**Aalborg Universitet**

**Altruism or entrepreneurialism? The co-evolution of green place branding and policy tourism in Växjö, Sweden**

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**Abstract:** More and more cities around the world are adopting green-city labels and are making use of their urban environmental policymaking for the purpose of place branding. However, the nature of the relationship between the branding of green cities and urban environmental policymaking is contested. Some researchers have highlighted so-called 'greenwashing' and the cherry picking of easily attained goals. Others argue that green branding is driven by altruism and ambitions spread good practice, rather than intra-urban competition and entrepreneurialism.

Drawing on literatures on policy tourism and green place branding, this article presents a longitudinal study of green branding in Växjö, Sweden. It contributes to the debate on green place branding by showing how two sets of contradictory impulses – entrepreneurialism/competition versus altruism/cooperation, and cherry-picking/greenwashing versus comprehensive environmental policymaking – affect the relationship between green place branding and environmental policy. In particular, the analysis illuminates the changing role played by policy tourism in shaping both the development of environmental policies and branding practices.

**Keywords**: Economic development, Policy, Place Branding, Local Government, Växjö, polict boosterism

**Introduction**

During the early 2000s, the small city of Växjö in Sweden became an internationally renowned destination for visitors interested in environmental policies and sustainable urban development (Collier and Löfstedt, 1997; Emelianoff, 2013; Gustavsson, Elander, and Lundmark, 2009). One widely cited news story, broadcast by the BBC in early 2007, dubbed Växjö "the greenest city in Europe", and this was adopted as the official place brand of the city. Växjö is an excellent example of what McCann (2013: 5) termed 'policy boosterism', becoming a paradigmatic emblem of environmental urban policy (Blok, 2012; McCann, 2013) in a similar way to Copenhagen and Malmö (Anderberg and Clark, 2013), Freiburg (Buehler and Pucher, 2011; Hall, 2014; Rohracher and Spath, 2013) and Masdar (Cugurullo, 2016).

However, the nature of the relationship between green place branding, policy tourism and the development of environmental urban policy is highly contested. Many writers are deeply critical of the entrepreneurial urbanism that is said to drive green branding initiatives. Some argue that the competitive nature of place branding may lead to

'greenwashing' where the brand provides cover for superficial policy changes that do little to enhance the sustainability of cities (Holgersen and Malm, 2015). Others note a focus on easily attainable and/or narrowly focused environmental targets in areas where a city can claim to be 'world leading', rather than serious attempts to address a broad range of sustainability issues (Anderberg and Clark, 2013; Andersson, 2016). Some researchers, however, have found that environmental policy boosterism is driven by a genuine desire to address environmental problems in a comprehensive fashion, and to share knowledge and expertise that may help other cities (Busch, 2015; Emelianoff, 2013).

Drawing on a longitudinal study of green branding in Växjö, this paper contributes to the debate by showing how these contradictory impulses – entrepreneurial-ism/competition versus altruism/cooperation and cherry-picking/greenwashing versus comprehensive environmental policymaking – affect the relationship between green place branding and environmental policy. In particular, the analysis illuminates the changing role played by policy tourism in shaping both the development of environ-mental policies and branding practices.

**Eco Cities and Green Branding**

The concept of place branding refers to a variety of practices and tools used by political organizations and local governments to develop and market an image and set of values associated with their city, region or nation (Andersson, 2014). This may be compared to the way in which corporate branding is used to express core values, beliefs or organizational cultures, and associate products with desirable qualities and images (Hankinson, 2001; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; van Ham, 2008). Public authorities most commonly initiate place branding activities, either alone or in public-private partnerships (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; van Ham, 2008). The objective of place branding is usually to attract visitors, new residents and business investment, typically in response to a perception of increasing competition between places (Hospers, 2006).

Busch (2015) notes the increasing popularity of 'green' branding related to environmental or sustainability issues, and identifies 'liveability', green tech/knowledgeability and low impact as key brand values. Green branding is linked to the rapid increase in the number of 'eco', 'sustainable' and 'low carbon' cities, and Joss et al (2013) name Växjö as one of around 20 pioneer cities that began focusing on environmental urban policy in the 1990s. By the early 2010s, the number of eco cities had increased to nearly 180. Joss et al (2013) note that policy focus has shifted from local environmental problems such as urban sprawl, lack of green space and water/air pollution, to $CO_2$ emissions, energy systems and low carbon building technologies. Joss (2015) also argues that despite a

diversity of concepts, forms and practice, there are some 'ubiquitous' eco city features such as international orientation and knowledge transfer, carbon discourses, green-smart technology, and a green growth agenda.

There is a growing literature on the use of public policy as a specific place branding strategy, including studies of cultural development strategies (Bader and Scharenberg, 2010; Currid, 2007; Grodach, 2010) and urban redevelopment (Degen and Garcia, 2012). In this context, McCann (2013) introduced the concept of policy boosterism, defined as, 'a subset of traditional branding and marketing activities that involves the active promotion of locally developed and/or locally successful policies, programs, or practices across wider geographical fields as well as to broader communities of interest-ed peers' (ibid: 5).

McCann's work is part of a wider literature on policy mobilities which refers to the spatial diffusion of policies through intricate multi-scalar webs of actors, networks and infrastructures (Cochrane & Ward, 2012). Although the mobilization of urban policy is not a new phenomenon (see Cook, Ward, & Ward, 2014), several writers have identified an increase in the speed and extent of policy mobility in recent years, often attributed to processes of globalization. In this context, Peck and Tickell (2002: 47) identify 'an extrospective, reflexive, and aggressive posture on the part of local elites and states

[who] actively—and responsively—scan the horizon for investment and promotion opportunities, monitoring 'competitors' and emulating 'best practice'. Policy boosterism is part of this trend and involves a variety of activities such as speeches and media appearances by public officials, joining and engaging with international networks and organizations, entering competitions and award processes, inviting guests and organizing conferences and workshops. City rankings and awards are commonly used as indicators of success, helping cities to extend recognition of their brands internationally (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). Place branding is, however, a politically charged process (Pike, 2011a; 2013; van Ham, 2008) that may involve ideological associations, especially when place branding is based on public policies that, for example, promote or discourage certain lifestyles and practices (Brand, 2007).

**Urban entrepreneurialism or altruism?**

In relation to green place branding, one key area of debate is the extent to which cities engaging in policy boosterism are driven by altruistic rather than competitive motives. One of the most important drivers of place branding is certainly increasing inter-urban competition for financial investment, job creation, infrastructure funding, visitors and residents (Hospers, 2006). City rankings and awards indicate the global winners and losers in various fields such as 'liveability', or sustainability (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011).

Some researchers however, have argued that environmental policy boosterism signals a more altruistic desire to address global environmental problems by helping other cities to improve their environmental policy through sharing good experiences. For example, Busch's (2015) study of German cities that were involved in trans municipal climate networks – a common way to raise the profile of a city's green brand – found that environmental policy makers were not motivated solely by competitive considerations but also a desire to improve policy making globally. Similarly, Emelianoff's (2013) study of European cities concluded that there is a tendency to underestimate the role of political motivation to do good, rather than compete with other cities.

McCann's (2013) study of Vancouver's 'Greenest City' initiative indicates that policy boosterism is driven by a combination of altruism and urban entrepreneurialism. McCann suggests that as well as common 'supply side' motives for place branding, such as attracting external financial investment and improving image, policy boosterism presents "its own interest, strategies, audiences, geographies and consequences" (ibid: 9). These include friendly cooperation/competition relationships between cities, where places boosting their local policies are also, at least partially, motivated by a desire to help others to help themselves by setting a good example and sharing knowledge. Invitations to speak at policy conferences and summits give local politicians the opportunity to influence the national and international policy-making processes and may also open

up new funding opportunities. McCann (2013) argues that policy boosterism is often

motivated by a desire to gain access to policy networks and infrastructures and, if possi-

ble, established and formalized partnerships. Through these, municipal governments

hope to obtain new policy knowledge and external funding from national agencies and

international institutions.

Several other studies have noted that policy tourism is central to the development of a

successful place brand based on environmental policy (cf. Holgersen and Malm, 2015;

Lee and van de Meene, 2012; Pow and Neo, 2015). Cook, Ward and Ward (2015:187)

define policy tourism as 'a set of activities such as conferences, fact-finding trips and

walking tours where "best practices" are presented, discussed and, in some cases, expe-

rienced first-hand and up-close'. Policy tourism generally involves short fact-finding

trips or study tours to other cities undertaken by policymakers and other actors to learn

about the design and implementation of particular policies, and to interact directly with

those who were involved (Gonzalez 2011; Temenos and McCann, 2013). The presence

of policy tourists signals that a particular place embodies best practice in a particular

policy area and in this way policy tourism plays a key role in developing and reinforc-

ing policy brands that are associated with particular cities.

However, policy tourism also plays a key role in one of the key contradictions of entre-preneurial urbanism highlighted by Harvey (1989). By helping potential competitors adopt 'best practices', cities engaged in policy boosterism may simultaneously destroy the difference that their brand is based upon (Ooi, 2011; Pike, 2011b). Thus, as Emeli-anoff (2013:13) notes, 'cities aspire to create a brand based on a unique status, but do so by presenting best-practice, which in turn is supposed to be taken up by other cities, thus undermining the established uniqueness'. Emelianoff concludes that the standardi-zation that is desirable in the context of climate change mitigation, for example, be-comes a threat in terms of brand management. This may well spur cities on to make even greater efforts to improve their environmental credentials. It also, however, sug-gests a potentially uneasy compromise between competition and cooperation, which we know relatively little about.

**Greenwashing, cherry-picking or true environmental sustainability?**

A second area of debate about green place branding is the extent to which a green city 'brand' reflects a true commitment to sustainable urban development. There are con-flicting arguments, in particular, regarding the relationship between environmental pro-tection and economic development. The first eco cities, including Växjö, drew on the positive discourse of ecological modernization, which, according to Anderberg and Clark (2013:594):

'optimistically emphasises potentials for combining environmental and economic goals by identifying and exploiting win-win situations…Programs of environmental innovation, local sustainability investment, development of alternative energy sources, and green industry initiatives are seen not only to improve environmental performance, but also to stimulate regional economic competitiveness and growth by making regions more attractive to tourists (which account for increasing shares of urban economies), investors, and the creative class (commonly perceived as a key factor in urban development).

In this context, branding which attracts 'green' investment is seen as contributing to a virtuous circle of environmentally and economically sustainable development, particularly in previously declining industrial cities. However, this is not always the case. For example, Anderberg and Clark's (2013) analysis of the sustainability branding of the Øresund region showed that many environmental achievements were actually a result of deindustrialisation since the 1970s, which led to reductions in air pollution in Copenhagen and Malmö. They argue that 'a sizeable share of [environmental] improvements were exogenously generated, through economic restructuring or national policy' (Anderberg and Clark 2013:607) and that environmental policies and investment connected to the region's eco-branding have had very little impact. However, they suggest that this is not necessarily a problem, as green city brands could be based on aspiration or vision rather than current reality.

Taking a rather more critical perspective, Holgersen and Malm's (2015) study of Malmö describes such branding as a 'green fix', which aims to attract capital to the city

through the production of an environmentally friendly image, but does not necessarily imply a real improvement in relation to environmental sustainability. Their study shows that apparently 'environmentally friendly' urban development in the city is in fact based on unsustainable consumption patterns and the displacement of environmental problems to other countries. Busch (2015) goes further, suggesting that a neoliberal, entrepreneurial minds-set might lead to green urban policies that are deliberately designed to prioritise image and economic growth instead of effectively addressing environmental problems, leading to so-called 'greenwashing'. This perspective on green branding implies that 'the main priority for decisions in this area is how well a measure can be marketed, rather than the actual environmental benefits' (Busch, 2015: 6).

Finally, there has been debate around the extent to which cities have deliberately chosen to focus on environmental problems that are relatively easy to solve, rather than pursuing a comprehensive long term sustainability agenda with few 'quick wins'. This type of policy selectivity might be described as a form of 'cherry-picking', where the most suitable or easily accomplishable targets are chosen (Andersson, 2016; Burch, 2010). This is, of course, facilitated by the illusive definition of sustainable development itself (Burch, 2010; Muir, Phillips, and Healey, 2000; While, Jonas and Gibbs, 2004). Recent surveys show that the types of environmental policies that form the basis for green place branding vary enormously. Some initiatives are characterized by an explicit focus on a

limited number of key goals – such as carbon-neutral urban developments – while others deliberately emphasize a broader, multidimensional approach (Joss 2015:829). According to De Jong et al (2015), cities with a 'sustainability' label tend to have a more holistic approach in the environmental policies compared to for instance 'low carbon' or 'smart' cities, which often have a narrower and more technical focus.

The existing literature on green place branding indicates that it is characterized by two key of tensions: cherry-picking or greenwashing versus comprehensive environmental policymaking and; entrepreneurialism and competitiveness versus an altruistic desire to spread best practice in policymaking. As illustrated in Figure 1, these two sets of tensions potentially pull green place branding between comprehensive environmental policymaking and helping others on the one hand, and the potentially cynical adoption of supposedly 'green' credentials in the context of urban competition on the other. Common to both perspectives is the practice of policy tourism, which plays a key role in both the development of an internationally recognized policy brand, and the sharing of knowledge. However, we know little about how cities negotiate these tensions over time and what the implications are for evolution of green place branding practices.

[Figure 1 here]

**Figure 1.** Key tensions in green place branding (source: own adaptation)

**Methodology and Case Study**

In the following sections, we explore the changing nature and role of policy tourism and its relationship with environmental policy-making and green place branding in Växjö. The analysis draws on in-depth interviews with key informants involved in place branding, environmental policymaking and policy boosterism in Växjö. The interviewees were mainly employees or former employees of Växjö municipality and local politicians as well as an international policy expert working for ICLEI. Interviewees were selected to include the main actors involved in organizing study tours and the place branding strategy in the city. Interviews focused on the development of study tours and the link between policy tourism and place branding in the city. Participant observations were made during four days of tours. In these visits, visiting groups were accompanied on different visits, workshops, lunches, etc. During walks, bus rides and coffee breaks informal interviews were undertaken with the visitors and organizers about their experiences and expectations of the visit to Växjö. In addition, the analysis draws on official policy documents and memos from Växjö municipality, together with 90 articles from local, national and international media on the environmental policies of Växjö.

The development of policy tourism in Växjö was sparked by an announcement made by Växjö Municipality in 1996, declaring that it intended to become a 'fossil fuel free city' by 2030. Between 1993 and 2009 carbon dioxide emissions were reduced by 34 percent in the city (Växjö kommun, 2010).

However, the initial reductions in carbon dioxide emissions were not driven by environmental concern. In fact, they were prompted by a local political scandal involving fraud and the disappearance of 40,000 cubic meters of heating oil in 1981, which led to major public investment in the local thermal power plant. This in turn led to a shift from the use of heating oil to wood chips - a byproduct of the local timber industry. Between 1983 and 2015 the publicly owned power plant *Sandviksverken*, gradually increased the use of biofuels until it produced 100 percent bio-based production supplying electricity and heat to approximately 60 percent of residences in the city (Växjö kommun, 2011). Over the years Växjö has also implemented other environmental policies such building a biogas plant and introducing biogas busses, developing low climate impact housing, introducing a green space program, and implementing eco-procurement guidelines (Collier and Löfstedt, 1997; Emelianoff, 2013; Gustavsson et al., 2009). The city is a long-time active member of policy networks such as *Energy-Cities*, *Covenant of Mayors*, *Union of Baltic cities* and *ICLEI*. It has also hosted several international environmental

conferences and representatives from Växjö are regularly invited to give presentations on the local sustainability and environmental policies (Gustavsson et al., 2009; Leo, 2008; Persson, 2008a; Växjö kommun, 2001; 2014). The city has received several international awards, such as the *Local Initiatives Award for Excellence in Atmospheric Protection*, the *Sustainable Energy Europe Award,* and the *Union of Baltic Cities Environmental Award.* Between 1998 and 2014 more than 1100 groups from around the world travelled to Växjö to learn about the environmental policies implemented by the municipal government (see Figures 2 and 3).

[Figure 2 here]

**Figure 2.** Number of groups visiting Växjö for environmental policy study tours 1998-2014 (Source: Växjö kommun, 2014)

Visiting groups come from all over the world, but Asia and Europe predominate, as illustrated in Figure 3. In addition, many international visitors (representing EU-organizations, the UN, or other non-country-specific groups) have travelled to Växjö,

with more than 40 study tours coming to the city between the years 2000 and 2014, which are not included in Figure 3.

[Figure 3 here]

**Figure 3.** Number of study tour visitors to Växjö, by country, 2000-2014 (source: Växjö kommun 2000; 2005; 2014).

In the following sections, the relationship between environmental policy, place branding and policy tourism between the years 1998-2014 is examined in greater depth.

**1998-2007: Internationalization and altruism**

Following the adoption of Växjö's "Fossil Fuel free city" policy, the city was keen showcase its power plant, water treatment[1] facilities and Agenda21 programmes. The success of Växjö's policies, and subsequent recognition through international awards, precipitated a rapid increase in flows of visitors. Between 2000 and 2005, the munici-pality received almost one visit per week on average. At this time, environmental poli-

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[1] City lakes *Trummen* and *Växjösjön* underwent massive restoration during the 1970's due to heavy pollution and bad smells in the city centre.

cymaking and place branding were not linked (from 1998-2008 the official city brand was "Dynamic Växjö") and the main motivation for receiving visitors was to share knowledge. In fact, policy tourism began to be perceived as an administrative challenge because no budget existed to cover the costs of coordination, giving presentations and guided tours (Växjö kommun, 2006; Interview G).

Nonetheless, the increasing number of visitors coming to the city to learn about its environmental policies was recognized as beneficial for the hospitality industry and in terms of generating publicity for the city. In 2004, the local political leadership introduced an *International Policy for Växjö municipality*, which identified international visits as a way to gather information about trends in municipal government elsewhere, as a source of cheap publicity for the city, and as a way to generate income for local businesses (Växjö kommun, 2004; 2006). In 2006 a study tour coordinator was appointed to reduce the workload on the planning department and to professionalize the organization of the visits. During this period the  municipality also adopted a wider variety of policies related to environmental sustainability. One example is Välle broar, a sustainable urban development area, consisting of high-rise housing and office buildings made entirely from wood.

**2008-2012: Commercialization and entrepreneurialism**

In 2008 Växjö Municipality launched a new place brand to reflect the publicity gained from policy tourism. The title of a BBC documentary about Växjö provided the new branding slogan: 'the greenest city in Europe'. Växjö was indeed one of the leading cities when it came to reducing carbon dioxide emissions, although, as in the case of the Øresund region (Anderberg and Clark, 2013), this was an accidental achievement in the sense that the adoption of biofuel was not originally driven by environmental concerns.

In 2007-2008 number of policy tourists visiting the city to learn about the local environmental policies increased significantly (see Figure 2), and this cemented the city's 'green' image (Fehrm, 2013; Nilsson, 2011; Westergren, 2008). The municipality decided that study tours should be commercialized, both in the sense that the private sector would become more closely involved in hosting visitors, and that securing investment and export orders became an explicit goal (Frank, 2008; Westergren, 2008). At this point it appears that the city explicitly rejected its previously altruistic approach, and instead attempted to leverage its environmental policies to attract investment and support economic growth. This shift is similar to that noted by Pow & Neo (2015) in their study of Chinese flagship eco-cities. In 2008, a newly recruited international coordinator with a background in business development took over the responsibility for the study tours in Växjö (Persson, 2008b, Växjö kommun, 2008; Interview O; Interview P;

Interview, G; Interview F). Coordination and booking functions were moved from the

planning department within the municipality, to a public-private corporation that could

charge visitor fees and commercialize the operation (Persson, 2008b; Törnberg, 2008;

Westergren, 2008; Interview K; Interview O; Interview P).

A new municipal *International strategy* replaced the former *International policy* in

2009. International study tours were now the highest priority and the city aimed to re-

ceive 75 to 100 visiting groups annually. In addition, international business develop-

ment was prioritized in the strategy, emphasizing the potential for collaboration be-

tween the municipality and the local business community regarding international study

tours. The aim was that at least 50% of the international visits should involve business

participation in some form, and at least 50% of those visits should result in new busi-

ness 'contacts' (Växjö kommun, 2009). In 2011, the economic co-operative *Sustainable

Småland[2]* was established, gathering seven selected local businesses with a "green" pro-

file together with the municipality and the local university. The objective was to trans-

form study tours into profitable business opportunities for local businesses (Ernstsson,

2010; Rosell, 2010; Sustainable Småland, undated; Interview B; Interview O; Interview

P).

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[2] Småland is the region in which Växjö is located.

The municipality had previously seen its role as a teacher sharing expertise about im-

plementing environmental policies, with some benefits for the local hospitality industry.

Now, study tours also became a central part of the municipality's economic develop-

ment strategy. At this point both altruistic and entrepreneurial motivations for policy

boosterism were important, as in McCann's (2013) study of Vancouver.

However, the content of the Sustainable Småland study tour program changed very little

from the previous non-commercialized version. The tours showcased public policies,

and most of the sites were facilities owned by the municipality, not private enterprises.

There was also little change in the composition of international visitors. The vast major-

ity were politicians and policymakers who did not provide business contacts and were

mainly interested in the municipal governance issues related to environmental policy.

There was only a slight increase in the number of business visitors, from 8.8 % between

2000-2004 to 12.3 % in 2008-2009 (Växjö kommun, 2014). Records of study tours

from the municipality[3] reveal that environmental policies, planning and Agenda21 con-

tinued to be the most popular topics discussed, and this was confirmed by municipal

employees involved in the tours:

[3] Records available for 2000, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009 (Växjö kommun 2000; 2001; 2014).

"It is very much the knowhow that exists within the local government [that visitors are interested in], very much about how the municipality is governed, but also its management, how we steer and carry out green leadership in the municipal organization, how we do good green procurements, how we carry out projects…" (Interview O).

In addition, local businesses proved reluctant to commit time to study tours and pursued their international interests through other channels:

"The [corporate] members [of Sustainable Småland] prioritized other business than the ones that the network had found, which in the end made it impossible to work according to the principle and ideas that we had set up from the beginning" (Interview O).

After one year, Sustainable Småland had not succeeded in facilitating a single business deal. Over-ambitious targets and the unchanged design of study tours, which were almost exclusively focused on public policy and governance, contributed to the failure of the strategy. As a consequence, the coordination of study tours was moved back to the municipality (Interview B; Interview O; Interview P). At the time of writing, Sustainable Småland is still in existence but now has a mission to 'lead' on environment issues, build networks and bring together partners to bid for project funding, with little involvement in study tours.

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**2013 – present: strategic collaboration**

Given the failure of Växjö to meet its targets in relation to attracting economic invest-
ment through policy tourism and place branding, we might question the overall benefit
of these practices for the city. As Figure 2 shows, the number of study tours to Växjö
has fallen since 2012, which can partly be attributed to the failed commercialization
initiative. However, it is also partly due to a deliberate strategy on the part of the munic-
ipality to reduce the number of visitors it receives, as set out in a revised *International
strategy* in 2013. Here, three new objectives for policy tourism were set out: securing
*external funding* for projects; *collaboration* with other cities; and *internal capacity
building* (Växjö kommun, 2013). In contrast to the previous plan, the competitive ele-
ment of the brand strategy is confined to the acquisition of project funding, and policy
tourism is seen as a means to support the development of new policies in much the same
way as the cities in Busch's (2015) study.

In addition to the failure to attract investment, another important driver of this change is the difficulty the municipality has faced in living up to its branding. Put simply, an increasing number of cities have started to develop similar environmental policies, jeopardizing Växjö's status as "greenest in Europe". As McCann (2013) has argued, policy boosterism always involves an element of competition. The choice of the 'green-*est*' city brand has created pressure to continually develop new projects and policies to stay ahead. One response to this challenge has been the re-interpretation of the brand by the municipality.

Originally Växjö claimed to be 'greenest' due to its success in reducing carbon dioxide emissions and a pioneering ambition to become a fossil fuel free city. Now representatives from the local government argue that Växjö's claim to be greenest is supported by its broad repertoire of local environmental policies, such as toxin free public buildings, waste management, bicycle planning, energy efficiency and water management. Municipal employees refer to this as doing the "environmental heptathlon" (inspired by local icon and Olympic champion in women's heptathlon, Carolina Klüft) in the sense that the city is performing well in many different events simultaneously, although perhaps not best in all, and therefore may still legitimately claim to be the "greenest in Europe" (Interview B; Interview D; Interview G; Interview K; Interview M; Interview O, Interview P). De Jong et al (2015) found that cities branded as 'low carbon' tended to have a

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relatively narrow policy focus. While Växjö's early environmental ambitions were closely linked to the low carbon agenda, over time a wider range of issues have been addressed and it now has more comprehensive policies. The city's success in branding itself has thus fed back into the policymaking process. As one of the local politician's muses:

"We are great heptathletes. I don't know if we are unique, but it is the wise way to handle this concept [of the greenest city in Europe] … The trick is not just to be good at one thing, that can be a good strategy initially to get the opinion working for you, but to get long-term stability it is important to be good at many different things" (Interview M).

In this sense, Växjö strives to live up to its brand, although it is hard to gauge the extent to which the various environmental initiatives represent a true commitment to sustainable urbanism. Whether or not Växjö is, or ever was, the greenest city in Europe, the municipality certainly continues to develop new environmental policies in order to justify its branding. The contradictions generated by the city's attempts to brand itself on the basis of environmental policy boosterism are now acknowledged.

Consequently, the search for new and more innovative policies has intensified, and visits by policymakers from elsewhere have taken on a new significance. Rather than see-

ing itself in a teaching role, Växjö is increasingly learning from other cities to support
its brand. Visiting groups consisting of mainly non-commercial actors continue to come
Växjö but in lower numbers. Although the format of the tours remains similar, the in-
ternal guidelines for the visits have been changed. The municipality now selects its
guests more strategically. Some international visitors generally interested in environ-
mental issues are redirected to the local tourist bureau (Interview A, Interview B). As
one official explains:

"[A]t one point …it felt like many visitors were not really here to have a proper ex-
change with *us* in particular … that kind of visit we don't agree to anymore, so the
numbers of visits have gone down" (Interview A).

In addition to lectures and talks on environmental policy in Växjö, more collaborative
knowledge sharing workshops and networking sessions between visiting groups and
staff working within the municipality are organized. Sometimes these workshops are
based around a particular environmental planning problem in Växjö, like public
transport or waste management, and visitors are asked to act as "critical friends". The
focus of study tours is now knowledge exchange and the development of policy net-
works from which Växjö municipality will derive benefit (Interview A, Interview B,

Interview G; own observations). Now, 'successful' branding and policy making relies on fewer, but higher quality, policy tourists. One official describes the new regime thus:

"For us it is more of a collaboration idea really. We have the international coordinator working with us and it is always a chase after new ideas basically, so we are always open to anyone interesting who could be a future partner; and that we [through the visits] can build contacts… we are thinking all the time, can this lead to cooperation in a project?" (Interview A).

In this sense, the city is still pursuing a competitive rather than altruistic agenda. There has been no return to the early regime of policy tourism where all visitors were welcomed. The city may now place less emphasis on economic development as a direct outcome of branding, but it certainly sees itself as a competitor for public funding of various kinds, and this has led to the prioritisation of certain groups of tourists. For example, the demands of EU funding have placed a premium on tour groups from European countries who might be potential project partners. A second group of visitors of strategic interest are those from developing countries who might become partners in "policy-aid" projects. Such projects are commonly financed by national institutions such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (*SIDA*) and the Swedish Energy Agency. The municipality therefore sees study tours from countries in the global

south or Eastern Europe as an opportunity to continue to boost Växjö's status as a centre of best practice.

Finally, a commercial interest in study tours remains, but its focus has been substantially narrowed. For visiting groups from North America, in particular, a project called *Wood City* (In Swedish: *Trästad*), is highly promoted. Here the local government, together with private actors from the forest and construction industries, and researchers from Linnaeus University, has developed a program for energy efficient housing with low climate impact during construction. With this program in mind, visitors are greeted as potential export opportunities for local building technology. Overall it is clear that policy tourism and green branding are now characterized by a new combination of altruism and self-interest.

**Conclusion**

The engagement of cities in entrepreneurial activities to improve their image and attract investment is hardly new (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Harvey, 1989), and place branding is normally conceptualized in the context of urban competition. However, the use of public policies to brand cities has challenged common understandings of the drivers of place branding practices. In relation to using environmental policy as a means to brand cities, a number of possible motivations have been suggested (McCann, 2013; Emelian-

off, 2013). These include an altruistic desire to help other places to improve their poli-

cymaking processes, attracting economic investment, advanced R&D or manufacturing

activities, and a desire to gain access to policy networks and infrastructures. Our analy-

sis shows that all have played a role in Växjö. Furthermore, our study shows that these

motivations are dynamic, and are combined in different ways over time. The present

hegemony of neoliberal urban policy may be a critical context for policy circulations in

the early 21$^{st}$ century (Peck, 2011) but this case study highlights the interweaving of

collaborative and competitive impulses over time. As illustrated in Figure 4, the rela-

tionship between environmental policy making, green place branding and policy tour-

ism in Växjö has evolved over time and reflects tensions between altruistic and entre-

preneurial/competitive impulses, as well as between cherry-picking and comprehensive

environmental policymaking.

While the city began by sharing its environmental policy making knowledge haphazard-

ly, the growth of policy tourism and media attention prompted the rebranding of the

city. The municipality sought to leverage their policy success by partly privatizing study

tours, with a view to attracting business visitors and investment. However, attempts to

commodify the brand through policy tourism were largely unsuccessful, calling into

question the assumption that a green image attracts investment (Holgersen and Malm,

2015). At the same time, some of the contradictions inherent in green branding became

apparent. Other cities were increasingly adopting similar policies and the city was no longer an innovative pioneer, disrupting the alignment between the branding of Växjö (as green*est*) and its actual standing in comparison to other places. As the city's brand was called into question, the municipality responded both by reinterpreting their achievements as a 'green heptathlon' and re-orienting study tours to help them regain their cutting edge and support the brand.

[Figure 4 here]

**Figure 4.** The changing position of green place branding in Växjö

Policy tourism is acknowledged to play a critical role in support of green place branding by helping to spread awareness of policy models, which may serve both altruistic and entrepreneurial purposes. This study has contributed to the debate by highlighting the role that policy tourism plays in mediating the relationship between place branding and environmental policymaking. What began as the unplanned growth of study tours con-cerned with environmental policy, followed by opportunistic branding, now drives the development of local environmental policymaking, as Växjö strives to remain at the

cutting edge. The direction that environmental policymaking now takes is fundamental-ly shaped by the city's attempts to live up to its brand, and by the networks that have been established through contact with policy tourists visiting the city.

More generally the case of Växjö underlines the importance of carefully unpacking the processes and practices of place branding associated with urban policy, and how they co-evolve over time. We suggest that more detailed, longitudinal case studies are re-quired to build a picture of the relationship between branding and urban policymaking in a variety of contexts. Our understanding would be enhanced by further studies of policy boosterism and how, when and why different kinds of cities collaborate or com-pete.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Interviews**

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Interview A; *Head of Department*, Växjö municipality, 6 February 2014.

Interview B; *Public Officer*, Växjö municipality, 6 February 2014.

Interview C; *Public Officer*, Växjö municipality, 16 October 2014.

Interview D; *Elected politician*, Växjö municipality, 9 May 2014.

Interview E; *Policy expert, ICLEI European Office,* Freiburg, 4 May 2012.

Interview F; *Head of the Department*, Växjö municipality, 24 January 2011.

Interview G; *Public officer,* Växjö municipality, 16 May 2014.

Interview H; *Project Manager*, Växjö municipality, 25 January 2011.

Interview I; *Head of Department*, Växjö municipality, 25 January 2011.

Interview J; *Public Officer*, Växjö municipality, 5 February 2014.

Interview K; *Head of Department*, Växjö municipality, 25 January 2011.

Interview L; *former Head of Department*, Växjö municipality, 6 February 2014.

Interview M; *Elected politician*, Växjö municipality, 7 May 2014.

Interview N; *Elected politician*, Växjö municipality, 7 May 2014.

Interview O; *Public officer,* Växjö municipality, 5 February 2014.

Interview P; *Public officer,* Växjö municipality, 16 May 2014.


**Observations**

Breakfast member meeting, Expansiva Växjö, 10 February 2011.

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Technical visit to Växjö municipality, visting group: Täby municipality, 15-16 May 2014.

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Cherry-picking/
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Altruism/
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Entrepreneurialism/
competition

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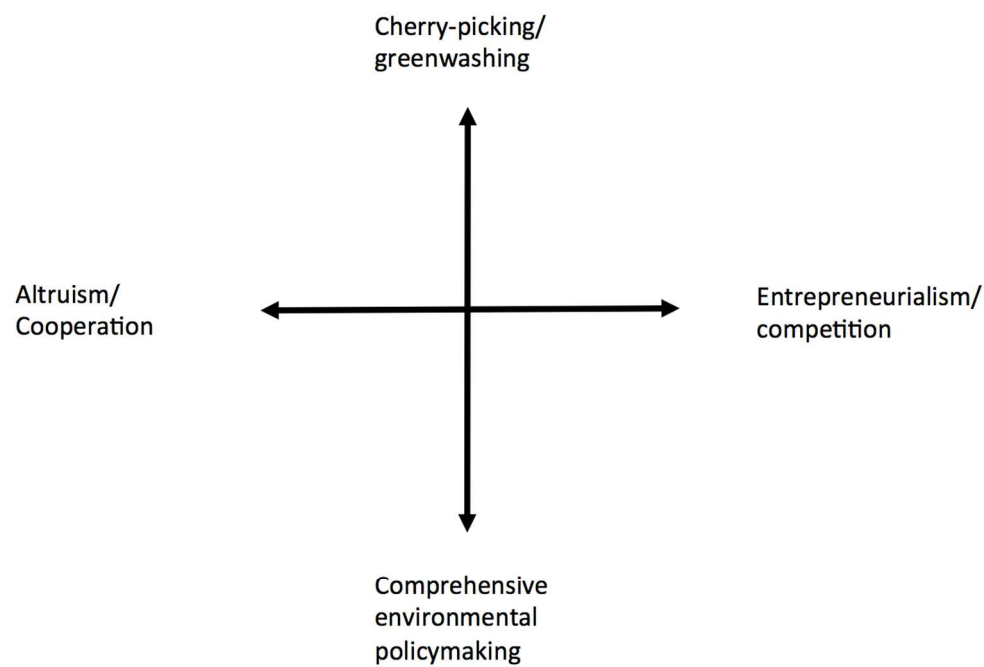
Figure 1. Key tensions in green place branding (source: own adaptation)

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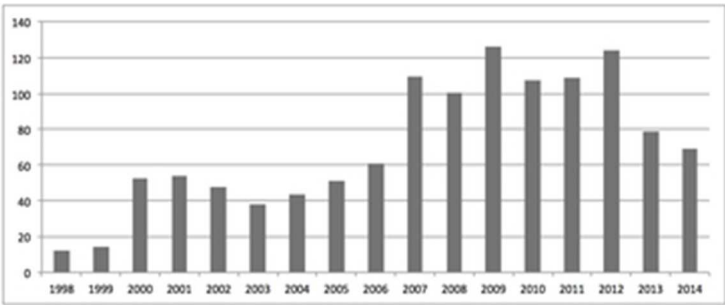51
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Figure 2. Number of groups visiting Växjö for environmental policy study tours 1998-2014 (Source: Växjö kommun, 2014)

61x25mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Figure 3. Number of study tour visitors to Växjö, by country, 2000-2014 (source: Växjö kommun 2000; 2005; 2014).

109x59mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Cherry-picking/
Greenwashing

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Commercialization
(2008 - 2013)

Altruism/
Cooperation

Entrepreneurialism/
Competition

Collaboration
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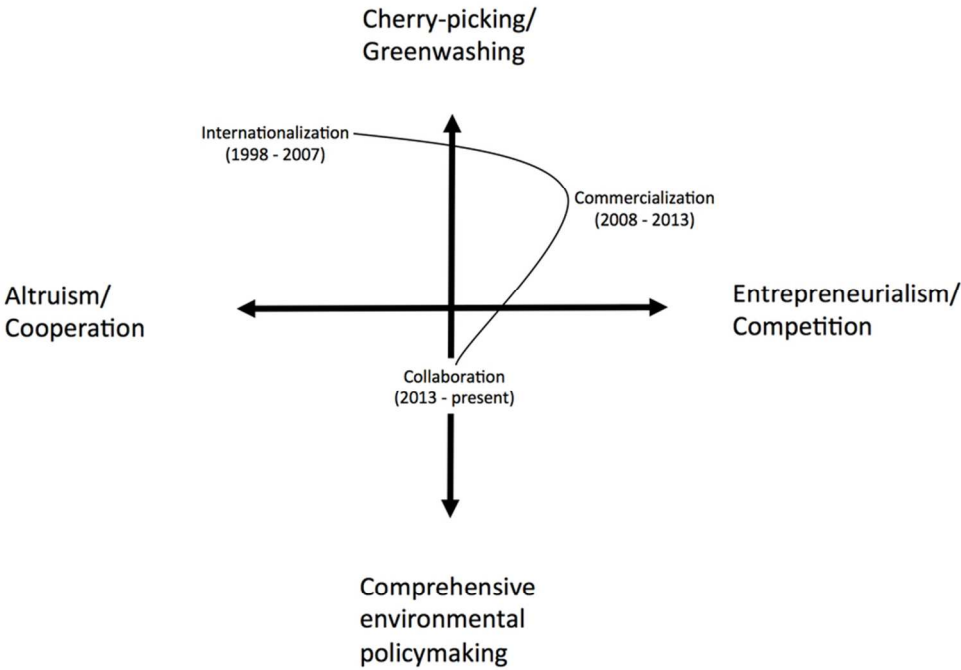
Comprehensive
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Figure 4. The changing position of green place branding in Växjö (source: own adapta-tion)

161x114mm (150 x 150 DPI)