A 'Europe of the Regions' – Swedish Regions as the Undead

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Introduction

The theme of this issue of *l'Europe en formation* is on regions, regionalization, regionalism, and the European Union, and more specifically upon the concept of a *Europe of the Regions*. A *Europe of the Regions* was discussed widely in relation to the regional, or sub-national, level within EU member states in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The origins of this concept can be found in changes of EU regional policy in 1988, the institutionalisation of the Committee of the Regions in 1994, and an amendment to the Maastricht Treaty, Article 146 EC, which meant that ministers in regional government could take the place of a national minister and represent the member state in the Council of Ministers.¹ The changes were also included in the *new regionalism* literature² and provided a renewed interest in regions,³ and in the roles the regional level (can) play within national administrative systems. **A further key focus of this work was on how the EU, through**

1. Bainbridge, T. *The Penguin Companion to European Union* (3rd edition), (London: Penguin Books, 2002).

2. Gren, J. *The New Regionalism in the EU. The lessons to be drawn from Catalonia, Rhône-Alpes and West Sweden* (Östersund: SIR 1999); Gren, J. *Den perfekta regionen?: en nyregionalism i Europa och samspelet mellan staten, regionen och den europeiska integrationen* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2002); Keating, M. "Is there a regional level of government in Europe?" in *Le Galès, P. & Lequesne, C. (eds.) Regions in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1998).

3. Hofstad, H. & Torfing, J. "Collaborative innovation as a tool for environmental, economic, and social sustainability in regional governance," *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration* 19 (4) (2015) pp. 49-70.

these changes in its regional policy, opened up a new supranational arena for regional actors and as a possible way to bypass the national level if there were conflicting views between national and subnational levels. A *Europe of the Regions* initially referred to a federal EU in which the regional level was the constituent part and not the member state, or at least those regions that possess a strong identity (and considerable self-governance) such as, for example, Scotland, Flanders, Basque Country, and Catalonia. However, a federal EU with the region as its constituent part is still as unlikely at the time of writing as any other form of federal EU. The concept may be less used within the regionalisation/regionalism discussions and within the recent academic literature in relation to the role of the regional (sub-national) level in an EU perspective, however it did at the time provide an important indicator of the increased importance of the region within the EU. This importance or the role of the regional level in EU affairs has not withered away or disappeared but rather has become part of *daily politics* within the EU as a multi-level polity, at least within Swedish regional development policy.

A multi-level polity is here understood as the political system in which the EU, member states and sub-national governments operate, and in which regional policy could be argued to operate within a system of *multi-level governance*. Multi-level is in itself self-explanatory as governance taking place either between or at multiple levels within society. The concept of governance includes non-governmental actors into politics, into the collective decision making processes within a state (or within a political system). The emphasis thus is on the activity of governing rather than the formal institutions. How 'politics is done' has changed and is now (more) shared between actors and groups found close to and around the central state and its institutions (at all levels of society). Warleigh-Lack and Stegmann McCallion argue that the EU was used as argument in favour of (further) regionalization and Europeanisation of Swedish regional policy.⁴ Power in a polity system like the EU is shared, at least to some extent, between state actors and actors from the private sectors, civil society and non-state institutions or agencies found at different levels within the political system. Europa Forum Northern Sweden, in a response to the Committee of the Regions White Paper on Multi-Level Governance, defined multi-level governance as a:

[c]o-ordinated action by the European Union, the member states and democratically elected regional representatives, based on partnership and aimed at implementing EU policies as the shared responsibility of the different tiers of government concerned.⁵

4. Warleigh-Lack, A. & Stegmann McCallion, M. "Europeanisation and the Uses of Discourse: Evidence from the Regionalization of Sweden," *Journal of European Integration* 34 (4) (2012) pp. 379-396.

5. Europaforum Norra Sverige, *Europaforum Northern Sweden Multi-level governance – The Committee of the Regions' White Paper CONST-IV-020*, (2009) p. 1.

In the multi-level governance literature one can see that responsibility either has become shared between levels of administration (vertically) within the state,⁶ e.g. as a realisation of the national level that economic growth cannot be 'directed' from the national level but that sub-national levels need to be included,⁷ and that governments have changed what has been described as 'traditional' forms of governing to governance (horizontally).⁸

Emilsson argues⁹ that by using a "power perspective lens", when exploring the autonomy of subnational governments and their compliance with national policies one can understand how steered or guided the subnational actors are. Including a power perspective can, for example, highlight the role that an actor plays in the policy process; how the supranational/national level steer actors at other levels, in this case regional development policies of subnational levels; and the impact this may have on the actors involved in the framing of their policies, the measures suggested, and what subnational actors can propose and implement. In this article one also needs to add the compliance with the EU's policy for regional development as well as EU legislation, for example in relation to state aid. One could here include a discussion on Europeanisation as a top-down process, take a slightly defeatist attitude and argue that there is no to very little interest because the 'EU has decided' that this is what is important and should be done. However, one should bear in mind that there are two further processes of Europeanisation, the cross-loading and bottom-up processes of Europeanisation. What is of interest is *if*, and if so is the case *how*, does the Swedish regions include strategies in their regional development plans or in their internationalisation information on influencing the EU level (i.e. up-loading), and *if*, and if so is the case *how*, do they engage with other regional actors (i.e. cross-loading). These two processes should be included in the power perspective lens, by applying a power perspective lens on regions in cross-loading and bottom-up processes of Europeanisation one has to take into consideration what the region can do in relation to *international relations* and this falls outside the remit of this article. In relation to the *Europe of the Regions* debate what is interesting is the empowerment of subnational levels

6. Hooghe, L. & Marks, G. *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*, (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

7. Stegmann McCallion, M. 'Multi-level Governance in Sweden?' *Regional and Federal Studies* 41 (3) (2007) pp. 335-351.

8. Emilsson, H "A national turn of local integration policy: multi-level governance dynamics in Denmark and Sweden" *Comparative Migration Studies* 3:7, (2015) p. 4.

For more on multi-level governance see Enderlein, H., Wälti, S. & Zürn, M. *Handbook on Multi-level Governance* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010); Marks, G., Hooghe, L. & Blank, K. "European Integration from the 1980s: State-Centric v. Multi-Level Governance," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 34 (3) (1996), 341-378; Hooghe, L. & Marks, G. *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Bache, I. & Flinders, M. (eds.) *Multi-level Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

9. Emilsson, H "A national turn of local integration policy: multi-level governance dynamics in Denmark and Sweden," *Comparative Migration Studies* 3:7, (2015) p. 2.

as well as an opportunity, if subnational actors wish to take it, to ‘bypass’ the national level if there is a disagreement and go directly to the EU-level.

If the literature on multi-level governance, Europeanisation, regionalism/regionalisation—and especially in relation to the *Europe of the Regions* debate—mainly focuses on relatively politically independent, devolved or federal regions which possess a large degree of a political identity that is different to the national level one may overlook important aspects in the academic quest for a more holistic understanding of the relationships between the EU, national, and sub-national levels. The changing relationships between levels and actors within a member state does not necessarily need to mean or result in a win-lose relationship, if and when the actors, for example, have a common goal—being part of a multi-level system this may also provide a win-win situation. One should ask the question *what are the reasons a member state is willing to delegate/decentralise power to both the supranational and the subnational levels?* What in the political context is that that has changed the national level view on participating in a multi-level polity? Warleigh¹⁰ provides eight possible reasons and it has been argued elsewhere¹¹ how these reasons apply to the Swedish example, especially in relation to regional development. How the Swedish regions view the EU level in the multi-level polity is explored by how the EU2020 economic growth policy is incorporated in the regional strategy documents, and in order to provide a broader understanding of how Swedish regions view the EU level how they relate to the EU level is also explored. How Swedish regions view the EU integration process gives a sight into how regions in a decentralised unitary state view regions role in the EU and thus contributing to the *Europe of the Regions* debate. This also allows us to answer the question if the debate is obsolete or obstinate.

Exploring the Swedish political system prior to EU membership, Montin argues¹² that the welfare state administration was situated in a national multi-level polity/governance context between municipalities, county councils, and the national level as the responsibility welfare of citizens in Sweden was shared between these levels. This changed with EU membership and now also includes the EU level. It is recognised that around 50 percent of what falls on the County Council’s (region’s) agenda, and around 60 percent of what falls on the municipal council’s agenda, originates from the EU level.¹³ The Swedish welfare state is

10. Warleigh, A. (2006) “Multi-Level Governance and Policy Networks: Conceptual Combinations and the Study of the Euro-Policy” in Cini, M. & Bourne, A. (eds.) *Palgrave Guide to European Union Studies*, p. 79-80.

11. Stegmann McCallion, M. “Multi-level Governance in Sweden?” *Regional and Federal Studies* 41 (3), (2007) pp. 335-351.

12. Montin, S. “Swedish local government in multi-level governance” in Reynaert, H., Steyvers, K. & van Bever, E. (eds) *The Road to Europe: Main Road or Backward Alley for Local Governments in Europe?* (Brugge: Vanden Broele, 2011).

13. SKL *EU påverkar lokalpolitiken* (2010), available at: <http://skl.se/download/18.a827c16146db10f89a70fa9/1404738548161/EU+i+lkalpolitiken.pdf>, p. 4.

formed within a capitalist economic system based upon economic growth¹⁴ that is to say upon the export of goods and services. What is important in this context is that economic growth is pursued either to keep existing employment levels or that new employment opportunities are created¹⁵ which then provides an income base for municipalities and county councils/regions. How and who (which actors) is involved in policy thus is important.

Regionalization involves, according to Benz et al¹⁶ the development of new kinds of both politics and policy-making, and *space* becomes a significant part of the context in which public tasks are performed. Regionalization in this sense created not only new structures in Sweden and in other EU member states but also procedures where the regional level became a forum for mobilisation, co-operation, participation, and democratic self-determination. Regionalization processes can both be top-down and bottom-up, if it is a top-down process it is usually viewed as a state-led process compared to a bottom-up process in which the pressures for change are from sub-national actors and levels.¹⁷

What makes Sweden, which can be described as a decentralised unitary state, an interesting case to explore in a *Europe of the Region* perspective is that it finds itself in what can be described as a process of political regionalization as defined by the European Parliament.¹⁸ Political regionalization does not result in separately constituted powers between the levels as found in federal states; a second difference from a federal system is that the regions do not participate in the exercise of national legislative power on their own account in, for example, being represented in a second chamber. Continuing the differences between federal and unitary states, being constituents of a federal state normally implies that all constituents have equal rights whereas in states that are non-federal *political* regionalization is generally characterised by inequality in institutions and powers. The regionalization process in Sweden has mainly focused upon the actor that should be responsible for regional (economic) development and which has resulted in a

14. Bäck, H., Erlingsson, G. & Larsson, T. *Den svenska politiken. Struktur, processer och resultat* (uppl. 4) (Stockholm: Liber, 2015), p. 255.

15. Swedish regional development policy thus follows the same logic as the EU regional development policy, there are other critical perspectives that can be applied however these falls outside the remit of the focus of this article.

16. Benz, A. Fürst, D., Kilper, H. & Rehfeld, D. *Regionalization Theory, Practice and Prospects in Germany* (Östersund: SIR, 2000), p. 7.

17. John, P. *Local Governance in Western Europe*. (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2001) p. 111; for a more in-depth overview of top-down and bottom-up regionalization processes please see p. 114-117.

18. European Parliament DG IV Publications Regional Policy *Regionalization in Europe Executive Summary* REGI 108a XX/rev.1 –04/2000 (2000).

*regional mess*¹⁹ with three different regional actors being responsible for the policy area, and a debate about Sweden's regional geography.

The article draws upon the regional development strategies, websites and other documents produced by the regions in relation to the EU. The next part of the article examines the current regionalization process in Sweden before moving onto the penultimate part that explores how the EU is viewed. In the conclusions the article argues that in relation to the a *Europe of the Regions* debate the Swedish regions can be described as undead.

Waves of Swedish Regionalization

The current regionalization process has been discussed since the late 1980s²⁰ and has resulted in several Swedish Government Official Reports. It is important to understand the regionalization process that has taken place and how it can be seen with an 'empowerment lens' (as discussed within both the multi-level governance and the Europe of the Regions literature) and especially in relation to regional development as the regional administration and the policy of regional development, it can be argued, is intertwined.²¹ The regionalization process can be described as a learning process in relation to the EU level—a learning process of how to both interact and engage with the EU level and part of this has also been a Europeanisation of Swedish regional policy into regional development policy.

One can discern different waves of momentums in the Swedish regionalization process. These waves of momentum one can argue are the result of a tug-of-war between supporters of centralism (or just keeping the status quo), opponents to a regional administrative level, and supporters of (further) decentralisation to the regional level within the successive Swedish national governments.²² During the early 1990s a source of inspiration for the proponents of regionalization was the deliberations around a *Europe of the Regions*, and there was a window of opportunities opening with Swedish EU membership. In October 1996 the Social Democratic Government put forward the Bill *the Regional Societal Organisation* (Swedish: Den regionala samhällsordningen), which led to the introduction of

19. For a definition and further discussion on the *regional mess* please see Stegmann McCallion, M. "Tidying Up? 'EU'ropean Regionalization and the Swedish 'Regional Mess,'" *Regional Studies* 42 Issue 4, (2008) pp. 579-592.

20. **The debate of the role(s) the regional level is Sweden should have**, one could argue actually started in the early 1960s, please see Stegmann McCallion, M. & Tallberg, P. Sant'Anna Legal Studies, STALS Research Paper N. 6/2008 (2008), available at: <http://stals.sssup.it>, however the *current* regionalization process it is argued started in the late 1980s.

21. Stegmann McCallion, "Tidying Up? 'EU'ropean Regionalization," pp. 579-592 for how these two processes, it can be argued, are twinned.

22. For a discussion on tension between decentralisation and national standardisation in Sweden see Hall, P. 'The Swedish Administrative Model' in Pierre, J. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 308-309.

the Regional Pilot Project in July 1997.²³ At the time there was a 'majority' for, or rather, within the government there was a rather strong supporter, at the time, the Home Secretary Jörgen Andersson of regionalization, who enabled the introduction of the regional pilot project. There was also at that time a desire of regional and local politicians to take more responsibility over the region's future economic development, in some parts of the country there was a feeling that the regions were overlooked by 'Stockholm' and that in order to have a positive economic development one had to take matters in their own hands.²⁴ If this was the first wave in the current regionalization process within Sweden, the second wave was the Committee on Public Sector Responsibilities and its conclusions presented in 2007.

The Committee on Public Sector Responsibilities was tasked in 2003, by the then Social Democratic Government to clarify the different responsibilities of the local, regional, and national levels of government within the administrative system, i.e. one could argue to (partly) 'clean up' the *regional mess*. The Committee presented its conclusions in 2007 and one of the conclusions was that the regional map should be redrawn; although the Committee did not provide a new one it suggested that Sweden could have six to nine new regions. These regions were to be formed using five criteria that the new regions should fulfil and a timeframe was also proposed.²⁵ The first criterion was population based, the Committee suggested a population based between one and two million people (however, half a million could have been accepted as an exception); secondly, each region should have its own regional (university) hospital; thirdly, each region should have at least one university; fourthly, the region should correspond to the anticipated local labour market as predicted for 2030; and the last criteria was that there should be some kind of common identity (identification) for the citizens within the new region.²⁶ However, halfway through the *remiss* process²⁷ in which some 550 actors having responded to the report,²⁸ the *Government Alliance*²⁹ gave the signal that appeared to slow down the regionalization process to a halt. Part

23. For more on the Regional Pilot Project please see Stegmann McCallion, M. "Multi-level Governance in Sweden?" *Regional and Federal Studies* 41 (3) (2007) pp. 335-351.

24. Stegmann McCallion, "Tidying Up? 'EU'ropean Regionalization," pp. 579-592.

25. The timeframe, at that time, expected for the regional reform was that most of the new regions would have been formed in time for the elections in 2010, or if needed for the elections in 2014.

26. Stegmann McCallion & Tallberg, Sant'Anna Legal Studies, STALS Research Paper N. 6/2008 p. 13.

27. The *remiss* device ensures that findings of an inquiry or committee are sent out on a consultation process to authorities, institutions, and organizations for an opinion on the findings.

28. For a complete list of bodies consulted see Finansdepartementet, 2007-03-23 Fi2007/1536 Ansvarskommitténs slutbetänkande: Hållbar samhällsorganisation med utvecklingskraft (SOU 2007:10), remissinstanser.

29. *Alliansen* (the Alliance) was made up of the Moderate Party, the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, and the Christian Democratic Party which formed a coalition government in Sweden after the elections in September 2006; they later formed a minority government after the 2010 elections.

of the slowdown in the regionalization process can be found in a debate article stated that “*the parties of the Alliance are united: the proposition from Mats Svegfors’ Committee on Public Sector Responsibilities is stopped. The Government has no intention realising that larger and fewer regions replace the county counties.*”³⁰ A slight opening in the regionalization process came with a debate article by the Prime Minister Reinfeldt and the fellow party leaders of the Alliance government about a year and a half later in January 2009, that the regional pilot project regions of Skåne and Västra Götaland would become permanent but also that the counties of Halland and Gotland would become *regionkommuner*,³¹ thus one could argue, favouring the directly elected region but still disregarding some of the criteria put forward by the Committee on Public Sector Responsibilities.³² Even though the criteria suggested by this Committee were dismissed by the previous government they seem to have surfaced in the discussion about creating larger regions again in the latest government inquiry into the regional level.

The latest, and on-going at the time of writing (spring 2016) of government inquiries into the regional level is the *Committee on Regional Division*, and which may be viewed as the third wave in the regionalization process. The Committee has been tasked with presenting a new regional map of Sweden; it presented an interim report on the 28 February 2016 that summarised where the Committee is in relation to its task. The Committee since it was formed has held meetings and dialogues with actors relevant to the regional level such as county councils, regions, regional development councils, county administration boards, and other state agencies or departments that have in their organisation a national sub-division at regional level (e.g. Swedish Public Employment Service, Swedish Tax Agency, Swedish Police). The Committee on Regional Division summarised in its interim report that “*a considerable majority of regions and county councils still view the Committee on Public Sector Responsibility’s criteria are relevant.*”³³ **Whereas the County Administrations Boards did not stress this, the County Administration Boards** view that it is the “*regional co-ordination with the central state agencies*” that are of importance, as well as the importance of “*collaboration* [Swedish:

30. Odell, M., Schlingmann, P., Flanking, A. & Ullenhag, E. “Vi säger nu gemensamt nej till att bilda storregioner,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 7 July (2007). Translations into English are done by the author.

31. This was earlier signalled via a debate article by the Government Alliance, including Mats Odell (the relevant minister), in *Dagens Nyheter* 7 July 2007 (Sweden’s largest daily news paper). The article indicated that Skåne and Västra Götaland would be made permanent, and that further requests for regional status from other parts of the country may be granted, but that further regionalization programmes would not be a priority for the Government. See Odell, Schlingmann, Flanking & Ullenhag, “Vi säger nu gemensamt nej”. Halland and Gotland had at the time applied to become regions and in the article the Government said that they would approve the application.

32. Reinfeldt, F. Olofsson, M., Björklund, J. & Häggglund, G. “Regeringen öppnar nu för nya storregioner” *Dagens Nyheter* Debatt 28 januari 2009, (2009).

33. Indelningskommittén, *Delredovisning från Indelningskommittén* Fi 2015:09, p. 6 (2016).

samverkan] with regional self-rule".³⁴ The Committee has also had meetings and a dialogue with national government agencies and various interest organisations, however it does not present their views in the report. The dialogue with all concerned parties is set to continue.

The Committee on Regional Division did present four 'criteria', or *points of departure* as common starting points for future dialogue. These departure points have their foundation in the information gathered from the above-mentioned actors.³⁵ A new regional map of Sweden was presented on 9 March 2016, and the final report is due in August 2017.

The current government, a minority government formed by the Social Democratic Party and the Greens, stated in its Government Declaration on 4 October 2015 that "*the county councils, that so wish, will be given the possibility to become regions.*" This was further followed up by a debate article written by Shekarabi (Minister for Public Administration) and Micko (Chair, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions), which was published in *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the major broadsheets in Sweden. In this article Shekarabi and Micko wrote:

"Sweden's entry into the EU has also required an adaptation to the roles that regions play in EU's cohesion policy within the frame for [both] European cooperation and the structural funds.

The regional levels increased importance for growth and through this tax-paying power is also illustrated by that many county councils [regions] has taken over the responsibility for regional development from the county administration boards."³⁶

The role of the European Union, and the EU's structural funds, in influencing the regionalization in Sweden has been explored elsewhere. That it still does is evident in the influences for change needed in the Swedish administrative political structure both by, for example, the government investigation Committee on Regional Division and the debate article by Shekarabi and Micko.

If the long-term aim of the regionalization process is directly elected regional assemblies in charge of regional development policy one could thus argue that for every two steps forward there seems to be one step backwards, i.e. the wave. This perspective has for example been summed up by Region Sörmland: "*the regional*

34. Indelningskommittén, *Delredovisning från Indelningskommittén* Fi 2015:09, p. 7, (2016).

35. The four points of departure are (1) more equal or uniform regions, that is to say that the size of the population within the region is a continued important aspect, it is so in relation to taxpaying power and economic viability in order to be able to meet future needs of the population and future challenges. More equal regions would also mitigate the current asymmetrical organisation in the current administrative system. (2) The capacity to build structures for regional development. (3) The ability to be responsible for the health care system. (4) The new regional map should emanate from already existing patterns of collaborations. Indelningskommittén (2016a) *Delredovisning från Indelningskommittén* Fi 2015:09, p. 8.

36. Shekarabi, A. & Micko, L. "Ny regional indelning ger stärkt välfärd" debate article in *Svenska Dagbladet* 21 October 2015.

organisation in Sweden has been characterised by the lack of unity, and the interest from the central level to steer and guide the process has been limited.”³⁷ As illustrated in table 1 (below) there are three different regional actors responsible for regional development, this illustrates that the regionalization process in Sweden also could be more correctly described as regionalization processes; there are different agendas at play here, with a range of wished-for outcomes, and diverse regional levels of experience on the road to regionalization. Thus, Gidlund’s verdict that regionalization would increase political tensions between centre and periphery in Sweden remains valid.³⁸

*Swedish Regional Development Policy*³⁹

Part of the regional level’s task is to prepare regional development strategies and to implement these strategies. Regional economic development policy should provide measures taken in order to create a sustainable regional economic growth and development within the region. The regional actor responsible for the regional development policy depends currently on which type of ‘region’ it is, if it is a *region*, that is to say a directly elected assembly, then it is part of the region’s responsibility; if it is a *regional development council*, that is to say an indirectly elected council formed by the municipalities and the county council within the county, it is the regional development council that is responsible; or if it is an ‘old’ region then it is the central state’s regional agency the County Administration Board that is responsible. Please see table *Regional Authority Responsible for Regional Development* for which regional actor is responsible (see table 1).

Table 1. Regional Authority Responsible for Regional Development

<i>Region</i>	<i>Regional Development Agency</i>	<i>County Administration Board</i>
Region Gotland	Region Blekinge	Norrbotten
Region Gävleborg	Region Dalarna	Stockholm
Region Halland	Region Uppsala län*	Västernorrland*
Region Jämtland Härjedalen	Region Värmland	Västmanland
Region Jönköping	Region Västerbotten	
Region Kronoberg	Regionförbundet Kalmar län	

37. Region Sörmland, Genomlysning av den regionala organisationen i Sörmland – Rapport 2014-11-18, (2014) p. 3.

38. Gidlund, J. *Regionalisering & demokratisk legitimitet* (Kalmar: Regionförbundet i Kalmar län, 1999).

39. In Swedish *regionalt tillväxtarbete*.

<i>Region</i>	<i>Regional Development Agency</i>	<i>County Administration Board</i>
Region Skåne	Regionförbundet Sörmland	
Region Örebro		
Region Östergötland		
Västra Götalandsregionen		

* is set to become a region 1 January 2017.

The responsibility for regional development contains six areas, (1) to draw up a strategy for development within the county and have this strategy ratified and finalised with relevant actors, (2) to co-ordinate measures in order to implement the strategy, (3) to make decisions about how funding for regional development should be used, (4) to follow up, evaluate and report the results of the measures to the national government, (5) to carry out tasks that falls within the frame of the EU's structural funds programmes, and (6) to establish and finalised a county plan for transport infrastructure.⁴⁰ It is in the *regional development strategies* that one can see how the regional actors relate to both the EU and national levels and as a result how they view the multi-level polity they operate within.

As the EU is a multilevel policy it is normally governments that are held responsible for policy outputs and policy outcomes, even if measures are delivered in collaboration with other actors and thus what is of interest in the collaboration is the role of leadership.⁴¹ Combine policy collaboration with the power lens previously argued is present within Swedish regional development policy so the political leadership role that regional actors can take becomes very interesting, as well as how the EU is used to create opportunities for the region. The vast majority of the regional development strategies published by Regions and Regional Development Council stress the multi-level polity and how their work in regional development is both part of and contributes to the EU2020 strategy, as well as to the national development strategy. Regions and Regional Development Councils throughout the whole of Sweden illustrate the importance of the EU level in their regional development strategies.

*In a European perspective, all regional and local decision makers are important links to the citizens of Europe. Each region thus has a local ownership and interest in striving to reach the EU2020 goals.*⁴²

40. SFS Lag (2010:630) om regionalt utvecklingsansvar i vissa län (2010).

41. Lindqvist, K "Dilemmas and Paradoxes of Regional Cultural Policy Implementation: Governance Modes, Discretion, and Policy Outcome," *Administration and Society* (2016) pp.1-28.

42. Region Jämtland Härjedalen, *Jämtland/Härjedalen Innovativt & attraktivt. Regional Utvecklingsstrategi 2014-2020*, (2013) p. 8.

The strategies also illustrate the importance of the regions that they hold in creating economic growth on the international arena.

At the same time as the regions are given greater importance, as creator of development and growth, the arena or the stage is not only bigger in reality but also more complex. Where the regions earlier were seen as parts contributing to the national achievement potential, it is today clearer that it is the regions, rather than the nations, which are the bearer of competitive advantages. Thus, it is also the regions rather than the nations that compete in the global market Region Örebro.⁴³

The connections between regional development strategies are not only with the EU's EU2020 policy, but in several cases also include the macro regional policy—the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

“Today it is about concentrating the interventions strategically. In the municipality's adopted interregional strategy the main focus is upon the collaboration around the Baltic Sea and with other islands as well as with organisations within the EU.”⁴⁴

The regions also provide illustrations how the different levels within the multi-level polity is connected through the various policies connected to regional development as well as where and how the different (public) actors fit into the polity.

Chart 1 ‘Building Blocks’ in Swedish Regional Development Policy⁴⁵

43. Region Örebro 2011 *Regional översiktlig planering. Rumsligt perspektiv på utvecklingsstrategi för Örebroregionen*, p. 4.

44. Gotlands Kommun *Vision Gotland 2025 Regionalt utvecklingsprogram för Gotland - RUP*, (2008).

45. Influenced by: Regeringskansliet (nd) *En nationell strategi för hållbar regional tillväxt och attraktionskraft 2015-2020*; Region Jämtland Härjedalen *Jämtland/Härjedalen Innovativt & attraktivt. Regional Utvecklingsstrategi 2014-2020* (2013); Regionförbundet i Kalmar län (nd.) *RUS Regional utvecklingsstrategi för Kalmar län 2012-2020*.

It is not only in the regional development strategies one can see the connection between the levels; this is also highlighted in the Swedish national strategy *A National Strategy for Sustainable Regional Growth and Attractiveness 2015-2020*:

“In order to contribute to the goals of the regional growth policy [...] it needs to be more result oriented. This means that [...] the EU’s cohesion policy is integrated in a more visible way in the regional development measure.”

The strategy thus aims to develop the following areas:

- Multi-level and sectorial collaboration within regional growth ‘work’
- Integrate EU’s cohesion policy in the regional development policy[.]⁴⁶

The implementation of the policy takes place through an interaction between EU, national, regional, and local level, however the starting point is the regional development strategies.⁴⁷

Further, it is not only about *downloading* the EU’s regional or cohesion policy into the regional development strategies, some regions and regional development councils also state how it is their responsibility to influence EU policy for future multi-annual framework programmes. Region Halland state that is their role to contribute to EU’s goals, influence its policies and monitor the opportunities that the membership involve.⁴⁸ Another region, Region Östergötland, argues that:

“as an individual region it is hard to influence the EU and the decisions taken at the EU level. Region Östergötland’s EU office is therefore part of different networks in order to together with others take a common stance to what should be prioritised within EU [...] as well as to discuss how EU’s role should be within a specific area.”⁴⁹

The Region Östergötland is part of the following networks: Assembly of European Regions, Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation, EARLALL, European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, European Regional and Local Authorities on Asylum and Immigration, European Regions Research and Innovation Network, Healthy Cities Network, European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy, S3 Smart Specialisation Platform, Sarajevo Economic Region Development Agency, Sweden Emilia-Romagna Network, and Nordiska ministerrådets skärgårdssamarbete (Nordic Council of Ministers archipelago co-operation).⁵⁰ Region Västerbotten argues that “*integration at subnation-*

46. Regeringskansliet (nd) *En nationell strategi för hållbar regional tillväxt och attraktionskraft 2015-2020*, p. 9.

47. *Idem*, p. 11.

48. Region Halland *EU och Region Halland*, (2015), <http://www.regionhalland.se/utveckling-och-tillvaxt/omrade/eu-fragor/> Last updated 19 October 2015.

49. Region Östergötland, *Påverkansarbete* <https://www.regionostergotland.se/Regional-utveckling/Internationell-samverkan/EU-kontoret/Paverkansarbete/>, Last updated 10 November 2015.

50. Region Östergötland, *Internationella nätverk* (2015). <http://www.regionostergotland.se/Regional-utveckling/Internationell-samverkan/Internationella-natverk/> Last updated 28 December 2015.

*all/regional level [has] been an important tool when it comes to strengthening the ties between the countries of Europe. By stimulating collaboration, for example, between regions, local actors and organisation around common challenges and possibilities the EU co-operation becomes also a bottom-up process.*⁵¹ However one should not only make use of the EU in 'Brussels', Region Uppsala län states in relation to its work on influencing the EU that it should also include contacts within EU's formal decision-making structure such as Swedish civil servants working within the Commission, and Swedish MEPs. Although, at the moment, there is no representative from the Uppsala region that is a member of the Committee of the Regions this is desirable and thus the Region should lobby for a representative in the future.⁵²

Conclusions: Swedish Regions as the Undead

One can view the Swedish regionalization process as part of modernising the Swedish welfare state. There has been, and still are, discussions around the regional geographies and which actor should be the responsible authority in relation to regional development policy. One conclusion that can be drawn from the Swedish regionalization process is that for a Europe of the Regions truly to be 'obsolete', it must be absent at each level of the polity, in each member state and it is *not* absent in the Swedish regional debate nor policy. Rather the opposite as national, regional, and local actors have used EU membership as argument within the debate.

One can see that Swedish regional actors often see the EU level as an 'ally' as well as other regional actors active on the EU arena such as Swedish representatives within the institutions, Swedish regional offices, other member states regional offices, and regional interest organisations. Indeed, these 'allies' are sought to influence both EU and Swedish policies. One could thus argue that as the EU is used to influence the national policy the Swedish regions see the EU level of politics as robust and actually part of a multi-level political arena, and an arena which it is worth investing in and believing that one will get something from this investment in turn. **Being part of a multi-level polity like the EU illustrates the complexity when it comes to influencing as well as implementing a policy such as regional development.** It is within this complexity that the experiences and participation of Swedish regional actors become visible and one can see that some regions are more active than others in relation how the regions view the EU level as an arena and how the regions engage with 'EU'. That is to say how the regions view the EU as an arena where they are represented, as a level where

51. Region Västerbotten, *Västerbottens möjligheter i EU nuläge och omvärld 2013*, (2013) p. 2.

52. Region Uppsala län *Europas mest attraktiva kunskapsregion. Plan för att positionera Uppsalaregionen i Europa* Dnr RFUC 2013/52 (2013).

information is gathered; as an arena for lobbying and/or providing information about the 'home' region to EU institutions or other actors; as a place for dissemination of knowledge amassed in the region regarding specific issues; or as something necessary to engage with in relation to carry out and implement EU regional policy through participation in specific programmes.

How the regions in Sweden view the EU level and the various actions the regions can have at this political level varies. One possible explanation for this is that the Swedish regions have different experiences, resources, but also that there is different priorities within the regional political elite and the choice of channels for influencing national policy. Lindh, for example, in his study of the West Sweden regional office in Brussels and the following break up of this regional office shows that the three participating regions have different ideas of what the EU level can 'offer' in terms of politics at 'home'.⁵³ This also can serve as an example of how a region not only needs to find its working relation with the EU level but also within a multi-level polity and the complexities that working within such a polity entails. Lindh's study also shows that regions within Sweden view the EU level and the region's ability to participate and influence in the EU policy process as key in creating successful opportunities 'at home' for regional development. This thus strengthens further the argument that Sweden is an interesting case in relation to the *Europe of the Regions* debate; and finally, that the Swedish regions are undead.

Abstract

The 'Europe of the Regions' debate in the late 1980s and early 1990s influenced the current regionalization process in Sweden; regional actors used it as an argument for further decentralisation of power with a degree of success (Warleigh-Lack & Stegmann McCallion 2012). Thus one important element in any discussion around a 'Europe of the Regions' and its possible obsolescence is its impact not just at the EU level but also in the regionalization processes within member states. If the EU is a multi-level polity, then for a Europe of the Regions truly to be 'obsolete', it must be absent at each level of the polity, in each member state. This article argues that a Europe of the Regions is far from obsolete, although it may well be patchy and expressed differently, and to different degrees, in each EU state. Focusing on the case of Swedish regional actors, the paper argues that officials and politicians from this level, who participate in politics at the EU level or in the EU arena, see this participation as a win-win situation that they wish to preserve.

53. Lindh, M. (forthcoming) *Regionen och EU, europeiseringsprocessers påverkan på regionalt handlande i EU-relaterade frågor* PhD Thesis, Karlstad University.