

The Political Distance between Citizens and Planners in Swedish Ecological Governance

1. Introduction

Known to most Japanese readers as welfare state, Sweden is also increasingly regarded in Japan as a leader in environmental issues. Ecological rational governance is defined as the governance toward ecological sustainability, while also securing autonomy and democracy. For the balance of the autonomy and democracy, citizen participation and involvement are important and enhance deliberative democracy. The citizens must be involved in ecological governance, since a change in public attitudes toward sustainability is necessary to establish a truly sustainable society, as Lundqvist (2004) argues.

However, in the reality of Swedish ecological modernization, citizen participation has become looked down on, in that especially in planning citizens are rarely involved. This paper clarifies how planners regard citizen involvement in environmental projects in Swedish municipalities, which have the wide range of autonomy. The analysis examines the image that planners have of citizens, or in the terminology of Feichtinger and Pregernig, imagined citizen, classified as instructive, judicious and enlightened (Feichtinger and Pregernig 2005).

This paper will begin by discussing the background of this research to explain why Sweden is an interesting case study, and a literature review to explain why this research is important. The third section presents the framework and the method for the research. The final section presents the results about imagined citizens in Swedish municipalities and the conclusions, which illustrate the dilemma in Swedish ecological governance.

2. Background

Sweden is generally regarded as a 'forerunner' in sustainable development in the world, ranked in first place in environmental performance in Europe (Yale Center 2006), and Sweden is most certainly a 'driving force' for the EU to be more ecologically sustainable (Lieverink and Andersen 1998).

Swedish government, under the leadership of a Social Democratic majority, proclaimed in 1997 to aim toward attaining a "Sustainable Sweden," combining a revitalization of the economy, green job creation, and environmental protection. This proclamation, which was the very beginning of ecological modernization, continued and accelerated with a program called LIP (Local Investment Program, Lundqvist 2000). The Swedish government recently organized the unit for Sustainable Development in 2003 aiming at developing a Green Welfare State and continuing ecological modernization with the huge investments of a new program known as KLIMP (Climate Investment Program) and a green tax system. Environmental issues are regulated in the Environmental Code and the Planning and Building Act, which stipulate the importance of citizen consultation, as well as the 16 Environmental Quality Objectives (EQOs), which set priorities in the national objectives in environmental issues.

The 290 Swedish municipal governments have the right to levy taxes and have responsibilities in physical planning. This decentralized system was established so as to bring politics and government closer to the citizens and to make policies more legitimate and based on citizens'

opinions. Considering the decentralized system and Sweden's willingness to be the driving force in environmental issue, Sweden is close to the ideal of institution for "ecological rational governance" (Lundqvist, 2004). The analysis of the Swedish case is useful to test the dilemma of the theory of ecological rational governance. Lundqvist, one of Sweden's prominent political scientists, defines the norms of ecological rational governance as "set by the limits of democracy and individual autonomy" (Lundqvist 2004, 148).

3. Theoretical Review

Dryzek argues "the main reason for the democratization of environmental administration has been a felt need to secure legitimacy for decisions by involving a broader public" (Dryzek 1997, 86). According to this normative idea, the administrations of the municipalities should be encouraged to deal with environmental problems within the framework of democracy and individual autonomy. Communication between citizens and planners is especially important. Lundqvist argues that in successful ecological governance, citizen participation is necessary, since comprehensive value change is presupposed (Lundqvist 2004). Also Agenda 21 adopted at Rio Summit in 1992 encourages citizen participation through fostering local government initiatives.

Citizen participation is one of the methods of deliberative democracy, which broadly advocates that deliberation or dialogue brings legitimacy to a decision (Grimes 2006). Grimes found that especially the Swedish national report of democracy in 2000 argued for a need for citizen involvement so as to revitalize citizens' political interest and democracy (Grimes 2005, 39). She

also argues the importance for local governments to have discursive relationship with citizens.

Considering the above, it is important to investigate planners' willingness to initiate deliberation with citizens, which enhances citizens' political trust, interests in politics and the legitimacy of political decisions. As Grimes (2005) writes, guaranteeing the freedom and opportunity to criticize policy decisions mobilizes public consent, and that administrations must justify their policies, that eases the "implementation from above". Thus, this paper will examine the willingness of environmental administrators in Sweden to listen to broader opinions and to try to refer or reflect citizens' opinions in the policy process. Education and training are assumed as main goals of the process of deliberative democracy (Elam and Bertilsson 2003, 16). Education of all parties involved is the starting point of the deliberation.

In sum, to achieve ecological rational governance, it is important for environmental administrators to encourage public participation including education to public, as Sweden aims to be a sustainable society and acknowledges the necessity of the citizen involvement.

4. Empirical Discussion

Citizen has not easily involved in not only in planning but also in projects themselves. A 1997 report entitled Local Agenda 21 (LA21) in Sweden showed that all Swedish municipalities had commenced active work to implement LA21 (SOU 1997, 82). Eckerberg found, however, that only 3% of citizens reported that they were engaged in LA21 projects (Eckerberg, Forsberg, and Wickenberg 1998, 56). Lundqvist argues that in preparing LIP applications, local network

management thus become “governance without the people”, and – in effect – also local “implementation from above” (Lundqvist 2001, 332; 2004, 173). Both he and Eckerberg point out the lack of citizen participation in LIP. At the same time, Lundqvist found that the government tended to regard citizen much more as customers than as political actors, in that Swedish ecological modernization is based on encouraging green consumption and green production (Lundqvist 2004).

Also, Lundqvist points out the difficulties of citizen involvement in decision-making, for example that citizens tend to be interested in “neighborhood issues” not in the abstract policy agenda (Lundqvist 2004, 171). That is why citizens must be empowered to participate in the political decision. In a nutshell, on the ecological modernization in Sweden, citizen participation is seen rare and difficult to increase. The following text will indicate that administrators tend to see citizens as static rather than proactive and leading.

5. Framework for analysis

These are two distinct viewpoints on citizens. While Lundqvist sees the two types of views of the citizen as being consumer and political citizen, in this paper citizen is classified as either educative, judicial or enlightened (Feichtinger and Pregernig 2005).

Feichtinger and Pregernig (2005) suggest these three types of “imagined citizen”, which does not refer to kinds of citizens in reality, but rather to policy makers’ perception of citizens. Instructive citizens cannot recognize their own interests, so policy makers have to make decisions for them that

protect their interests. Judicious citizens can perceive their interests but need others' help to put them into practice, so their opinions are made use of during policy making but after that, decision making and implementation is handed over to administrators. Enlightened citizens can recognize their interests and put them into practice, so citizens should work along side administrators in the policy-making process.

According to them, the difference between the first and second type of imagined citizen is whether citizens are at least invited to articulate their attitudes, wishes and needs. The difference between the second and third type of imagined citizen is whether citizens have the capacity for autonomous action. Instructive citizen can have the "one-sided exchange of information", judicious citizens can have "two-sided exchange of information", and enlightened citizen can have "discourse" which means that citizen can control the administrators (Feichtinger and Pregernig 2005, 236).

Among these three conceptualizations of the citizen, the citizen as consumer in Lundqvist's finding can be categorized as instructive citizens, in that they are not regarded as political agents but as individuals who should be educated and influenced by political decisions.

Sociologists perceive that scientific experts should interact closely with lay people and argue that science should be highly integrated in citizens' daily lives to acquire "scientific citizenship" (Mark and Bertilsson 2003). This perspective can be applied to the relation between citizen and policy makers in environmental issues, since decisions often rely on scientific knowledge. Especially in ecological modernization, scientific knowledge is crucial. Policy makers can be

compared to scientific experts as planners of environmental projects at Swedish local governments, because they are biologists or electrical engineers, among other things. The point is that sociologists more consider the extent of the involvement between lay people and experts, and in a similar way, this paper considers the political distance between citizens and planners. In political decisions, citizen and planners must always interact in a democratic political system.

Even though Agenda21 assumes that the public has a consultative role in the planning process, and citizen should hopefully be recognized as at least judicious citizens, ecological modernization seems instead to have caused a widening knowledge gap between the public and experts. Education becomes all the more crucial. Thus, it seems that on the procedure of ecological modernization, the distance between citizen and planners in the administrative process has become wider.

This paper will clarify how planners of environmental projects regard citizens in Swedish municipalities in reality, and the effect these views have on the extent that Swedish municipalities have taken measures of citizen involvement.

6. Method

For this research, the author interviewed administrators in 6 Swedish municipalities. The studied municipalities are three biggest municipalities: Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, and the other three municipalities: Örebro and Gotland (both quite famous as pioneers in environmental projects and democratization), and Katrineholm, a small municipality that succeeded in getting a

KLIMP grant, while other small municipalities have had difficulties to get such grants.

The details of the deliberation methods taken by planners will not be discussed in this paper, but my interviews include questions about measures taken by LA21 coordinators, LIP or KLIMP planners and other environmental strategists in the municipalities studied. Instead of the description of measures, my analysis will focus on the extent that the municipalities have been active in encouraging citizen involvement, as well as on administrators views of local citizens along the lines of the theory of “imagined citizens” mentioned above.

7. Results

From the interviews with administrators, various imagined citizen have been captured. Two administrators articulated that citizens are knowledgeable enough to be involved in their decision-making. Andersson, J. (2006) in Malmö has not been engaged in the citizen targeting projects but he has targeted companies, and he regards employees at companies involved in KLIMP also as ‘citizens’. Järliden (2006) in Örebro is also passionate about equality in society as the basis of the development of sustainability. Both of these planners imagine citizens as ‘enlightened’.

Müllerström (2006) and Sandström (2006), two KLIMP planners in Göteborg and Katrineholm consider themselves experts in environmental issues and good at making “abstract” plans, which they think citizens usually are not interested in. They have tried to involved citizens mainly and actively through education to public. They can be said to view citizens as ‘educative’.

Rosendahl (2006), the Environmental Coordinator in Örebro, thinks that specific issues, not a national framework such as the EQOs, are more interesting to citizens. She has herself involved citizens in the decision-making in the implementation of EQOs. This indicates that she views those citizens interested in the issue as judicious citizen, and others not involved in planning as educative. It makes sense that in the EQOs implementation, the citizens interested are invited to the meeting for reviewing the plans for local EQOs (Rosendahl 2006). Ramberg (2006), the Environment and Development Manager in Göteborg, thinks that when the issues start to affect citizens' material interest in reality, then that issue will become interesting for citizens, otherwise she regards citizens are indifferent to what administrators are doing.

From those opinions, their imagined citizens are in-between the categories of instructive and judicious citizen, in that they think some citizens can perceive their interests but their interests might be wrong or misled, and that some citizens can recognize their immediate interests, but not abstract and long-term interests, so it could be better to classify this view of citizens as educative. The city of Göteborg tends to see developing deliberation as not comparatively important, but more tends to put emphasis on educating citizens locally through LA21 (Friberg 2006; Müllerström 2006; Ramberg 2006; Rohdin 2006).

In Malmö, Fossum (2006), LIP project leader thinks that citizens are the experts of their needs or situations of their neighborhoods, while they lack the knowledge that administrators have. Also Eriksson (2006), LA21 coordinator in Malmö thinks that citizens are not experts but they do have patchy knowledge and that they know their needs and those of their neighborhoods. Eriksson also

thinks social equality is crucial, so she feels the necessity to approach as many citizens as possible.

In a similar way, Gunnarsson (2006), a vice major in Stockholm thinks that citizens can express their needs but cannot suggest policies, and that they sometimes do not understand the incompatibility of their needs and their bad influences to environment.

These opinions clearly show their imagined citizen as judicious citizen, in that citizens can recognize their interests, but they cannot put those into practice, and administrators need to make it into policies. From this image, the two-way-deliberation can start. It makes sense that Malmö and Stockholm have experienced various deliberation methods, but the efforts in Stockholm have been more developed than those in Malmö (Andersson, J. 2006; Eriksson 2006; Forsell 2006; Fossum 2006; Gunnarsson 2006; Möller 2006; Saar 2006).

However, in the KLIMP procedure in Stockholm, citizens tend not to be involved in planning, but the KLIMP projects themselves are quite deliberative, with one encouraging and educating citizens about ecological consumption (Saar 2006). Back to Lundqvist's opinion that ecological modernization entails viewing the citizen as consumer, Saar's project proves Lundqvist's argument in that Saar's imagined citizens are instructive consumers whose behaviors can be changed by education. Even though the consumption project used a deliberative style, this Stockholm administrator is more interested in citizens not as political citizens but as those to be influenced by education. This KLIMP planner sees citizens are educative.

Andersson, H. (2006), a Gotland ecostrategist thinks that People do not usually have many opinions and citizens think that issues are too complex for them to tackle, so that they do not want

to be involved. She worries that citizens' interest in the environmental issues has declined, while local governments have started to have better policies than before. This clarifies the image of citizen as educative. Gotland municipality has tried active deliberation in the form of education, since they felt that it was crucial to raise citizens' awareness. They have actively involved advisors in environment from each department at the municipality, but not citizen in the decision-making.

Sandström (2006), the Katrineholm energy advisor and Axelsson (2006), Head of Environment and Health think that citizens are not knowledgeable, and Sandström thinks that it is easier to focus on some interested group than to try to disseminate information to everyone. The reason why he thinks that citizens are not knowledgeable enough was that citizens do not have time (Sandström 2006). This is very similar to Gotland in that imagined citizen is educative, but they have different reasons for seeing citizens as educative; in the one case citizens are seen as lacking time and in the other as lacking true ability.

In sum, most administrators see citizens as quite passive; among 12 opinions of the planners, 2 envision citizens as enlightened, 3 as judicious, and 7 as instructive. And even among those who regard citizens as instructive, in two municipalities the administrators tend to talk of two types of citizen, regarding some citizens as judicious and while others as educative. It makes sense that these attitudes among administrators explain the quite weak proactive deliberation, despite the various experiences in deliberation methods in most of the municipalities. Planners' images surely influence what measures of deliberation the municipalities have had and their willingness to encourage citizen involvement.

8. Conclusion

Almost half of the planners interviewed had a view of citizens that the theory of imagined citizens would classify as educative, while the other planners regard citizens as judicious or enlightened. In reality, most municipal administrators seem to see deliberation with citizen as a useful way to educate. Also as Lundqvist points out, the one example in KLIMP conveys the image of citizens as consumer and educative, and not actors to be involved in the decision-making in planning. It makes sense that as long as municipal administrators view citizens as educative, they will lack the means for the transmission of citizens' direct opinion to planning.

Planners' views of citizens influence the tools that they choose for deliberation. Unless the officials in municipalities have the positive image to involve citizens into policy planning, they will not try proactive deliberation. Swedish municipalities have involved citizens mainly through offering education, or in reviewing, but not in the planning process as actors that can have the two-way deliberation with planners.

In sum, Lundqvist's argument of "implementation from above" is seen because ecological modernization is accelerated at the governmental level mainly at local governments, not always at citizens' level. The deliberation between planners and citizens has rarely established as a two-way deliberation.

Even in Sweden that is the forerunner in ecological governance, considering deliberation measures and imagined citizens, the way towards sustainable development as is written in Agenda

21 and in the theory of ecological rational governance seems to be long. And in ecological modernization, the political distance between citizens and planners must be closed since the individual value change is required before we can attain a sustainable society.

9. References

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