “provide opportunities for more sales as more people stay longer in the area” (Huddinge 2010a). This shows the property conflict and that the municipality favors economic development rather than social sustainability. One could argue that it would be better to have meeting places without consumption as the main attraction, if social sustainability was the most important goal in the development.

5.3 The municipalities’ role in planning for a sustainable urban development

Municipalities’ strategies and role to ensure a sustainable urban development needs to be more focused on practical work rather than just stating sustainable urban development as an aim in the policy documents, as Campbell (1996), Wheeler (2004) and Berkley & Conroy (2000) argue. This section aims to describe how municipalities could work in the future to ensure national objectives are actually fulfilled.

5.3.1 The use of the term sustainable development in an urban planning perspective

In a wider perspective, this study could be boiled down to fundamental principles of the concept of sustainability and what it means. Campbell asks in his article if sustainable development perspective really is necessary. The relevant question is whether sustainability is a useful concept for planners, since the goal may be too far away and holistic in order to be operational (Campbell 1996).

It is obvious that the phrase sustainable development has been used too widely in the policy documents to be able to be incorporated into daily practices. Long-term sustainable development is desirable, but short-term decisions based on desires from the market risk resulting in ad hoc decisions on a daily basis that result in a selected pathway far away from the idea of a sustainable urban environment. Sustainability should not be something only in theory, but should instead be used also as a tool to achieve the aims, as explained by Jepson (2004). Berkley & Conroy (2000) and Campbell (1996) discuss the same issue: Only dutiful mentioning of sustainability in the policy document does not result in a sustainable urban development. This is something that is visible in the case of Huddinge that has adopted a commercial policy that does not seem to contribute to a more desirable development than in municipalities without a similar plan. It is time to stop talking about sustainable development as something generic, and start talking about the specific national environmental objectives instead, which, if fulfilled, are more likely to result in sustainability as stated in national objectives.

The use of a long-term perspective is inherent in sustainable urban planning (Wheeler 2004), and is it thus notable to see how much of the municipal planning practice is shortsighted and focused only on fast economic development and increased working opportunities. Neglecting the goals set up in the comprehensive plan is also a matter of democracy and accountability. The comprehensive plan is a document adopted by the elected representatives having consulted various stakeholders in public hearings and referral bodies. If the municipalities do not follow the long-term intensions set up in comprehensive plans and policies, the citizens do not get any chance to hold them accountable for the result. Even though the comprehensive plan is not legally binding allowing a galleria to be built in Huddinge less than a year after the comprehensive plan forbade such development plans

proves the dominance of the economic paradigm. Planners evidently do not consider all perspectives of sustainable development in the process.

The issue of external shopping areas is a very important aspect of social sustainability, which will not be solved with means of future technical development advocated by the expansionist worldview, as Jepson (2004) explains, also acknowledged by Rydin (2010). Aspects such as equity, equal access to the area and democracy are fundamental values that will not change, even with electric cars or other technical development. The development of these areas defines the society and the societal structure we will have in the future. In that aspect, it may not be desirable to locate many of our societal meeting points under a consumption umbrella, as also Lowe (2000) and County Administrative Board (2007) discuss. The planners will have a vital role in working with consultations and citizen dialogues to ensure participation that could strengthen both democracy and social cohesion.

Another strategy could be to acknowledge commercial establishments as a vital part of urban planning, since they attract so many visitors and reshape the structure of the society, as Kärholm & Nylund (2011) and Söderlind (2011) argue. These kinds of questions have to be posed by the municipalities prior to granting expansion and building permits in order to set the visions for a desirable outcome. In order to solve this issue, national objectives and strategies could be used as tools for evaluating urban planning prior to adopting policies and granting planning consents.

5.3.2 National objectives and strategies as means in urban planning

The national environmental objectives, as well as the national strategy for sustainable development, already exist and could function not only as a goal, but also as tools to support urban planning practice. The objectives use a long list of indicators set to measure the progress, and some of the indicators are applicable as tools for evaluation of planning prospects.

Some of the indicators used by the objective *A Good Built Environment* are *Mileage by car*, *Transport planning*, *Energy use* and *Noise from traffic*. All these indicators could be applied to evaluation and assessment prior to granting consents for commercial areas, and could be used as arguments for approving or denying commerce at a proposed location.

Using the indicators and the environmental objectives set up by the government could also function as something for municipal officers and local politicians to rely on when discussing exploitations proposals with business representatives. An argument based on actual indicators may be easier to accept than if the municipal planners and politicians would turn down proposals with reference only generically to that they not fulfill the goals of “*a sustainable development*”. An environmental impact assessment could also be used as a tool to support municipal decisions. The Swedish EC propose that impact assessments should be done if the plan is expected to have “*a considerable impact on the environment and health*”. This formulation leaves much up to interpretation, but as County Administrative Board (2007) argues, this should probably be done in every case of external commercial establishment if one looks at environmental impacts related to an increase in car traffic. Hence, to use the tools and means that already exist could facilitate the planner’s work and function as good support to decisions.

5.3.3 An updated role for municipal planners

The municipality's role in planning practice was an issue that returned several times during the interviews. This is something that obviously is important, but sometimes difficult to handle since many opinions and actors must be taken into account. Several respondents mentioned the politicians' role as vital, with both negative and positive comments. Politician3 describes the politicians' role as the guardian for ensuring a positive sustainable development. However, his argumentation is very contradicting; since he claims that politicians and municipal officers are the most important actors although it is easy to fall for argumentations made by the business sector when they approach him with expansion requests. He thus has the same perspective on regaining power as applied research in Swedish authorities (Boverket 2005, Vägverket 2008), but in practice he is aware of the difficulties in turning down attractive development proposals.

In academia, the perception of the planner's role have shifted from the single responsible to a network coordinator, where the planner is the facilitator and the coordinator of stakeholders and citizens through discussions and collaboration. The planning practice and applied research in Swedish authorities on the other hand talks about regaining the power in planning and to *"dare to say no to business proposals"* (Boverket 2005). It may be time to abandon this old perception and start planning with even more focus on dialogue and consultations.

Nacka municipality has worked with this issue and is now mixing many different administrations to work together within the structure of sustainable development (Planner3), which may be a successful way to ensure that all perspectives of sustainability are accounted for. This is also brought up by Wheeler (2004) and Rydin (2010). Planner3 describes the sustainability work with housing issues in Nacka and emphasizes the success in letting several sectors of the municipality, which were not represented earlier, participate in the process. Urban planning has traditionally been only "hard" issues such as traffic planning, infrastructure and engineering, but the acknowledge of "soft values" such as social cohesion, children's perspective and culture could benefit the development (Planner3). This idea also includes the development of dialogues and consultations in the planning process and a reversed planning process where the citizens are more involved in the planning process and may highlight aspects that urban planner's traditionally have left out. This structure could be used in municipal planning practice not only in housing issues, but also in the planning of commercial establishments. This is also to some extent visible in the case of Sickla köp kvarter, which has, through close collaboration between the municipality and the landowner resulted in a shopping area mixed with offices and cultural activities. The plan is to also include dwellings in the area and to remove a large part of the open-air parking spaces in order to improve the aesthetical values in the area (Politician2). This shopping center, or "shopping block" as they call it, is thus a hybrid between a traditional area only dedicated to commerce and conventional city centers. Close collaboration and a landowner who understand the potential in increased business while making the area more attractive through mixed-usage seems to be a key factor in this development.

5.3.4 Developed regional planning

The fundamental idea of the planning monopoly in the Swedish local governance puts a certain pressure on municipal planning practice. The case of external commercial establishments shows that the outcome in the planning is not always the most desirable when looking at environmental and sustainability aspects in a wider perspective. The municipalities often compete in attracting commercial establishments, since it is a matter of working opportunities, municipal attractiveness and tax money. The competition undermines social

and environmental perspectives in sustainable development. A response to this situation may be a developed approach to regional planning, in order to look at commercial establishments in a more comprehensive approach since the development affects the whole region, rather than only individual municipalities.

The current state of regional planning leaves much to desire. One of the problems is that the regional planning is too weak because there is no single responsible authority, which is highlighted by Kärholm & Nylund (2011) and Söderlind (2011). Regional planning goals are set, but no institution can make sure they are implemented and the municipal planning monopoly cannot be ignored. This is an area for development, since the municipalities obviously do not see the whole regional picture when planning local areas and commercial establishments. Boverket (2005) even goes as far as to argue that Sweden may need national agreements on this important subject, which is the case in most of the other EU countries.

The County Council coordinates regional planning in Stockholm County and a regional planning strategy is adopted and updated on a regular basis. The current document, *RUFS2010*, points out both *Kungens kurva* and *Sickla* as important regional cores, but it does not state anything about coordinating external commercial establishments in the region and how retailing and business should develop outside these cores (SLL 2010). That is an issue that may have to be included as a more comprehensive strategy in updated versions of the planning document. Since external commercial establishments attracts visitors from the whole region, and thus increase the need for transportation, a regional perspective on this issue is desirable and should be developed to take responsibility for the coordination of the progress. To include infrastructural planning in local urban planning process is also something that Rydin (2010) highlights as a key to sustainable urban planning, since infrastructural planning determines travel patterns. To include sustainability when granting planning consent is thus too late in the process, since the infrastructure cannot be sufficiently modified in such a local scale (Rydin 2010:101ff).

The County Administrative Board could take a leading role in changing this development, by claiming that the development is an important issue connected to inter-municipal interests and cooperation. This is something that the County Administrative Board (2007) in *Skåne* did a couple of years ago, in their guide for sustainable commercial development where they emphasize municipal commercial policies and cooperation between municipalities as a solution (County Administrative Board 2007). A commercial policy is however only another policy document, so the effects of the adoption of such policy may be limited, which is clearly visible in the case of Huddinge municipality. Better-developed tools to actually fulfill the policy are maybe more important in this case.

6 Discussion

This chapter discusses research reflection and generalization of the results. It also brings up methodological and theoretical concerns along with an outlook for further research.

6.1 Research reflection

The method used in this study was a triangulation of literature analysis, document analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews were able to confirm the outcome of the document analysis but with reservation to biased replies due to their interpretation of the intentions with the interviews. All respondents tried to emphasize and exaggerate their sustainability work, which is common and natural in an interview situation. The method is still applicable despite this, since it is a good way of getting deeper knowledge and insights in their daily planning practices.

The theoretical framework consisted of earlier research and theories about sustainable urban planning and planner's role in sustainability work. The limited amount of available earlier research directly connected to the issue of external commercial establishments is a shortcoming in the study. The theme of this study has not been fully researched earlier and there are still knowledge gaps. Theories regarding sustainable urban development are relatively general and may not be suitable for the specific case of commercial establishments. Other theories that may have been suitable to use in this case are discourse theory and theories related to power and hierarchy of political decision-making processes. The research questions, especially the third one related to what municipalities could work in the future, could possibly have been better answered with a theory more related to the power structure and the political process.

The findings are mainly based on interviews that reflect special circumstances in three municipalities in Stockholm. The focus in the interviews was urban planning practice, which results in a study outcome that is not fully covering the complex issue. Since sustainable development should be incorporated in all areas of the municipality's work, it would have been interesting to also interview municipal officers engaged in business development issues and societal cohesion and housing development etc. It would also be interesting to not only interview politicians in leading positions, which in this case were all right-wing politicians, but also representatives from the opposition. That may have contributed to a more nuanced image of the situation.

6.2 Generalization of results

The results are difficult to generalize and apply to other issues, since interviews are based upon urban planning practice in specific cases. However, the issue about discrepancy between theory and practice, as the case with policy documents and planning practice, may be similar and applicable also in a wider context. The distinction between theory and practice is apparent. It is obvious that many of the politicians and municipal officers have impressive plans and objectives for sustainable city planning in their municipality, but other stakeholders' influence along the way and the outcome sometimes differ substantially from initial plans.

The problem with external commercial establishments has been acknowledged in many different countries, and most of the other EU member states have national restrictions on the establishment of external retail parks and shopping centers. This study could be applied on other countries, as well as on other areas of Sweden, where findings may be even more apparent in smaller municipalities with city centers that are even more affected by external commercial establishments than the municipalities in Stockholm County. Stockholm city will never lose the attraction despite the many external commercial establishments that surround the cities, but suburban areas and local centers in proximity to the establishments are already affected by competition.

6.3 Outlook and further research

Many new questions have emerged during this study, which would be interesting to further explore. It would be interesting to examine the framing of consumption in relation to external commercial establishments. Many municipalities work with consumption issues and send out information to citizens on sustainable consumption and how to reduce the environmental footprint by decreasing the consumption and take more care of the things bought. At the same time they approve for new shopping centers to be built. What kind of message does that send to the citizens, and how much responsibility can be put on individuals?

Another thing that would be interesting is to further investigate this issue with a focus on social sustainability and societal cohesion. Since a lot of policy documents and research within sustainable urban development focus on environmental aspects, it would be interesting to further examine the social sustainability in these types of areas and what effects they contribute to society and the city as a whole.

Last, a more exhaustive case study of *Kungens kurva* in Huddinge municipality would be interesting. The findings there show a large discrepancy between policy and practice in the development of commercial establishments. The municipalities have obviously made many decisions that counteract long-term sustainability objectives. The decision making process and the relationship between politicians and business actors would be very interesting to further examine and analyze in this special case.

7 Conclusion

In this study, three questions have been addressed with regard to municipal urban planning of commercial establishments in relation to national environmental objectives and legislation. The questions are; (1) how municipalities interpret and incorporate sustainability objectives and different sustainability perspectives with planning strategy and praxis, with regard to commercial establishments; (2) what conflicting sustainability perspectives the municipalities are facing in the process of establishing external commercial areas and how they prioritize between them; and (3) how municipalities could work in the future to ensure a sustainable urban development in line with national environmental objectives.

The theoretical framework used to answer these questions consists of theories of commercial establishments in an urban planning perspective and sustainable urban planning theory, as well as the planner's role in sustainable urban development. The findings in the municipal planning documents show that there is a discrepancy in how the municipalities discuss sustainable development and how they implement the ideas in planning practice. The reason for this discrepancy is that the concept of sustainable development is used in so general wordings that the concept is almost impossible to operationalize.

The conducted interviews with municipal planners, politicians and business representatives show that economic aspects constantly are put above the environment and aspects of equity and social justice. The municipalities compete with each other to attract commercial businesses in order to increase the municipal attractiveness and the amount of working opportunities in the municipality. Conflicts occur between all aspects of sustainability, and often in favor of the economy. The examples of granting consents and building permits show a shortsighted perspective, which will not lead to a sustainable urban development in line with national environmental objectives and sustainable development aims.

The recommendation to municipalities in their work for urban sustainability is to define the term sustainable development more clearly, preferably by using already existing tools and means in national environmental objectives. Politicians also need to be more involved in developing planning policies in order to ensure decisions grounded in the political process. Environmental impact assessments of external commercial establishments may also function as planning tools to a larger extent than today. The municipal planners also have to define their role more clearly as a coordinator in a complex web of stakeholders on both local and regional level, rather than looking at municipalities and business as clashing actors. The commercial development includes a larger variety of actors and citizens, which have to be able to participate in the planning. Acknowledging these groups through dialogues and reverse planning processes could impact the development positively. As a part of this development regional planning also has to evolve and increase its impact, which would also function as a support for municipalities and to minimize the risk of inter-municipal competition in the planning process.

This study shows that the concept of sustainable development is often vague and undefined in policy documents connected to urban planning. It is obvious that in order to actively working with achieving the goal, vague formulations is not enough. It is time to interpret the concept into manageable indicators and use them means to obtain the goal. Otherwise we will just be stuck with arguing about what it actually means, which for sure will not lead to the sustainable urban development that is the intention.

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8.4 Image sources

Figure 1-1 *Map of Stockholm with the external shopping areas in the selected municipalities*: Retrieved online [2012-04-10] at: <http://www.hitta.se/karta>

Figure 3-1 *Illustration of the planning process in relation to national legislation and policies*. Vägverket [Swedish Road Administration] (2008) Retrieved online [2012-04-04] at: http://publikationswebbutik.vv.se/shopping/ShowItem_____3730.aspx

Figure 3-2 *Outdoor environment at Kungens kurva*: Retrieved online [2012-04-10] at: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kungens_kurva_2010b.jpg

Figure 4-1 *Scott Campbell's (1996) "Planner's Triangle"* Retrieved online [2012-04-10] at: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~sdcamp/Ecoeco/Greencities.html>

Figure 5-1 *Värmdö has five closely situated commercial areas of various sizes*: Retrieved online [2012-04-10] at: <http://www.hitta.se/karta>

Figure 5-2 *Air-photo of Sickla köp kvarter and its surroundings*: Retrieved online [2012-04-10] at: http://mb.cision.com/Public/MigratedWpy/79951/9211846/b129e556ea622c4b_org.jpg

Figure 5-3 *Air-photo of Kungens kurva shopping area*: Retrieved online [2012-04-10] at: http://huddinge2.episerverhotell.net/upload/Bygga&Bo/planering_och_byggande/F%C3%96P%20Kungenskurva/fopkk_del_1_w.pdf

Appendix A: List of informants

Business sector (*BusinessX*)

Fredrik Kolterjahn (Business1), Senior Analyst, HUI Research. January 30, 2012.

Peter Werneman (Business2), Project manager and responsible for sustainability issues, Atrium Ljungberg. February 6, 2012.

Municipal Officers (*PlannerX*)

Anna Green (Planner3), Municipal Officer, sustainable construction, Nacka. Mars 13, 2012.

Annika Löfmark (Planner1), Municipal Officer, traffic, Huddinge. January 27, 2012.

Angela Jonasson (Planner5), Municipal officer, deputy head of planning, Nacka. Questions posed via e-mail. Mars 22, 2012.

Gunilla Sundström (Planner4), Municipal Officer, exploitation and development, Huddinge. Mars 15, 2012.

Johanna Tullhage Wadhstorp (Planner6) Municipal officer, planning architect, Huddinge. Questions by phone. Mars 26, 2012.

Mats Hellberg (Planner2), Municipal Officer, head of municipal planning unit, Värmdö. Mars 2, 2012.

Local politicians (*PoliticianX*)

Cathrin Bergenstråhle (Politician2), Elected representative (Moderate Party) in Nacka municipality. Chairman in the Environment- and Urban Planning Committee and member of the Drafting Committee for Sustainable Development. Mars 23, 2012.

Ellinor Avsan (Politician1), Elected representative (Moderate Party) in Huddinge municipality. Chairman in the Environment Committee and member of the Urban Planning Committee. January 24, 2012.

Tomas Hansson (Politician3), Elected representative (Christian Democrats) in Huddinge municipality. Chairman in the Urban Planning Committee. Mars 28, 2012.

Appendix B: Initial interview questions

The interview method used in this study is semi-structured interviews; hence the asked questions differ in the interviews. This list is a summary of the questions asked to most of the respondents, in order to provide research transparency. Most of the interviews were recorded and could be provided upon request.

About the respondent

How long have you worked here?

What is your main work?

About municipal urban planning

What kind of planning ideals do you have in the municipality?

How do you think the planning policy has changed during the last 10-20 years?

To what extent can you connect planning practice to the visions stated in planning policy documents?

About commercial planning

What driving forces are the strongest in commercial development? In general? In a municipal perspective? (Why grant permits?) What arguments are used? (Attraction, competition, working opportunities etc.)

In what way do you think the municipality could plan the commerce with regard to national environmental objectives and national sustainability aims? How would that be done realistically?

What possibilities do the municipality have in theory to hinder commercial establishments that are seen to be unsustainable? And in practice? Has that ever happen? Do you think it would happen?

What are your ideas concerning the tradeoffs between business and environmental objectives/sustainability?

What role do you think that the municipality has in ensuring that the perspectives from all interest groups are considered?

What is your opinion about the commercial areas that exist in your municipality today? Considering location, accessibility etc.

In what way do you think that commercial establishments affect the society and the societal structure? E.g. traffic, attractiveness, as node in the municipality, as meeting place etc.

Do you think that external commercial establishments are a sustainability issue? Why/why not? Which are the most important aspects?

Do you think that commercial establishments have been treated as a strategic issue for the municipality? In what way? Has the view changed? Why/why not?

Do you think that commercial establishments should be a strategic issue?

What type of investigations/planning do you do prior to granting planning consents for commercial establishments? In what way do you study alternative locations? In what way do you study consequences for car traffic and societal development?

Do you think a retail park or a shopping area could be more sustainable? In what way and how?

Who is responsible for the development? Rank the three most important actors. Do you have any cooperation with these actors today? How do the cooperation function? Does it need to be improved? What could you do/what could the other actors do?

What is the most important according to different aspects of sustainability? Social, environment, economy.

What is done today to improve the sustainability of commercial establishments? What would require in your perspective to fasten the development?

What do you think should be done on a regional level to improve urban planning in a sustainable development perspective?

At last

Do you have anything else to add?

Could you propose anyone else for me to interview?

May I contact you if I have any further questions?