

## Planning in the Best of All Possible Worlds: The Helsingfors case 1964–2017

### Introduction

It seems generally agreed that town planning in the Finnish capital has survived as a remarkably strong instance of traditional Scandinavian official-led planning (Mäenpää et al 2000, 35f; Staffans 2004, 30f; cf Kervanto Nevanlinna 2014, 13f), with architects in charge (Puustinen 2006, 229, 236)<sup>1</sup>. In attributing strength or power to the City Planning Department, existing as a separate office 1964–2017<sup>2</sup>, it is here suggested that it has had economic and knowledge resources as well as a certain autonomy in relation to the rest of the city administration, politicians and strong actors. Although much planning theory and many recent studies appear to presume or conclude that neo-liberal planning has taken over even in a Nordic context (Holgerson 2017, Listerborn 2017, Strand & Næss 2017), leaving little scope for effective public-sector steering, the present case rather supports Tore Sager's (2015) questioning of the general applicability of the idea of neo-liberalism as the ruling regime. For this reason alone, this peculiar local planning institution deserves to be studied. Moreover, the impact of planning on the emission of greenhouse gases, poor liveability, segregation and other topical problems, urgent for society to solve, makes it even more important to explore the workings of the town planning institution here focused on, as it might be held to form, from its own planning viewpoint, 'the best of all possible worlds'.

Accordingly, rather than assuming that the City Planning Department just wields arbitrary power or delegated power for heteronomous action, its apparent strength might possibly be perceived as a beneficent force in the face of the neo-liberal threat of strong actors moulding the cityscape haphazardly as they pursue their special interests. This is so despite the reproach by local activists and academics alike of the department for its self-sufficient attitude (cf Staffans 2004). Yet, to ascribe the above planning goals a significance that survives present-day fads and gives them more than rhetorical force, their meaning should be related not only to the pragmatic comprehension of the planners themselves but also to a theoretical understanding. Respecting the commitment and urban design knowledge of planners, however critical of real-world planning practices one may be, thus presupposes that at least some key notions used by them can be given a strict sense. To avoid controversy, even ideas referring to purely aesthetic ambitions, crucial for architects and non-random, but potentially contentious, will mostly be disregarded. Nonetheless, except for including the contemporary overarching sustainability principle, the treatment centres on the architecturally prominent notion of urbanity, intended to generate a simultaneously liveable and ecologically sustainable environment (Manninen et al 2013, 5, 17).

Distressingly enough, considering the planners' claims to expertise, the scientific status of urban design has recently been questioned (Cuthbert 2007; Marshall 2012; cf also Dovey & Pafka 2015) and so, implicitly, the obliging nature of its guidelines. Nevertheless, it is here assumed that at least some design rules, suggested by classics such as Jane Jacobs (1961) and Jan Gehl (1971, 2010), indeed amount to reasonably precise and uncontentious criteria of urban properties understood in an architecturally pertinent manner. Contrariwise, vagueness and outright conceptual confusion in relation to urbanity *in a design sense* may result when social meanings are introduced in a way that blurs or downplays the significance of its architectural

connotations (cf Mäenpää 2005)<sup>3</sup>. This paradoxically also may result from stereotyped declarations by town planners<sup>4</sup>. Still, *their* real test is the practical one of succeeding in strictly adhering to architectural urban principles, while that of academia, among other things, is to explicate the rational, in need of specification, ideally guiding the planners. As this view implies a position in some tension with current planning theoretical perspectives, a brief account of it seems appropriate.

Whereas in planning research Habermas's theory of communicative action and Foucauldian or post-structuralist theory have been vying for primacy in the last few decades, I prefer a more neutral and, in theory of science terms, realistic approach. This is precisely because I wish to take seriously the planners' rational and expertise, both skills employed *de facto* and knowledge existing in principle. The problem with the communicative approach inspired by Habermas – except for the applicability of the communicative ideal in the system context of planning in the first place (Lapintie 2003, 20f) – is that it tends to turn the focus away, if not necessarily from the exercise of power (cf Forester 1989), as sometimes supposed (Flyvbjerg 1991, 131), then at least from substantial expert knowledge, formed and used under external pressure. A difficulty for Habermas's own stance, analytically avoiding the corruption of knowledge by power, is that realising an ideal speech situation is highly demanding intellectually as well, requiring the participants to understand and take seriously all the available arguments, which in real-world interaction may be equally impracticable as the dated ideal of rational-comprehensive planning.

Again, Foucault's power/knowledge analysis, if consistently adopted rather than used only heuristically, forces the researcher to dissociate entirely from the knowledge used by planners<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, post-structural approaches influenced by his thinking are 'strong on criticism' in emphasising the need to respect the Other (weak actors) and watching out for hegemonic practices; yet, they also thereby de-emphasise the importance, or the constructive role, of content-related expertise involved in planning, tending to reduce the activity to mediation between political interests and views. They are hence unable to offer constructive criticism based on professional planning aims and means. The alternative opted for is therefore instead Giddens's synthesising theory of structuration<sup>6</sup>, in some respects complemented by Bourdieu's theory of practice<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, my heuristic use of Foucault is manifest in the thematisation of the intertwinement of power and knowledge, a phenomenon of particular importance within the pragmatic field of architect-led planning.

Once the approximate consensus on the principal political ends and professional means of urban design are respected as a starting point of the investigation, questions concerning the urban environment cannot be cut down to politics or value issues. A knowledge component, non-reducible to artistic creativity within the limits set by technical considerations, must be acknowledged as well. This is not to say that the expertise used, be it discursively explicable, is neutral and untainted by the power/knowledge processes producing it and guiding its use. But neither must it lead one to think that it is necessarily dubious, even as tacit. In any case, the unescapable aesthetic element in architecture and urban design does not mean that relevant social scientific knowledge may be treated as optional, as inspirational only.

While empirically more substantial research than mine has been done on different aspects of Finnish town planning, a possible contribution of the present investigation is the highlighting of some problems in the relation between the professional rational and realised action. This defines a kind of immanent criticism, yet without commitment to the broader assumptions of

critical theory. As to the power issue involved, even without going into the classical Anglo-American debate (Dahl 1961, Bachrach & Baratz 1962, Lukes 1974), the complexity of the question as ‘layered’ must be recognised. Studying power cannot thus be reduced to the empirical investigation of whether, for example, the planning authorities or strong actors can force given initiatives through the political decision-making process. Instead, it presupposes an understanding of the structural conditions favouring some interests while helping others disappear from the agenda.

Whatever the theoretical complications, the distinctiveness of the planning studied must be underlined, as it takes up the urban tradition broken in the 1960s more resolutely than comparable planning agencies. The capital region, judged by Central European measures, is certainly sparsely populated (Söderström et al 2014, 2; EEA 2006, 13), although the degree depends on the areal delimitation (Lampinen 2015, 99). Yet, unlike other Finnish cities, the capital itself has preserved its traditional European urban features. These include perimeter blocks in the inner city and, within its borders, suburbs and sub-centres well served by public transport.

What therefore is focused on in what follows is not how planning, however organised, in any sense (in contrast to the free play of market forces) or in view of any (architectural-aesthetic) purposes, has succeeded. Great plans, such as that of Hagalund (Fi Tapiola), have been drawn up for the suburban municipalities as well. The focus in this context, however, is not on the description of isolated plans by great masters for specific areas, such as Alvar Aalto’s plan for the Tölö Bay, but on comprehensive, ongoing, municipally organised town planning dominated by architects-officials and oriented towards decidedly urban purposes – sometimes conflicting with spectacular architecture of extraneous provenance – as we currently know it in Helsingfors<sup>8</sup>.

The assumption behind the present investigation, supporting my broader study of town planning in the Finnish capital, is that to understand its town planning office, one needs to comprehend the conditions of the emergence of its distinctive traits, the sources of its power, its declared objectives and its shortcomings. Likewise, one should relate its peculiar traits and achievements to comparable planning agencies: secondary Finnish cities and its suburban neighbours, with the Scandinavian capitals as an obvious point of reference<sup>9</sup>. To answer my questions, I shall describe its workings today and identify some episodes, actors and mechanisms relevant for grasping its role, bearing in mind the contingent nature of both its present state and the circumstances that have formed it. The research material consists of books, reports, articles, blogs and interviews<sup>10</sup>.

### **Evaluating planning agencies – comparing the incomparable?**

For the idea of an exceptionally strong City Planning Department to make sense, its character must differ from similar planning agencies, its output also contrasting with theirs in significant and comparable respects. Presumably the powerful position of the department is based on given structural causes, starting with its host city’s status of capital and including historical and geographical aspects. The point of securing rough comparability is to avoid false or trivial results as when contrasting completely different environments or such features of the planning agencies that directly follow from the character of the cities, such as their size or relative centrality. The exposition supports the presumption that, even if it may be possible to find common traits characterising a ‘Scandinavian mode of planning’ on the formal institutional level

(Newman & Thornley 1996), for example between Finland and Sweden, there may be considerable local variation on the informal institutional level and that of planning culture (cf Reimer et al 2014, Ch 1; Reimer & Blotevogel 2012). Thus, planning in the Finnish capital may remind more of that of Stockholm than of planning in its closest neighbours Esbo and Vanda.

Still, the effectiveness of local interventions cannot be treated separately from the overall planning system, including legislation, binding norms and established practices (cf Reimer & Blotevogel 2012, 9). Thus, urban sprawl is reduced in the Danish capital region by the Finger Plan, with the status of law, requiring important establishments to be located at walking distance from a rail connection (Fingerplanen 2017, § 6)<sup>11</sup>. Contrariwise, one may claim that the subsidiarity principle of the Finnish Land-use and Building Act, in not intervening in the game theoretic constellation forcing municipalities to compete<sup>12</sup>, weakens the local planning authorities in this respect<sup>13</sup>. In the Stockholm region, more comparable with Helsingfors, urban sprawl is also less, but due to other mechanisms, such as the corporate tax being paid exclusively to the state, reducing municipal competition for enterprises (Söderström et al 2014, 240).

National legislation, established practices etc are thus important among other reasons as, analytically, suburban municipalities are dependent for their existence on the central city, to some extent determining their action if left to their own devices. Empirically, *under the given conditions*, there seem to be geographical regularities, such as the correlation between the size of urban regions and the choice of mode of transport (cf Ristimäki et al 2013). One may assume that such variation additionally depends on local social structures and action. To explain, for instance, that a slightly larger share of road-users in the centre (pedestrian zone) and the public transport zone (Newman et al 2016) are public transport passengers in Tammerfors (Fi Tampere) than in Åbo (Ristimäki et al, 109), it is hardly enough to invoke geography and socio-economic factors. In principle, one must additionally investigate local decision-making, again dependent on specific political-historical features, such as the ‘Brothers-in-Arms Axis’ in Tammerfors (Laine & Peltonen 2003) or the Åbo disease (Klami 1982). Such constellations may form structures sustaining further action in a dialectical or structural process. However, comprehensive explanation of the kind is beyond the scope of my research, which is limited to a descriptive-analytical elucidation of the role of the planning authorities.

If the planning agencies of suburban municipalities might be deemed to a certain weakness, in view of present ideals and environmental imperatives they may still (politically-professionally) be expected to do their best by favouring sustainable solutions. Yet, these municipalities still depend on the logic and retain the benefits that once produced them, today providing bigger plots, large car parks for space-consuming establishments etc. Their incentive for supporting a laissez-faire winning strategy is that, for both pragmatic and ideological reasons, living close to nature and far from one’s neighbours, favouring car-based movement etc have not lost their attraction among inhabitants as quickly as among planners. Local politicians and the city leadership do not necessarily denounce strategies based on such advantages.

The predicament of planners and the planning agency (as of politicians of principle) is then to decide on their loyalties to sustainability and the professional ethos of taking responsibility for ‘the whole’, as they claim to do (Staffans 2004, 268; Puustinen 2006, 236), on the one hand, or the city’s, or its strong actors’, advantages, on the other. It may be easier to ‘side with power’, particularly as acquiescing in (or wielding) power backed up by ‘the system’ may also

secure some discretion and limited autonomy for realising aesthetic aspirations. Yet, integrity seems to require the opposite.

Despite the apparent moral dimension, this conflict hardly in itself defines a genuine ethical problem since if taking the overarching political consensus on ends and expert knowledge (best practices) to reach them seriously, the planner often actually knows what should be done, even if de facto politically unfeasible<sup>14</sup>. Now, according to communicative planning researchers, the solution is to engage citizens. However, if in such circumstances there is any space for a Habermasian ideal speech situation, it must be found within the constraints set by the general political consensus and experts' (best) knowledge<sup>15</sup>. And contrary to much 'post-thinking', unable to take political consensus and professional knowledge seriously, thus reducing what is really a power/knowledge issue<sup>16</sup> to an ethical-political question, my problem formulation instead 'de-relativises' the dilemma by tying the (autonomous and 'non-arbitrary') strength of a town planning office to its ability to promote professional and declared general commitments.

Concerning urban sprawl, the suburban cities of Esbo and Vanda are described as contrasting with the capital's suburban area. If the different conditions in the centre and periphery seem all too evident, their listing may still point out factors important to note. The anti-urban traits of the central grid area of provincial cities, here typified by Åbo, are then compared with the 'prototypical' urbanity of the capital's inner city. This also might appear stating the obvious; however, the differences between our main cities are seldom discussed in exactly these terms. Neither are the decisive features of urbanity made explicit within planning even on this basic level. Finally, some characteristics of architect-driven town planning are described, as pertaining particularly to the capital.

### ***Urban sprawl in the suburban cities of Esbo and Vanda***

Historically, the capital's neighbouring municipalities were ill-equipped, in terms of administrative resources and landownership, to react to the quick post-war urbanisation (Kervanto Nevanlinna 2014, 14). Spread-out development dominated, facilitated by the presumption of any plot in sparsely populated areas obtaining building rights (Maisala 2008, ??; Sundman 1991, 104). In these circumstances, also averting the threat of incorporation (Herranen 2002, 163), the peculiar system of areal development based on land-use agreement (Swe områdesbyggande) appeared out of improvised practices involving exceptional building permissions for increasingly large building and areal units (Maisala 2008, 66)<sup>17</sup>. By such means, promoter-contractors could develop their often peripherally located landed property in exchange for providing the projects with necessary infrastructure. Whereas in Esbo and Vanda (Helsingfors until 1972) the system was dominating, in Helsingfors only a few suburbs were built following this principle (loc cit). Another problem, continuing today, is that the allocation of building rights, rather than being based on an architectural or topographical perspective, must consider fairness or equality between landowners (op cit, app 1 & 3). Thus, it is often pointed out that the extensive landownership of the capital forms a power base of its City Planning Department. Esbo, contrariwise, has deliberately refrained from a policy of active land acquisition (op cit, 136).

The resulting urban sprawl is connected to an environmentally disadvantageous location of major urban functions. Thus, according to the former head of the capital's City Planning Department<sup>18</sup>, a main difference between the suburban area within the city limits and that of its suburban neighbours is that shopping centres in the former are situated at junctions served by rail connections or efficient public transport. While Esbo, the richer of the two main suburban cities of the capital, may be more notorious for its Americanised suburban sprawl, at the turn of the millennia Vanda, having created the self-image of a city specialised in logistics around the airport and along the outer ring road (Hirvonen 2005, 167), accepted a huge shopping centre (Jumbo) primarily serving motorised customers. Minor differences to one side, the unsustainable urban structure of both cities appear to correlate with the fact that while emissions of greenhouse gasses have been reduced substantially within the city limits of the capital, those of its suburban neighbours are still above the level in 1990<sup>19</sup>.



**Figure 1.** The capital region. [Pre-war versus today?] [THE PICTURE WILL BE CHANGED!]

Despite such problems, already in the 1970s and more forcefully from the start of the 1980s, there was a will in Esbo and Vanda to assert the powers of planning, to improve the environment and stop the urban sprawl. In Vanda, this urge materialised in repeated refusals by planners to comply with demands by the retail business and developers for new shopping centres by the motorways and housing areas in previously unexploited terrains (op cit, Ch 3, 157). On the other hand, Vanda's planning authorities have not been able to keep functions within the limits intended and, like Esbo, have suffered from internal differences in view both between the levels of planning and between planning and supervision of building (op cit, 133, 135; Maisala 2008, 112). And as the economic boom of the late 1980s gathered momentum, there was a return to developer-led planning (Hirvonen 2005, 155, 4.1.1).

Fashioned after the capital, much planning in Esbo has been organised as projects and, in the 1980s, even strict planning regulations were introduced. There was also a promising endeavour to activate inhabitants. (Maisala 2008, 112, 366, 387ff) Yet, such attempts appear as exceptions, the initiative slipping to the private sector and projects turning into public-private partnerships (op cit, 122, Ch 6, 367, app 4). If the city has won partial victories in gathering commercial functions in its centres and resisting sprawl beyond the outer ring road until the 1980s (op cit 115), establishments outside the centres still serve motorised customers, and later the sprawl has indeed extended beyond this limit. The mere fact that, according to Maisala, the decision-making in the 1990s on the then tallest residential building in Finland (the ‘Sea Tower’ in Esboviken) was exceptional in the town planning history of Esbo in that architectural arguments were used in the political decision-making besides economic ones (op cit, 112, 388) testifies to differences with the capital.

### *The disintegration of the ‘basic urban structure’ in central Åbo*

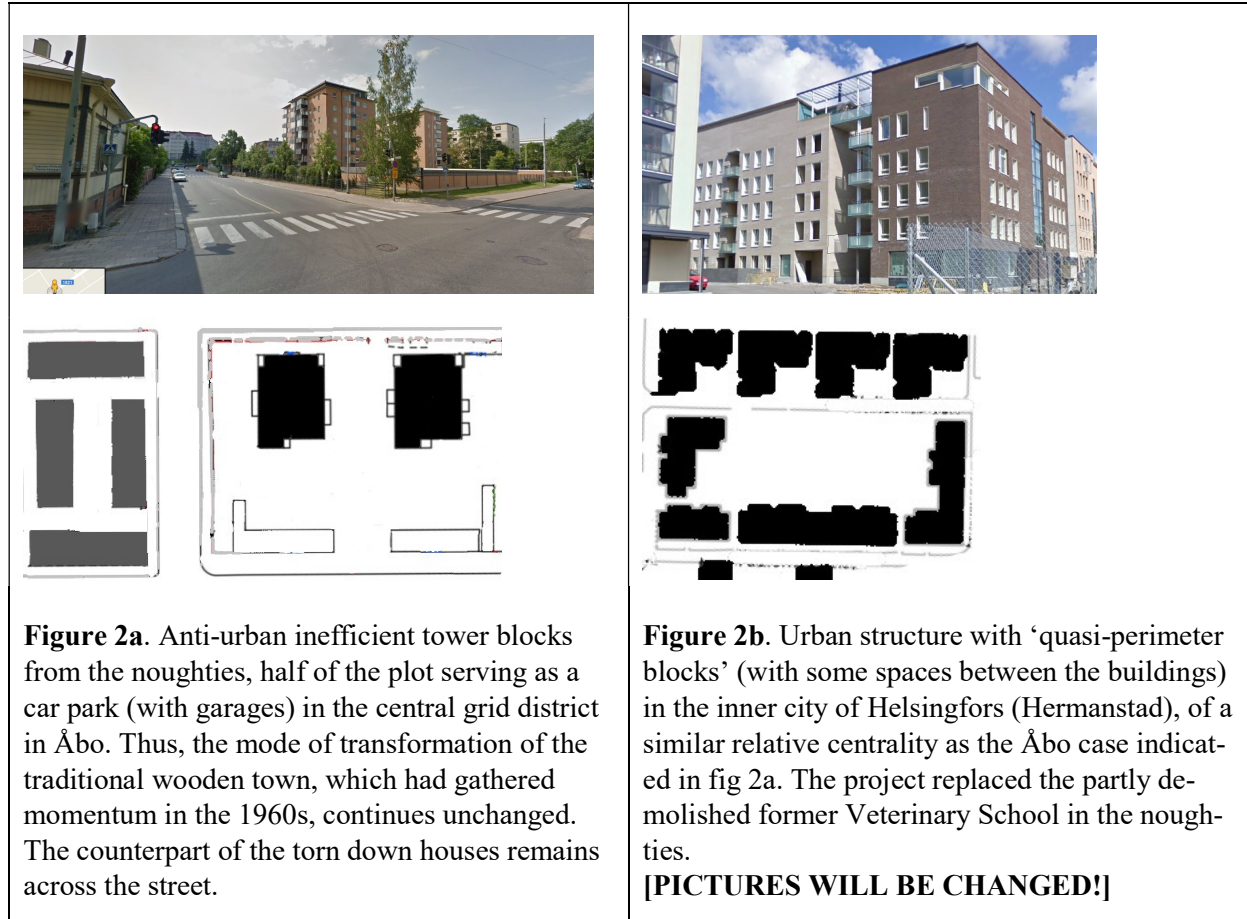
While urban sprawl might even be measured quantitatively, the evaluation of urbanity in an architectural sense is a less straightforward undertaking. In the absence of an uncontested scheme like the Transect principle of the New Urbanists, deciding on contextually appropriate urban properties may be disputed especially outside unmistakably urban environments. Therefore, I shall mostly stick to such ‘prototypical’ urbanity, or what I shall call a ‘basic urban structure’, characterising traditional European inner cities – or Manhattan. The ideal typical patterns of this structure then serve as exemplars, realisable in less intense modes depending on centrality and geographical features.

In evaluating the performance of different town planning offices in producing urbanity in an architectural sense, one should again note their unequal starting points. It would thus be pointless to blame Esbo and Vanda for not being urban in the prototypical sense in which central parts of the provincial cities of Åbo or Tammerfors might be expected to perform better than they do. Still, the simple, hopefully uncontested, principles used would suffice for registering anti-urban solutions, say, in central (ie applicable) parts of Ørestaden in Copenhagen, despite its comprehensive architectural design, and in the much less coordinated London Docklands, the flagship of neo-liberal urban development (Edwards 1992).

The idea of urbanity as a panacea for solving problems from ecological degradation to stagnating growth may be of recent date. Nonetheless, the objective has been important for most of the time the City Planning Department has existed, even if taking on slightly different meanings over the decades. For present purposes, the notion is understood in a minimal sense, disregarding possible aesthetic, scarcely verbalisable connotations, while going beyond its crudely technical ones (in the first case, eg highly abstractly transferred ideas of classical series of spaces; in the second, efficiency). As applied within architecture, principles must allow for variation and creative reinterpretation rather than effecting wholly mechanical patterns. Still, they must significantly limit possible designs not to become altogether rhetorical.

While in general urbanity is tied to functional and experiential spatial intensity, archetypal urbanity of an old-established kind, what I term the ‘basic urban structure’, includes, among other things, perimeter blocks (these ‘blocks’ sometimes being completely built up in central locations), clearly delimiting the public street space. Relaxing these strict criteria somewhat,

one may – *pace* Sitte – allow the structure to be broken up by freestanding public buildings<sup>20</sup>. A connected property defining the urban, even more important than the purely spatial one facilitating it, is the existence of diverse street-oriented ground floor functions<sup>21</sup>. In between these, one may add the physical-functional principle of small units (cf Gehl 1971, 87). This can be assumed to imply at least the detailing of big buildings and their division into subparts as well as the splitting of normal-sized perimeter blocks into several buildings.



In places, particularly in suburbs, the principles may be weakened, thus for example the first one into a requirement of creating street space (eg with fences, typical for traditional wooden towns) and collecting streams of people, while in central locations at least securing L-shaped corner houses.<sup>22</sup> The point of the focus on ‘prototypical’ urbanity or the basic urban structure is to create a burden of proof for those only paying lip service to current ideals – perhaps rather building commissioners or companies maximising their profits than architects.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the idea can be regarded as an architectural re-description of the starting point of Jane Jacobs (1961), for whom the well-working street is all-important for the functioning of the city. Jan Gehl (1971, 76–93) also emphasises, if not necessarily as strictly as to suppose perimeter blocks, the need of gathering together people and functions in a way that a spread-out suburban structure often does not allow.

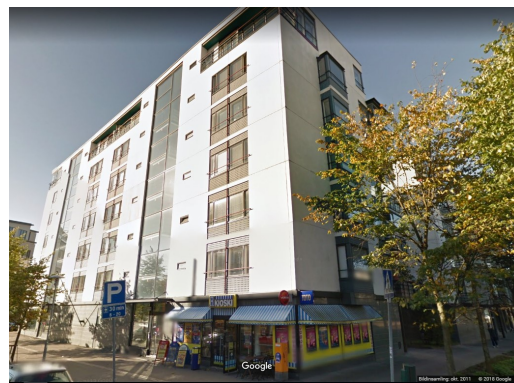
To describe a difference in the planning agencies in the capital and other cities in Finland applying these criteria, one may consider the inner-city structure they have produced during the last few decades at relatively central sites (fig 2 & 3). To be sure, the conditions facilitating the achievement of a traditionally European urban environment are better in the capital than in



small towns, as the pressure to build efficiently is stronger in the former due to higher land value. Such circumstances favour the generation of perimeter blocks (or a today more typical quasi-version of them) and excludes, as such inexpensive, surface level parking areas on plots. Nevertheless, the same kind of pressures bear on second-rank cities as well, where the value of land in their central parts should be a sufficient incentive for building companies and commissioners to comply with stricter detailed plans rather than react to such regulation by abandoning their projects. The fact that achieving an urban environment is slightly easier in the capital than in provincial cities does not therefore seem a sufficient cause for the observed differences. There are variously ambitious – and variously urban – architectural means of producing efficiency: in Finland’s oldest and third biggest city (when counting whole city regions), Åbo, eight-storey slab blocks, higher than, at least until recently, the standard in the capital, combined with underused streetsides, is a common view<sup>24</sup>.



**Figure 3a.** Misplaced suburban corner in the central grid district in Åbo. Instead of a corner house, there is a playground next to the street crossing. Across the two streets, a park square and the Central University Hospital, respectively, would deserve a more urban framing. The quasi-perimeter block shown, with architecturally ill-founded gaps between the buildings and dead ground floors (in addition to uninteresting building architecture), is the result of a comprehensive rebuilding in the 1990s of the rectangular site delimited by streets.



**Figure 3b.** Urban corner in the inner city of Helsingfors (Busholmen, at Gräsvikskanalen), with no more relative centrality than that of the Åbo case in fig 3a. The architectural articulation of the corner, even if not an L-shaped corner house or part of a complete perimeter block, serves to delimit public and semi-private space (as do walls delimiting a parking garage from the street on the opposite side of the site), at the same time enabling urban functions. Urban renewal project of the 1990s.

**[PICTURES WILL BE CHANGED!]**

### ***Special features of the City Planning Department***

Above, I have described problems that are foreign to or much less marked in the capital city, such as non-enforcement of planning regulations, sprawling urban development on private initiative and a fragmented inner city. Whereas within weak planning institutions failure to realise best-practice solutions might easily be described in conventional power theoretical and political terms (‘who gets what, when and how?’), stronger planning agencies more clearly contain complex power/knowledge mechanisms. Some such analytically discernible general features of architect-led town planning seem particularly relevant for the City Planning Department as an ‘informal institution’, that is as an environment including certain ‘cognitively

anchored patterns of perception, beliefs, shared values and behavior of the actors involved' (Reimer et al. 2014, 1).

If the architectural profession finds aesthetic goals important, it should be noted that this preference often is tied to an ethos of social justice (Maisala 2008, 55). It is pronounced at least among the older generation of planners of the capital, going back to the early years of the City Planning Department at the turn of the 1970s (Mäenpää et al 2000, Ch 2), emphasising the need to create a good environment for all. Yet, the connected stress on considering 'the whole', or the public interest<sup>25</sup>, rather than the special interests supposedly motivating other actors, may simultaneously fill the role of justifying a certain disregard of demands expressed by inhabitants, environmental activists etc. In any case, this tendency, facilitated by the influential position of the planners, is the target of criticism by both activists and communicatively oriented planning researchers. Conflicts within the profession, between architects within and outside the department, again, may be rationalised by a similar wish by those inside to control 'the whole', for example affecting the attitude to the need of arranging competitions for new city districts, although more substantial differences are also involved<sup>26</sup>.

In this context, the importance of both structurationist and Foucauldian thinking is to grasp the contextuality and sophistication of power structures and relations, including how they affect knowledge production and implementation. In the pragmatic world of architecture and planning, theoretical knowledge recommending action resisted by strong actors and thus non-applicable, concerning for example the appropriate size of retail units or the amount of parking spaces, is likely to be devalued as irrelevant. Clinging to such knowledge and insisting on unrealistic solutions may again be conceived as dilettantish or politically radical<sup>27</sup>. Facilitating such transition or ambiguity between best knowledge and feasibility, particularly within the less exact area of 'social design knowledge', is the tension between the emphasis on artistic creativity and an adherence to well-tried solutions<sup>28</sup>. This latent conflict becomes real if independent ends, such as liveability, are conceptually mixed up with or reduced to the more ambiguous or contestable idea of architectural quality<sup>29</sup>. If, moreover, the content of urbanity, liveability and ecological sustainability remains vague, it is easy to pick and choose between interpretations of them that fit solutions preferred on other grounds. Architects may hence insidiously acquiesce in the demands of strong interests to preserve their (then possibly partly illusory) artistic liberty. The reason why key terms have been given strict meanings above is exactly to avoid this trap for the practitioner being carried over into the analysis.

To explicate further the fields of power catalysing these phenomena, 'out there' the issue of power relations may largely be perceived on the level of practical consciousness (cf Giddens 1976, 1984) and tabooed. Although officials might be unwilling to boast about their influence, there is evidence of both some competition between offices and acknowledgement within and without the planning agency of its initiative and expertise. Thus, the strength of the department is admitted by its former head (Mälkki 2012). Here one should observe that, quite apart from the possible internal hierarchy of the city administration, the strong position of officials in the Finnish capital is a more general phenomenon, not limited to the town planning agency (eg Malin 2015, 29f).

There is further evidence of the prevalence of a general *perception* of the strength of the department. (This, of course, is not the same thing as its real power, the evaluation of which can only be made in view of some well-defined criteria.) Hence, in my interviews, several politi-

cians have voiced a certain frustration with the advantage of the officials, due to their expert knowledge, in controlling the town planning process.<sup>30</sup> This expertise, as pointed out above, is especially that of the architect<sup>31</sup>. Still, the ability to apply distinctively architectural thinking depends on the planning agency. Accordingly, Sari Puustinen (2006, 229, 236) mentions an exceptional emphasis on the importance of architectural creativity among interviewed planners at the planning agency of the capital as compared with that of the cities of Tammerfors and Uleåborg (Fi Oulu).

Another peculiarity she finds is that planning in the capital is focused on projects, where the different planning levels of partial master plans and detailed plans are integrated (op cit, 229). However, according to my observations and as implied in interviews, there is a marked difference between the maintenance function of planning, taking care of the ‘built out’, old-established city, on the one hand, and projects, on the other<sup>32</sup>. Regarding the former, planners seem as dependent on the initiative of the landowner or developer as their Anglo-Saxon colleagues. Only regarding the latter does the City Planning Department wield real power. This appears partly to explain the need to find new *tabulae rasae*, brownfields or greenfields, such as the Malm Airport or ‘boulevardisable’ motorways, where planning can start from scratch.

### **The establishing of the power position of the planning agency and its trials**

There does not seem to be one single explanation for the founding of the City Planning Department in 1964. Except for the burden of work increasing substantially with urban and economic growth, the new weight of traffic planning has been regarded as decisive (Kolbe 2004, 163), together with more contingent reasons tied to the interests and power of individual actors (Mustonen 2010, 45–50, 53)<sup>33</sup>. In its first permanent officeholder, Aarne Ervi, the new department got a prestigious figurehead. Unluckily, due to health problems, his greatest days were past, his weak leadership resulting in some stagnation in the very beginning of the office’s existence (Mustonen 2012, 59). Juhana Lahti (2006, 184f), ignoring this, instead singles out the beginning of project organisation, integrating different levels of planning and balancing dominance by the project manager and cooperation.

The first projects of the new town planning office were anti-urban: gridiron suburbs in accordance with the new ‘compact city’ ideal, creating ‘contact’ only on the level of the slogan<sup>34</sup>, and Aalto’s plan for the Tölö Bay monumental centre, of partly inhuman dimensions, wasting the ‘chessmen’ of cultural buildings (cf Jacobs) on one spot<sup>35</sup>. Another grand project was Smith and Polvinen’s traffic plan, which proposed American-style motorways and junctions criss-crossing the inner city, implying the demolishing of rows of old perimeter blocks. The radical suggestion for solving the traffic problems might ultimately have led to the decision to build the metro (Mustonen 2010, 60; cf Kolbe 2004, 235).

The shift to more urban thinking was swift in the 1970s, although, despite increasing dissatisfaction with its quality, suburban development continued (Herranen 2002, 163). Under Lars Hedman the department, affected by the changing spirit of the times and criticism by young architects (cf Helander & Sundman 1970), sought to preserve cultural and aesthetic values of the built environment and limit car traffic in the centre. A turning point was the transforma-

tion of the former harbour area in Skatudden into a decidedly urban inner-city district from the 1970s on. The significance of the project lay both in its urban qualities as such and in interest once more turning towards the central city. During the 1970s suburbs were concentrated along railways, the planning of rail connections and land use being integrated for the first time (Herranen, 161–186).

Although the atmosphere and leadership of the department have in some respects been conservative, a certain left-wing culture, especially when contrasted with the Real Estate Department (Mustonen 2010, 120ff)<sup>36</sup>, has still been predominant. Thus, according to Mäenpää et al (2000), the City Planning Department bears the stamp of its emergence in the 1960s or the immediately following epoch. Rather than simply interpreting its partial defeats under Hedman as a weakness, strong deputy mayors taking fights with the department might have been a symptom of its powerful position<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless, in the first half of the 1990s, the conflict between the Deputy Mayor and the head of planning turned out to cause some ‘dynamics’. The planning of Kampen-the Tölö Bay and the connected removal of strategic planning from the City Planning Department to the Executive Office in 1990 form what could be called critical cases (Flyvbjerg 1991, ??) for understanding possible limits of the department’s power.

### ***Critical case 1: planning the Kampen-Tölö Bay***

One apparent failure of the City Planning Department concerns the managing of the central top priority project of the Kampen-Tölö Bay area. The case is multi-dimensional, landownership, of the state and the city, forming an important economic background. Other ingredients include the apparent opposition between incremental versus comprehensive planning, mixed use versus separation of functions, Aalto’s grand scheme versus the generally perceived requirements of contemporary society and steering from above versus democracy and citizen participation. Intertwined with the issue of comprehensiveness against incrementalism were architectural quality and harmony on the urban design level, whether architectural considerations might come to prevail over mixed-use functionality and a possible strain between elite architecture and a well-functioning city. The several standpoints, however, were not distributed in any immediately perceivable order.

A hundred years of great plans combined with non-realisation ended in the 1970s and 1990s when the development of the large sites of Kampen and the Tölö Bay, respectively, were finally initiated in an ‘incremental’ fashion, one huge building after the other being constructed on a plot-wise basis without a comprehensive architectural idea. In Kampen, the town planners’ requirement of dividing the masses into a traditional and human scale was not respected (a problem more typically inflicting provincial cities and suburban municipalities, cf above), causing opposition in both the City Council and the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Hence, students of architecture, in accordance with the spirit of the times, would demystify planners’ talk about competent planning solving conflicts and attaining liveability into an issue of who gets building rights. (Kervanto Nevanlinna 2014, 253ff)

In the middle of the 1980s, an ideas competition for the Tölö Bay area was arranged, apparently envisaged to put a stop to Aalto’s approach, and a partial master plan based on the winning entries finally approved on by the City Planning Board in 1990. In relation to the task,

Hedman observed an opposition between planning for daily life, focused on functionality, scale and balancing architectural elements, and ‘elite’ architecture, where a one-sided emphasis on architectural monuments may result in disconnectedness. However, the decade’s work was dismissed by the Deputy Mayor Erkki Tuomioja, who found the solution dated and insufficiently functional. A new plan was drafted by master planners removed to the City Office (op cit, 256, 261). Contrary to the later categorical rejection of the result by several activists and authoritative observers (Martinsen 2000, 86f), Kervanto Nevanlinna (2014, 262) appears to find at least the aims of the new partial master plan, coming into force in 1992, acceptable, as it sought to substitute mixed-use for the functionalistic division of Kampen and the Tölö Bay area into a business centre and a cultural-administrative centre, respectively.

(...)

### ***Critical case 2: strategic planning exiled***

The exile of the City Planning Department, lasting only for a couple of years, occurred at the end of the coinciding periods of office of Mayor Raimo Ilaskivi and Deputy Mayor, future Foreign Minister Tuomioja, and of the head of the City Planning Department Lars Hedman, just before the definite collapse of the booming Finnish ‘casino economy’. It was the culmination of long-standing tensions between different interests and ideologies, which were catalysed into an open clash by unfavourable personal relations between the city leadership and the head of the department, hardly radical or even left-wing himself.

The conflict was not only felt within the planning institution, but also provoked discussion in the mass media, elucidating the case. Analysing the conflict is likely to reveal not only an interesting concatenation of events in an individualistic, event-based ‘kings-and-battles’ mode of history writing, but also a level of structural causes. More broadly, one can grasp a constellation behind the conflict reminding of the one unveiled by Flyvbjerg in his Aalborg study, if less shrewd, hidden and specific, based on differing interests and the ideological perception of these, and involving power and knowledge.

Excepting the somewhat peculiar Sibbo case<sup>38</sup>, the main lines of the conflict can be described as, on the one hand, the perceived need of exploiting the boom by favouring growth in the capital and the capital region by swift action and less bureaucracy<sup>39</sup> and, on the other, the view that good professional planning takes its time; that it grasps the whole in a long-term perspective; involves the appraisal of how much can be built in an area without destroying its values; is democratic, both in being subjected to the City Planning Committee and in listening to affected inhabitants<sup>40</sup>. Those holding the latter view were also criticised by those holding the former for their old-fashioned mode of (master) planning being locked into itself, that is, disconnected from real effectiveness by not communicating with other sectors and external actors (Mustonen 2010, 114).

Even if there might be a good deal in the last point, the criticism of the City Planning Department was to some extent ideologically motivated rather than always based on facts. Hedman, defending his department, could thus demonstrate substantial results and an efficiency ex-

ceeding that of planning in the neighbouring suburban towns (op cit, 135, Helsingin sanomat 1990)<sup>41</sup>. One might perhaps suspect that the City Planning Department failed to ‘reinvent’ itself (Reimer, Getimis and Blotevogel 2014, 1) during the unexpectedly sudden economic, political and general societal transformation and the equally contingent constellation of key actors in the late 1980s, working against the traditional mode of master planning and ultimately leading to the open conflict and organisational ‘coup’. Still, it is not immediately clear that the department and its head apparently being caught in ingrained behavioural models apparently no longer suited for the new spirit of the times was unambiguously harmful for its reputation and future effectiveness.

## Remaining strains and normalisation in the 1990s

The tensions were felt even after the strategic planners were brought back to the department, as the new actors, Head of Department Paavo Perkkiö and Deputy Mayor Pekka Korpinen, repeated the failure of their predecessors of handling the situation<sup>42</sup>. In substance, the conflict again involved the city centre, including a new coach terminal, the museum of modern art and the age-old planning problem of the Tölö Bay. Korpinen favoured an incremental mode to enable action, whereas Perkkiö, like his predecessor Hedman, were still committed to a ‘rational-comprehensive’ planning ideal or, in less theoretically specific terms, to the architect’s aspiration of mastering ‘the whole’.

At least in the earlier period, Korpinen might have found master planning not only inefficient but unnecessary in principle (Mustonen 2010, 137). Such a view, of course, collided with the very essence of the architect-town planners’ conception of grasping the whole (master planning being conceived as an architectural task). However, as testified by Mustonen’s interviewees, the planners in exile learnt the lesson of master planning being strategic planning. According to the opponents of traditional planning, being detached from the needs and initiatives of resourceful real-world actors and the economic planning at the Executive Office of the city, it was basically worthless. Starting with the 1992 master plan, the planners made sure that each land use initiative was backed up by other sectors. (cf op cit, 313, 315f)

Though overall the attitude of both Hedman and Perkkiö, reflecting the view of their department at the time, remains characteristic of today’s City Planning Department, there seem to be some significant differences in emphasis, bringing the spirit of the *department* of the 2000s closer to the views of the *city leadership* at the turn of the 1990s. This may also be inferred from some revealing statements made by Perkkiö, in facing the humiliating state of his department, having lost strategic planning to the Executive Office. Among other things, he found the exiled strategic unit over-dimensioned, since the city, as it soon is going to be fully built out, will pass into a maintenance culture of planning (Mustonen 2010, 134). This implies the possibility that before the mid-1990s there was no real ambition of densification<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, Perkkiö worried that the company of engineers and jurists would socialise the transferred officials to a more efficiency-orientated attitude (Mustonen 2010, 133).

As to the first response by Perkkiö, though a certain urban thinking had prevailed in the department for a long time, the attempt to protect the old urban values soon complemented with the first project to create new decidedly urban environments, the contemporary out-and-out urban spirit was not there. As to the second, the attitude of Perkkiö could be interpreted as a rhetorically apt ‘that’s-just-sour-grapes’ type of reaction to the predicament of the department. However, quality, in a sense critical of rapid action primarily serving specific needs of trade and industry, might indeed have played a more significant role in the ethos of the City Planning Department of the 1990s than today<sup>44</sup>. In these respects, one may ask if there has been a shift towards a neo-liberal ethos in today’s department, as there seems to have been a shift towards intensified urban thinking.

### **The present spirit: urbanity and in-house drafting of grand inner-city projects**

There is both a continuum and new emphases when comparing contemporary planning with Hedman’s time. No planner today would deny that planning is done for the inhabitants or that enough green space must be secured. However, it would be added that the capital is built for all kinds of users and uses and, as to green spaces, that quality overrides quantity. Not all planners seem strongly preoccupied with sustainability<sup>45</sup>. Nevertheless, as the reduction of emissions of carbon dioxide is an argument for building densely and close to rail connections, the principle has become a given, if vague, starting point. Such objectives are also supported by the reinforced imperative of growth and by a cultural change favouring urban values.

Town planning objectives are often rather imprecisely described, then as now, making it difficult to compare words with deeds and possible shifts in these over time, at any rate unless comparing discursive claims with real traits in the urban environment<sup>46</sup>. When undertaking this, continuity appears. Even the first decidedly new urban area, the end of Skatudden, planned in the 1970s, is in no important sense less urban than newly planned districts although today the buildings might be a couple of stories higher. If its structure is not based on perimeter blocks in as strict a sense as in the old inner city, this is also true for the newest districts. For instance, so far there is *one* unambiguous perimeter block in Busholmen.<sup>47</sup>

It is puzzling that planners professing to favour urbanity built around neighbourhood services and complaining about the difficulty of getting corner shops, tend to allow big shopping centres<sup>48</sup>. The contradiction points to the power of the oligopolistic Finnish retail business, which, strictly *a priori*, ultimately can force through its special interests by political decision-makers representing it. As, still analytically speaking, at some level of consciousness, this may be recognised by planners, they anticipate the probable outcome of getting their plans refused if not abiding with the normal practice and seeing their freedom of planning curtailed. From this hypothetical viewpoint, it therefore certainly pays to keep to the unspoken gentlemen’s agreement and ‘render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’.<sup>49</sup>

Still today, project managers must struggle with or persuade building companies to build ground floor spaces suitable for commercial activities even in central (inner city) locations,

although it immediately seems that such private enterprises would not have much negotiation power in a growth centre. Often there is a virtual agreement among professionals, taught by experience, about what kind of solutions are ‘difficult’ or not worthwhile trying. Yet, these are not the same in the capital and in smaller towns. Many project managers in the former are prepared to stretch the limits. Nonetheless, the same mode of explanation as for the retail business may hold.

Other key issues in contemporary planning interfering with urban goals are that of high-rise building, parking norms and, when rigidly interpreted, the increasing number of norms aiming at environmental health and accessibility. High-rise building, puzzlingly, is only superficially argued for, if at all. It seems a product of the *Zeitgeist* coupled with an effort of attracting ‘good taxpayers’ and multinational companies, while its shadowing effect on wide areas is passed over and its effect on the traditionally low profile of the city is only partly controlled. Parking norms are implemented unsystematically and fought over both inside the City Planning Department and among politicians. As to the increasingly demanding environmental norms, the supervising authority, the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, tends to pay special attention to noise and particulate matter, ignoring carbon dioxide emissions<sup>50</sup>, leading to a fight between actors, all of which swear fidelity to sustainability.

[Architectural competitions versus in-house projects ...]

## Discussion

While social scientists may prefer directly to tackle more tangible urban social problems and architects are likely to maintain that urbanity can be achieved by various planning solutions, I do not find this valid criticism of my treatment centring on urbanity. First, one does not have to postulate environmental determinism to accept that urban life depends on adequate urban design, which cannot always be described in immediate social scientific terms. Second, for ‘social urban design knowledge’ to help achieve genuine urbanity, scientific evidence must not be viewed as inspiration only, but as binding, on a suitably abstract level. Not the least in Finland, the goal may be more than a slogan rationalising present trends, since the country’s feeble urban tradition was hit hard by the structural change and large-scale clearance of old wooden districts. Except for a valuable architectural-cultural layer being lost, the haphazard reconstruction, effected without architectural ambitions, has resulted in a fragmented pseudo-urban environment lacking in both urban and suburban qualities. The comparison undertaken suggests that planning outside the capital has not fully recovered from the industrial-modernist, even corrupted, urban renewal of the 1960s<sup>51</sup>.

The contrasting of the capital’s City Planning Department with the planning agencies of its suburban neighbours and provincial cities, necessarily brief, may be found superficial. However, as in philosophy, the conceived significance of simple observations such as those made may fluctuate between the trivial and the profound depending on the viewpoint. If the present view is accepted, most of the central grid area of our cities and town should be reconstructed to become urban in a Scandinavian (Central European) sense. What is more, the probable rea-



son why the problem exists is not, again according to the present perspective, some specificities of the cultural values and traditions of Åbo and Tammerfors, but weak planning authorities unable to resist the objective special interests of strong actors.

Especially when looking back to earlier decades, my account relies heavily on previous original research. The possible contribution of the present study is in trying to explicate urban design objectives, largely remaining implicit in town planning, independent of specific architectural-aesthetic aspirations. Missing elements in the City Planning Department's own planning practices are, firstly, a strict operationalisation of ecological sustainability or goals concerning reduction of emissions, putting an end to the 're-politisation' of the issue in the shape of a fight about parking norms etc; secondly, a specification of urbanity, ascertaining a standard of realisation of 'social urban design knowledge' (that of Jacobs, Gehl etc) and, if including a differentiation of levels or contexts of urbanity (cf the Transect principle of New Urbanism), a unique role for architects on the master plan level.

My interpretation is that the department had become a highly autonomous institution already in its early years, consolidating its power during Hedman's long period of office. The contingent conflicts serving as my critical cases could have been avoided if the key actors, or their contingent actual interaction, had been different – then depriving the researcher of the benefit of a crisis, where conflicting positions become clearly articulated. The strength of the planning department, leaning on its own expertise, was a precondition of the dramatic course of events rather than a symptom of weakness. It seems that the department has gained in power (as a useful tool for the Executive Office) along with the increased neo-liberal dominance in the world. Though the regime and the top leadership of the city today seem to affect the freedom of action of project managers only to a limited extent, this may be due to a partial internalising of the boundary conditions, to some extent transformed over the decades, set by the former.

However, this outward impression, even if essentially true, would not secure any sovereign rationality or ideal democracy, be it representative or participatory. My point is that the planning agency studied is interesting to problematise exactly as it appears to make up an ideal case from an inside perspective. My own problematisation does not go as deep as a Foucauldian approach requires because I find it even more interesting to keep the foundation of the institution in place to be able to criticise it constructively in its own terms rather than trying to deconstruct its rational.

## **Conclusion**

(...)

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## Keywords

town planning (urban planning); urban design; Helsingfors (Helsinki); ecological sustainability; urbanity

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<sup>1</sup> The essence of the first clause, supporting the scientific references, is due to the master planner D Gordon, expressed in an interview as well as at planning seminars. As for the second clause, an indication of architects dominating the planning agency studied is that all its project managers bear this professional title.

<sup>2</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1964, the town planning section of the Real Estate Department was elevated to an independent department of equal rank as the real estate agency. On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017, the City Planning Department again lost its independence, this time being fused not only with its former parent department but also with a host of other agencies into the Urban Environment Division.

<sup>3</sup> Pasi Mäenpää's (2005) notion of 'wide urbanism' (Fi avara urbanismi) is formulated as a response to what he conceives of as an exaggerated criticism of the anti-urbanism of the Finnish lifestyle. While this may be a valid critical point in discussing the Finnish society at large, one should be clear on the limited bearing of the notion on recommendations for town planning action.

<sup>4</sup> The problem is evident in the 'Vision 2050' of the latest master plan of the city (Manninen et al. 2013). Here the word 'urban' figures approximately 250 times, without, however, the vision providing any explicit definition of the notion or any architectural specification of the oft-mentioned characteristics of denseness, diversity, street-level shops and meeting places, implied by the idea of urbanity. – Ironically, one of the publication's illustrations of the imagined urban future (in Malm) shows a less urban, because more massively monolithic, environment than the historically layered and architecturally small-scale one existing today (op cit, 18).

<sup>5</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg (1991), who has probably decisively contributed to the shift from Habermasian to post-structural planning theory and research, does not, in fact, as pointed out by Kimmo Lapintie (2003, 21f), adopt the Foucauldian perspective in a consistent way.

<sup>6</sup> There is a more general social scientific reason for the referring to 'grand theory' in the first place. This is the need to respect, on the one hand, the wide-ranging knowledgeability and proactivity of actors (rather than just their scheming and unruliness, as with Foucault) and, on the other, their social constitution and the structural definition of the context of action, the two viewpoints meeting in (planning) practices.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu's contribution, except for preceding Giddens in formulating a mechanism of structuration (Bourdieu 1972), is the specification of its mechanism on the individual and group level by means of notions such as the habitus.

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<sup>8</sup> As should be well known in Scandinavia, this is the original, Swedish, name of the capital, situated on the originally Swedish-speaking coast. As seems natural in a Nordic context, I shall also use the (in most cases) original, more generally comprehensible and equally official, Swedish place names in the city instead of their latter-day translations into Finnish. (Finnish names are given in parenthesis for cities and towns where Swedish is not an official language.)

<sup>9</sup> Brief mention will thus be made of two of these cities, which all would merit a more profound study as objects of comparison than I can undertake here. The relating of the town planning of the Finnish capital to its Scandinavian counterparts is a motivating force behind my general research.

<sup>10</sup> My interviews have mostly concerned present-day planning, but some of those with experienced planners enable comparisons with earlier decades, from the 1970s on.

<sup>11</sup> However, whereas the real estate management and town planning have been strictly separated in the Finnish capital, in Copenhagen the most important planning projects have been entrusted a publicly owned company, along the 'Ørestad model' (Book et al. 2010), operating according to businesslike principles (By og Havn's website) and promoting competitiveness.

<sup>12</sup> The requirement in the Finnish jurisdiction, stipulating, among other things, that 'a large retail unit may not be located outside the area designated in the regional plan or the local master plan for central functions, unless the area is specifically designated for such a purpose in the local detailed plan' (Building and Land-use Act, § 58.3) is thus much less restrictive than the locally applying legislation based on the Finger Plan.

<sup>13</sup> Consequently, even the unique town planning authority strong enough to counteract detrimental market forces, that of the capital, is forced to increase the attractiveness and accessibility, for all modes of traffic, of its urban core not to encourage the moving of business activity towards the ring roads.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase 'actually knows' is ambiguous. It might be regarded as the theoretician's reconstruction and not part of the planner's view or knowledge. Following Giddens, however, one may also suggest that in the pragmatic world of planning, there is no need or time for reflection on how things are 'theoretically' or 'in principle'. Still, 'deep down' the 'correct answer' might be known or surmised, possibly causing cognitive dissonance in a powerless situation. This also goes far in explaining the workings of power/knowledge. Nevertheless, Pertti Maisala (2008, ??) testifies to Esbo planners already decades ago having discursively formulated knowledge about best planning according to topical research, such as that of Jacobs and Gehl, which was also applied. The problem is if such knowledge, particularly in situations of strain due to intruding strong interests and random political decision-making, is treated as inspiration only, rather than as (analytical) boundary conditions for planning.

<sup>15</sup> Neither interaction practice in planning nor research based on communicative action theory is always clear on the differences between factual information, (representative) opinions and valid arguments. While information based on 'local knowledge', often appreciated by planners, is certainly useful, unfounded opinions, as distinct from valid arguments, are not relevant as such in an ideal speech situation even if representative. One task for the skilful town planner or the 'interaction designer' responsible for interaction with citizens (both occupational groups should be reasonably knowledgeable in both communication and urban design) is to translate or reconstruct the 'fragile knowledge' of the weak actor into professionally respectable language.

<sup>16</sup> A power/knowledge mechanism is present if what in academia (in an 'in vitro' situation out of a practical 'in vivo' political context) can be formulated as knowledge, eg of how to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide or to secure corner shops and street life, loses its status of (applicable) knowledge due to the presence of interests of strong actors or of aggregated interests (eg the acquired right of driving the car freely) as represented by a strong opinion.

<sup>17</sup> This arrangement, profitable for building companies, but in some tension with law because part of the planning monopoly of municipalities seems to have been transferred to the private sector (Hankonen 1994: 418). P Maisala (2008, 67), however, points out that as the suburban municipalities were still rural districts (Swe landskommun) at the time when the development towards the system started, they did not have the same planning obligation inscribed in law as what pertained to market towns/urban districts/townships (Swe köping) and proper cities or towns. Later, he claims, planning was formally impeccably dealt with. At the same time, however, he admits that (...) The system was accepted by powerful actors, even by the state-level political establishment (op

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cit, 55f; Hankonen 1994, 6.3). It was connected to horse trading particularly between the political left and right, into which whole sectors of the Finnish society, including construction and retail, was divided before the fall of the Berlin wall.

<sup>18</sup> Personal conversation with T. Rajajärvi (...) 20?? at the town planning expo at the City Planning Department's info centre 'Platform'.

<sup>19</sup> Indicators show that by 2015 the emissions of greenhouse gasses had diminished by 28% compared with 1990 within the limits of the capital, while those of Esbo and Vanda, despite a recent reduction, are still above the level in 1990 (HRM 2017). Such results are dependent on the way of counting, however. Thus, part of the emissions per person of Vanda, which have been higher than those of Esbo, are explained by the traffic going through the city along main roads (HRM 2010). The issue is even more complicated. J. Heinonen and S. Junnila (2011) have implied that high consumption producing emissions of greenhouse gases are related to an urban life-style. By measuring emissions not within a municipality but emissions caused by its inhabitants' consumption, they have been able to question, if not conclusively disprove, the beneficent effects of densification. While the researchers have concentrated on finding correlations, the hypothesis might possibly be restated as being about the existence of a neighbourhood effect producing carbon dioxide emissions when settling down in a decisively urban environment.

<sup>20</sup> In a second-order sense, the basic urban structure may therefore be defined as the inner-city structure in its entirety, as far as it is made up of perimeter blocks mixed with monumental buildings, squares, parks etc. Such a structure contrasts with eg urban villa quarters or functionalistic 'buildings in a park', whether considered acceptable or not in a certain context.

<sup>21</sup> The realisation of this property of urbanity is mentioned as an objective in a report by the City Planning Department evaluating the social consequences of the development of the former central harbour areas into new inner-city districts, written as part of the planning process (Korhonen et al 2000, 73).

<sup>22</sup> The notion of a basic urban structure is compatible with more complex definitions, such as the tentative effort of Lees (2011, 33f), listing numerous properties from mixed uses/multi-functionality to places of local distinctiveness and a lively city culture. Some of the components of such a particular interpretation of traditional urbanism may be challenged (eg its emphasis on counteracting gentrification, as being contentious and architecturally superfluous) without undermining the suggested minimal notion.

<sup>23</sup> Yet, as high-quality urban design is always influenced by contextual factors and presupposes a certain tolerance for the aesthetic-creative ideas or whims of both the town planner and the building architect, a less than mechanically rigorous application of the above criteria may be acceptable even in quite central areas. Thus, for instance, even if accepting the above relatively clear criteria of a basic urban structure, L-shaped buildings in streets corners and continuous 'building walls' along main streets may still be much more important than the existence of perimeter blocks in a strict sense. This is so especially if any possible gaps are aesthetically and meaningfully designed, rather than making up leftover (or purely technically justified) spaces.

<sup>24</sup> A well-known cause of the disconnected nature of this city is the legacy of the 'Åbo disease', as the corrupted relationship between politicians, leading officials of the planning agency and building companies from the 1960s on was coined (Klami 1982, Le Galès 2003: 270). What is surprising, however, is that the physical output of the planning has not profoundly changed despite the city allegedly having overcome the disease.

<sup>25</sup> The standpoint of 'naïvely' taking the furthering of the public interest as a serious option is, of course, controversial from a philosophical and planning theoretical viewpoint (cf Marshall, Campbell, Alexander (...)), however necessary the notion may be for planners in guiding their thinking and their setting of targets. Yet, in this case, too, there are variously contentious instances, an obvious consensual one being the common good presupposed by game theory, where it is not the character of the objective but the reaching of it that is at issue. After here having defined reasonably uncontentious objectives of planning, such as furthering sustainability and liveability, important aspects of the task of considering 'the whole' should be possible to conceive as the action for overcoming game theoretic problems of the free market to reach the common good. Thereby it is also possible to reconstruct the key idea of the practitioner in a way acceptable for the theoretician.

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<sup>26</sup> However, there is also a perceptible difference between two cultures, further elucidated below. Some of the cases have a certain amusement value, as when a severe and strictly modernist former teacher of a project manager, once having torn to pieces (!) a sketch of a building with a ridge roof by the then student, applies for approval for his layout plan for a building but is rejected by the project manager who requires him to stick to the plan regulation. Another project manager, also requiring adherence to the planning regulations but still dissatisfied with the realised ‘non-urban’ elevations within his project area, says that the Otnäs professors (i.e. those at the Department of Architecture of the then University of Technology) are ‘the worst’. Still, these are extreme cases. There are also many signs of loyalty to common values within the profession, attested to in my interviews.

<sup>27</sup> Such mechanisms may intrude into research, not the least within an area close to practice such as architecture or planning geography. Thus, (...)

<sup>28</sup> This, of course, concerns science as well. Scientifically interpreted, a Kuhnian normal-scientific rather than a Popperian understanding is here presumed. The latter, however would demand strict testing of the results of innovative planning solution in view of the criteria of success (which might disqualify some artistic experimenting in advance). Yet, such post-occupancy evaluation is seldom carried out. In any case, the artistic criteria for success, focusing on innovativeness as such may obstruct repetition of well-tried solutions. Thus, in a pamphlet, NN suggested that the success of Hagalund (Tapiola) was not reproducible in the continued planning of Esbo due to the creators of the former had a kind of patent on the solution. The same might be said about Herrgårdsforsen (the competition won by a Swedish entry), all too picturesque for the taste of Finnish architects. The next suburb in its neighbourhood (Rosendal) was built (...)

<sup>29</sup> It is not clear where the artistic freedom starts, as socially significant traits supervene on (aesthetically describable) architectural traits. If environmental and social goals are to have tangible consequences for planning, they must be regarded as boundary conditions for it.

<sup>30</sup> Although such a predicament of the lay decision-maker has been famously noted already by Max Weber, in other municipalities and contexts the apparent lack of (planning) knowledge does not stop politicians from ruling (cf. Flyvbjerg 1991). As described below, even in the town planning of the Finnish capital, the power relation between officials and political decision-makers is not quite as simple as such statements by politicians themselves, taken by face value, might lead the unwary to believe.

<sup>31</sup> In my own interviews, the issue of the competences required for different levels of planning divided the architects of the City Planning Department. Some, often younger, architects, worried about their educational qualifications for coping with social issues on the level of town planning, while others did not. One interviewee simply stated that a competent planner must be able to plan regardless of the scale. For historical reasons, going back to Alvar Aalto (Nupponen 2000), in Finland the architect is expected to master several levels of planning, even the regional.

<sup>32</sup> Juha Ilonen (...) In this case it has been unable by itself to promote urbanisation by means of infill building and ‘urban surgery’ on the micro-level, such as in introducing pocket parks, alleys etc. into unpleasant, half-finished or weakly articulated parts of the existing structure.

<sup>33</sup> Somewhat ironically, population growth within the municipal borders of the capital came to a halt five years after the founding of the planning department, the decrease lasting for twenty years, until the depression in the beginning of the 1990s. Instead, the continued growth of the capital region mainly occurred in the neighbouring municipalities of Esbo and Helsinge (present-day Vanda), changing the focus of the City Planning Department into trying to secure the liveability of the capital municipality and plan for sufficiently of dwellings – to compete with the suburban municipalities.

<sup>34</sup> This relates to the infrequently discussed specifically architectural tasks on the master plan level. One point of my architecturally sensitive approach is to avoid decontextualised discussion of an idea such as urbanity. Accordingly, one cannot expect or accept mechanic implementation of prototypical urbanity, including grids of (quasi-) perimeter blocks etc., in suburban cities. This might imply going from bad to worse in respect of their current false fronts of urbanity, partly generated by simplistic, architecturally insensitive interpretations of sociological ideas such as ‘a compact town is a contact town’ (the slogan ascribed to the distinguished traffic planner Pentti Murole (...), inherited from previous decades. The grid areas of Vanda’s main centres, Dickursby and

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Myrbacka, stand out in this respect. Most of the five centres of Esbo fare better, however much eg the heightened efficiency of Hagalund (Fi Tapiola) has been criticised.

<sup>35</sup> Of these, only the Finlandia House was ever realised.

<sup>36</sup> Their political sympathies were not actually, despite some rhetoric, realised as any outright radicalism, but limited to a certain social conscience and a worry for the quality of the urban environment (cf op cit, 120ff).

<sup>37</sup> An indication of this is that it was able to decide which architects may design individual buildings (Kervanto Nevanlinna 2014, ??).

<sup>38</sup> One ambition mobilising the city leadership, not directly confronting it with the planning department, was the issue of land transfer from the eastern rural municipality of Sibbo, at the time still with Swedish speaking majority. The case ties local and regional politics to national politics and contemporary politics to that of the turn of the 1990s. The Sibbo issue was part of a report on the prerequisites for increasing building and housing production in the capital region. Its preparation was, controversially, entrusted Mayor Ilaskivi as the capital's interests or policy, according not only to Sibbo, but also to the large suburban towns of Esbo and Vanda, similarly guarding their independence and character, was perceived to conflict with its neighbours' (Mustonen 2010, 122f). Hedman was excluded as advisor in the case, Ilaskivi instead relying on the assistance of a leading (Social Democrat) official of the Executive Office (loc cit). Tuomioja, despite his initiative in the organisational question, was criticised within his own ranks for passivity and conservatism in the Sibbo case. Yet, since the report was soon silently forgotten – the annexation of Sibbo territory was realised only in 2009 –, the issue is significant for understanding town planning at the turn of the 1990s in the first place as it describes the expansive aspirations of the city leadership. In any case, the report was well received by the like-minded Mayor Jussi Pajunen, entering office in 2005, who found it still topical and applicable (op cit, 127f).

<sup>39</sup> A background factor probably influencing the course of events, was the presence of some strong politicians of the conservative-liberal National Coalition Party (Samlingspartiet), now with government responsibility after having been excluded from this position during the pre-Gorbachev Soviet years. Mayor Ilaskivi, representing the party, was backed up by his fellow party member, Prime Minister and former Chair of the City Council Harri Holkeri (cf Mustonen 2010, 122). Yet, in managing the capital, and more generally supporting 'urban' politics favouring the capital region, the Coalition Party was supported by the co-governing Social Democrats, a not infrequent constellation in Finnish politics. In this case, Tuomioja, representing the Social Democrats, presented the organisational reform relocating strategic planning (op cit, 129, Tuomioja 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Tying strategic land-use planning to the central administration of the city may also have had negative impact on democracy. This was suspected by the longstanding Chairman of the City Planning Committee Ylermi Runko, a fourth important figure of the time, whose commission lasted throughout Hedman's period of office. According to him, firstly, the Executive Office would not have the interest and resources for interacting with inhabitants; secondly, the City Council, replacing the City Planning Committee, would not have the capacity to thoroughly engage in town planning. In practice, according to Runko, this would imply increasing power for the planning officials transferred to the office. (op cit, 131) Whether Runko's care for participatory democracy, having lost part of his power base, was sincere or not, others, too, worried about democracy deficiency and the lack of discussion about questions of principle and real planning alternatives in the City Council (op cit 132f).

<sup>41</sup> Hence, corresponding to the situation described in the study of Flyvbjerg (1991), there were facts supporting the planning institution against strategic or ideologically based rhetoric from the side of the city leadership backed up by strong actors. This does certainly not mean that the planners were in possession of unprejudiced knowledge or were more 'rational' than their opponents, the decisive misinterpretation of Flyvbjerg (Lapintie 2003, 21f, 2004). Still, one must not jump to what might be Foucault's expected conclusion of complete relativism and disparagement of the 'non-epistemic' human scientific knowledge of planners. This would make one as bad as the other in comparing planning officials with their superiors favouring growth and siding with the strong interests of trade and industry. What is needed is a nuanced account making the research interest clear. As a planning theoretician or practitioner, that of taking an overly sceptical 'archaeological' and 'genealogical' stance to one's own knowledge base is scarcely the most natural one.

<sup>42</sup> At the start of his era as head of the department, Perkkiö attempted a reconciliation. This seemed possible, as both Ilaskivi and Tuomioja had been succeeded, the latter by a new strong Deputy Mayor, Pekka Korpinen.



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Surprisingly, the bad chemistry between the new leading officials led to the virtual repetition of the previous constellation. Just as Mayor Ilaskivi had asked for reports directly from the previous director of the town planning division, planning was now led by Korpinen by largely side-stepping Perkkiö and instead relying on co-operation with the then Director of the Town Planning Division Rajajärvi, who eventually succeeded Perkkiö as head of the department after the latter's premature death (op cit, 176, Mäenpää et al 2000, Ch IX).

<sup>43</sup> This is a matter of emphasis to be understood contextually, however. Densification or dense development *were* present already in the 1960 master plan (Schulman 1990, 152).

<sup>44</sup> One contemporary example is the swiftness by which the planning institution reacted in offering an attractive centrally located plot to a large webstore in need of new premises and on the verge of moving out of the city.

<sup>45</sup> One interviewed project manager stated outright that the notion brings nothing new to good planning, which has always aimed at standing time.

<sup>46</sup> This is the characteristic shortcoming that has been identified in Mäenpää et al. (2000). This work on the City Planning Department by sociologists unfamiliar with architectural and planning practice to some extent must take the planners at their word. As pointed out by Kaj Nyman (2003, 97), already the name of the study, *Sanat kivettyvät kaupungiksi* (literally: words petrifying into a city), is ominous, as practices of what could be called *Gestaltung*-based visualisation and aesthetics are much more important in urban design than words, which may mainly serve as rationalisation and as a smokescreen for the unwary. Nevertheless, as a methodically disciplined work, impeccable in its own limited terms, the study still contains valuable information on the local planning institution and several issues worth investigating further.

<sup>47</sup> Still perhaps uncertain of the sufficiency of planning instruments for securing that approximately evenly sized small building units as such would form interesting building blocks of urbanity, as well as of the professional, entrepreneurial and political acceptability of such an effort, planners of the new inner city areas instead tend to make renewed use of a play of volumes, if not in the typical 1960s fashion by adding lower wings to office blocks and blocks of flats, then by mixing typologies like terraced houses or townhouses with the blocks and by varying the height of the latter. If this variation succeeds in compensating for the lack of ground floor activities and for oversized plots and slightly monotonous façades to favour liveability and lessen psychological distances for pedestrians, it does not necessarily contribute to efficiency.

<sup>48</sup> The limited amount of services provided by the comparatively small area of the end of Skatudden are a few ground floor shops at the main square. The area would certainly need a larger amount of ground floor activity. However, so would completely new inner-city districts, such as Fiskehamnen, particularly Sörnäsudden, the part so far realised (in this respect, Busholmen fares better).

<sup>49</sup> To back up the story with some empirical facts, it is of some interest that each project manager interviewed has given a different answer to the reason for the solution of favouring shopping centres. This may partly be because the character and dimensions of the centres and districts are different. Still, not all explanations seem equally plausible. The plainest statement was that the planner wanted to offer the inhabitants in the area proper services, full stop. The most trustworthy one was the idea that the district needs an 'anchor' of relative concentration (the size of the centre being moderate) to attract businesses to settle along the streets of the area. The most interesting, if hardly the most reasonable, explanation was that just as Fredriksgatan (one major shopping street in the centre with specialist shops) needs Stockmann (the leading department store a couple of streets away), the customers comparing the selection and the price, so the new inner city district at its metro station, needs a big shopping centre to complement neighbourhood services. The obvious problem with the account, similar to the previous, is that the size of the centre is 60,000 square metres, compared, for example, with the 40,000 square metres of the shopping centre in Kampen in the core of the city.

<sup>50</sup> In my interviews, one official kept repeating that the interventions of the authority are based on the statements in law and nothing but these. However, there are paragraphs presenting declarations of intention, which in principle require officials to pay attention to sustainability in the mentioned basic sense of the Brundtland commission as well.

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<sup>51</sup> Thus, the town planner responsible for the central city southeast of the Aura river in the noughties explained, in a personal conversation, the present fragmented nature of the central grid area by its vastness, produced by CL Engel's plan after the great fire in 1827. The plan made an extensive urban structure possible, not necessitating efficient building (another obvious reason being that most development happened in the new capital at the time of Finland's first real industrialisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). This inefficiency was then retained as the old wooden town was replaced by blocks of flats in the 1960s. Still, however relevant the account may be as a background for understanding the urban structure of Åbo, it does not define a sufficient explanation. For example, had the spirit been more in favour of conservation, it would have been possible to form highly efficient perimeter blocks in the nuclear centre while preserving the old wooden structure in the rest of the grid area.