

Minutes from the workshop “Triangle Region” at the conference Traffic Days 2011 at Aalborg University, August 22, 2011

The aim of the workshop was, as stated by the conference program:

- To investigate whether any imprints of concerns of sustainable mobility can be traced in spatial planning practice in the one of Denmark’s main growth areas, viz. the Triangle Region in the East Jutland Corridor
- How and by whom is sustainable mobility framed? (intermediaries, changes, transitions...)
- What are the likely impacts of planned and proposed land use and transport infrastructure development in the Triangle Region, seen in the light of sustainable mobility objectives? The presentations will focus on the case of Fredericia and the Triangle Region (Trekantenområdet) the city is associated with.

The workshop was attended by 20 participants and opened with a short introduction by the chair, professor Petter Næss from Aalborg University. The workshop had been initiated as a spin-off from the research project ‘Enabling and governing transitions to a low-carbon society’ funded by the Danish Strategic Research Council, where Fredericia/the Triangle Region is one of the case study areas. Land use, transport infrastructure and mobility in the Triangle Region are undergoing considerable changes – but what kind of transitions are we witnessing?

The workshop’s first presentation was given by Nina Vogel from Aalborg University and was entitled ‘Imprints of concerns of sustainable mobility in spatial planning practice?’ She encouraged the participants to reflect on the ambivalence manifested by, on the one hand, Fredericia’s aim to become one of the leading climate municipalities in Denmark, and on the other hand the rapidly increasing road traffic and car-dependent land use and infrastructure development in the region. The centrally located urban transformation area Fredericia C is highlighted as a sustainability flagship project facilitating environmentally friendly modes of travel. But simultaneously, extensive urban sprawl is taking place in the outskirts of the municipality in developmental areas such as Danmark C and Fredericia West.

Anne Katrine Harders gave the second presentation (in Danish language), entitled ‘Do we dare to create the conditions necessary for sustainable mobility?’ Harders emphasized that a holistic approach and understanding of sustainable mobility is needed in order to obtain a real transition towards sustainable and low-carbon mobility. Sustainable mobility is not only about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but also about securing accessibility for all population groups, including those without a car. Good conditions for biking contribute to this. The inner parts of Copenhagen Metropolitan Area have made important achievements. Providing bicycle paths is however not sufficient. If, as in the Triangle Region, car travel is at the same time made more and more convenient, the sustainability effect of bike-promoting measures will be small. The mobility practice will not change unless we change the conditions for our mobility.

The last presentation was given by Susanne Krawack, director of the Triangle Region. She pointed at the fact that high mobility, especially for commuting, is one of the basic conditions for the evolution of the previously more or less independent cities of the Triangle Region into one functional urban area. Because

of the sprawling land use patterns of each of the settlements, most dwellings and workplaces are located too far away from train stations to make inter-city commuting by train attractive. More concentrated forms of housing are often considered low-status. The car is dominant even for more local trips. Ample and free parking, even in the city centers, aggravates this. In fear of losing retail customers to neighbor cities, each municipality is very reluctant to introducing any restrictions on parking or accessibility by car. Krawack therefore considered that policies for sustainable mobility would have to accept the region's car-dependent structure, focusing on car-pooling, mobility management and zero-emission vehicles rather than aiming to make people shift from cars to other modes.

In the subsequent discussion, some participants argued that the bike has probably a greater potential than public transport for competing with the car, at least for local trips. Some debaters considered that the size of the Triangle Region was after all limited and that car dependency in this region might – in a national perspective – be outweighed through stronger efforts to promote sustainable mobility in less sprawling urban areas, especially the Copenhagen region. Other participants emphasized that the existing car-oriented land use and infrastructure in the Triangle Region does not necessitate a continuation of this kind of spatial development. In countries such as Sweden and especially Norway, urban sprawl has largely been replaced with increasing urban population densities. It was also argued that although the car is likely to prevail as the main mode of transport for many trip purposes, it is possible to influence people's opinions about when to use the car. Such changes in 'mobility culture' could also release a potential for increased commuting by bike. In the Copenhagen area, many people accept the bike as travel mode for much longer commuting distances than what seems to be the case in the Triangle Region. It was also mentioned that several of the municipalities of the region had given verbal support of the Dutch ABC principle for mobility-friendly workplace location in their plans. The actually proposed land use did, however, not follow up these principles to any great extent. Another topic of debate in the discussion was the competition between the municipalities of the region, and between the Triangle Region and other parts of the Eastern Jutland conurbation, for inward investments and inhabitants. In this context, spacious and over-sized areas for commercial and housing development are often considered a competitive advantage. Some participants called for stronger regional-scale or national-scale regulations to counteract these tendencies. It was also mentioned that the trend in housing preferences might not point in the direction of increased demand for detached single-family homes. Developing more dense and vibrant, centrally located mixed-use areas like Fredericia C might turn out to be more effective in terms of attracting new inhabitants to the municipalities, according to some of the debaters. The social and cultural conditions for planning are constantly changing, and planners should not stick with yesterday's solutions. As a reminder of this, one of the participants mentioned the claim of a previous City Engineer of Copenhagen that it would never be possible to establish bike lanes along the Nørrebrogade in Copenhagen, since this would result in a total traffic chaos. Today, such bike paths have existed successfully for four years.