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Crafting a planning issue with citizens in the context of planning competition: a case of 'Nordic Superblock'

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the formation of the planning issue 'Nordic Superblock' through the early planning phase of the Hiedanranta area in Tampere, Finland. The workshops with citizens and professionals as participants, held after a planning competition, were an important part of the area's initial planning. The paper argues that the superblock issue emerged because the institutional context differed from the traditional zoning process. Furthermore, the issue itself challenged the traditional planning process and the current urban development regime. The case is a promising example of the outcome of expert–citizen interaction; however, it also reveals some bottlenecks in the planning process.

Introduction

Architectural and planning competitions are commonly used as a quality measure in urban planning. There is a widely held assumption that they are a solid method for finding optimum solutions to complex planning issues (Bern 2017). However, when it comes to participatory practices, we are in unexplored territory. Although some form of public engagement is typically involved, competitions have traditionally been expert-dominated practices, with a strong focus on the peer review process (Kazemian and Rönn 2009). Adding citizen participation to competitions, it has been argued, would make them democratically more legitimate (Garde 2014; Hou 2011; White 2014).

Yet little research exists on how citizen participation can be integrated into competitions and planning processes. Collaborative and communicative planning has been under an intensive focus in planning theory discussion in general (Agger and Löfgren 2008; Forester 1999; Healey 2003; Innes and Booher 2010), but studies about the practices of citizen participation in planning competitions are surprisingly rare (White 2014). Typically, the proposal's development potential is one of the main evaluation criteria in competitions (Kazemian and Rönn 2009), but combining citizen participation in this process has not been much explored. This paper responds to this gap in knowledge by examining one promising example of expert–citizen interaction in the context of a planning competition. The study focuses on an initial planning phase of Hiedanranta, a new district planned for 25 000 inhabitants and 10 000 workplaces in Tampere, Finland. In Hiedanranta, the

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attempt to integrate citizen participation into the planning competition led to a new planning issue, 'Nordic Superblock'.

The use of the term Nordic Superblock here means a mixed-use residential block that brings a novel scale of cooperation into the planning discussion: one or several blocks would now share the resources previously shared between residents of one building. Instead of building the usual community room for each building, the money reserved for it would be allocated to a shared pool, which could then be used for realizing a variety of shared spaces around the block (Alatalo et al. 2018). Cooperation on this scale could also help keep plinths and streetscapes alive, and it could help residents acquire joint sustainable energy solutions. The early twentieth-century modernist idea was to plan large superblocks outside the city, supported by mobility with private cars (Fishman 1982). Applying the idea in Nordic countries resulted in residential suburbs with few services (Saarikangas 2014). The Nordic Superblock concept turns the tables by offering ways to create mixed-use and lively urban areas instead.

The case is revealing in two important ways. First, it shows the potential of expert–citizen interaction to create a new planning issue that challenges the current urban market-driven development regime in Finland. Second, it reveals some bottlenecks in the planning process. This may prevent further development and establishment of planning issues outside traditional institutional settings or in collaborative processes.

This paper suggests that citizen participation could significantly contribute to the process, and especially to the outcome, of planning competitions. Its analytical focus is in the development of a planning issue in expert–citizen interaction. Currently, case descriptions focusing on a planning process have a weighty role in participatory urban design discussions (White 2014). This paper claims that focusing on issues and their articulation is an equally important element in collaborative practices with citizens; it is the interest in a planning issue that lies at the core of participation. Citizens are generally more interested in issues and outcomes rather than the participatory processes themselves. (Leino and Laine 2012). Following Noortje Marres (2007), public involvement in politics is here understood 'as a practice that is occasioned by issues and dedicated to their articulation' (Marres 2007, 775).

However, in the current Finnish context, participation is usually organized before the implementation phase of planning, which practically only allows for making a complaint, not for presenting any ideas. Urban planning is in the hands of experts and professionals (Mattila 2018). Matthew Carmona (2009) has presented a heuristic model of three professional modes of practice in the British context: creative, market and regulatory. They can be characterized as tyrannies of practice and seen also in Finland. The creative mode tends to emphasize design and prioritizes image over other values, such as economic, social or environmental. The market mode is usually promoted by construction companies and developers where commercial considerations come to the fore. The regulative mode has a rule-based approach, but it also aims to correct market failures. (Carmona 2009, 2646–2647). It is common that some of these practices are stronger than others in a given time and context.

In Finland, regulatory practice is strong in the zoning phase, but the market mode usually dominates in the implementation phase. Design expertise is essential, but it does not have a leading role. Citizens are in a position where they have 'almost no power', only a right to make a complaint about the plan (McGlynn 1993, cited by Carmona 2009, 2644). The conventional way in Finland to implement urban planning and construction leaves

citizens as passive consumers. (Laine, Joensuu, and Alatalo 2020; Mattila 2018, 96). This highlights the need for forming a new coalition to combat market forces. Thus, participatory discussions in planning (in one form or another) are essential to creating an environment for civic engagement and new alliances.

This paper is based on analyses of a series of workshops that involved both professionals and citizens and addresses the following research question: *How did an expert-citizen driven planning issue, Nordic Superblock, challenge the current planning system?*

The role of issues in citizen participation

The idea of mobilizing local urban publics has inspired scholarly debates about the democratization of planning processes (Zakhour and Metzger 2018). One important source for this literature has been the work by the Dutch philosopher Noortje Marres, who combines early twentieth-century American pragmatism with contemporary science and technology studies to understand the nature of publics and democratic politics. Marres's central argument is that not everyone engages in political activity for the sake of participating in democratic life but because they are caught up in *issues*. (Zakhour and Metzger 2018, 348–349; Leino and Laine 2012) In other words, Marres suggests that specific and concrete issues are the causes that mobilize broad segments of the population to engage in the governance of public life (Zakhour and Metzger 2018, 348).

The definition of 'issue' tends to include at least two things. First, issues are political; they are questions that are contested. (Marres 2005 cited in Asdal 2015, 76.) Political relevance is not to be found in traditional characters, sites or passions of political stages. Instead, diverse actors in multiple arenas engage in politics. (Latour 2007). Second, 'issue' comes with the capacity to gather *a public* of interested actors around it (Marres 2005 cited in Asdal 2015, 75). While pragmatists John Dewey and Walter Lippmann were concerned with publics as they related to statehood, it is useful to consider the formation of publics on other scales too. Smaller and more intimate scales might include neighbourhoods, or publics might form around distant and mediated interactions. (Dantec and DiSalvo 2013, 244.) Publics are increasingly also formed around future issues: those objects or events that we reasonably believe will appear or occur but have yet to do so (Latour 2007 cited by Dantec and DiSalvo 2013, 244).

In this case, the superblock issue was not turned into a political problem or conflict that needs to be resolved (cf. Latour 2007, 6). It was not the initial driver for participation, nor was it politicized. However, it was identified and expressed by a heterogeneous group of people, it energized the parties involved in the planning process, and it contested the current urban market-driven development regime in Finland on some important fronts. What is also relevant in this case is considering public involvement as a way to articulate issues that have insufficient institutional support (Marres 2007, 770–771). This notion is helpful since institutions are created to handle known issues. In the field of urban planning, the existing regime is particularly rigid, and new issues have to generate either a certain amount of public interest or powerful actors around them to surface.Turning something into an issue includes the idea that it opens up for involvement, discussion and controversies beyond existing institutions. Marres (2007) argues that we must focus on the events in which issues are articulated as objects of potentially widespread concern. We must identify moments when issues are opened up for outside involvement and processes in which issue formation

is moved to arenas beyond the institutional setting (Marres 2007, 761–771). However, Asdal claims that becoming an issue might sometimes also imply that it becomes closed and cut off from the relevant publics or groups with an interest. It becomes non-contestable, that is, a question made to belong and to be handled exclusively by certain issue-experts. Hence, it is not sufficient to argue that something becomes or is an issue. It is necessary to empirically analyse what kind of issues emerge and how in the first place, and what kind of effects they have. (Asdal 2015, 75, 88). The following analysis employs Asdal's concepts of re-timing and re-locating. Asdal (2015, 79) identifies re-timing and re-locating the issue as specific types of modifying work documents perform upon issues. Re-locating the issue can mean defining where or at which level of governance the issue is addressed. Timing of the issue refers to the definitions of when it is to be handled. Modifying work is also done through the distribution of roles: who plays the main characters and what this means for the issue (Asdal 2015, 80). As Asdal suggests, sometimes modifying work also detaches actors from issues and defines who does not fit. (Asdal 2015, 84). In the context of planning competitions, the role of documents, such as competition programme, competition proposals and evaluation minutes, is evident in modifying and transforming planning issues. However, modifying work is also done in other kinds of material-discursive realities and by many actors. This analysis is therefore not restricted to the official documents but also uses other materials, such as interviews and the minutes from the citizen workshops.

Data and methods

The empirical context of the study is a process that started after the planning competition held to create a comprehensive idea-level design for the Hiedanranta district in Tampere. After the competition results were published in early 2017, the authors organized four follow-on participatory workshops in collaboration with the city of Tampere. The data for this study consists of discussions at these participatory workshops in spring 2017 and interviews with the city planners and architects involved.

The design of the workshops was mainly based on small group discussions. Conversations of eight groups in total were analysed, each group with approximately five participants from different backgrounds, both professional and non-professional. The length of each conversation was approximately 1.5 hours, including generating ideas and prioritizing and developing them further. Finally, the groups presented their best ideas to other groups. All the discussions that took place at the workshops were recorded, the presentations of the best ideas were filmed, and the illustrations, along with the lists of ideas, were documented. To gain a more critical view, the analysis of the documentation from the workshops for this paper was undertaken by one author who was not involved in organizing the workshops.

The expert interviews were conducted after the first phase of the structural plan was accomplished in spring 2018. The experiences of the workshops were discussed, specifically the development of the superblock idea. In total, three interviews with five persons were conducted, and the planning documents of the area were also analysed. The research method included a content analysis from an interpretive policy analysis perspective (Wagenaar 2011) and a systematic examination of the varied data in order to build a broad understanding and interpretation of the development of the superblock planning issue.

Crafting 'Superblock' in Hiedanranta

In Hiedanranta, the attempt to integrate citizen participation into the planning competition led to the formation of a new planning issue, Nordic Superblock. The case is a promising example of the outcomes of expert–citizen interaction, but it also reveals some bottlenecks in the planning process that may prevent developing and establishing similar promising ideas and participation in general.

The competition assignment in April 2016 included preparing a comprehensive idea-level design for Hiedanranta – a future vision of the area. (City of Tampere 2016). The area has been open to the public since 2016, and the city of Tampere has started its development by enabling various events, experiments and temporary uses. The competition brief emphasized the objective of creating a dense and city-like district. The scope of the competition task was broad although the size of the competition area, covering 246 hectares, was locked. Significantly for the question of superblock emerging as a planning issue, the city block scale was not particularly addressed in the competition brief. Still, the brief set the aims of mixing various functions, promoting the emergence of community, as well as flexibility and adaptability to the future needs of housing. (City of Tampere 2016, 53–55) The competition received 39 proposals, two of which, Hiedanranta Innovation Bay by Mandaworks with Schauman & Nordgren Architects and Reflecting Tampere by Buenaventura Architecture Collective, were selected as the winning entries.

After the publication of the competition results in early 2017, the authors became interested in facilitating citizen participation and proposed a series of workshops to the Hiedanranta Development Programme. Four follow-on workshops were organized during spring 2017 in collaboration with the city of Tampere. Interested citizens and other stakeholders were invited to the workshops with an open invitation in newspaper ads, bulletins and social media. This was completed with targeted invitations to citizen associations with special knowledge on the theme or with connections to vulnerable groups that rarely participate in such events. The four workshops had a total of 202 participants, including 121 citizen participants. The rest were researchers, architects, city planners, and other officials. Each of the four workshops concentrated on different, yet overlapping, themes.

The participatory workshops started a pre-master planning process, called the structure plan of the area. Completed in 2018, this phase serves as the basis of the master plan. Workshops were held just when the results of the competition were entering public discussion and before the architects and city organization started to develop the winning entries. Thus, the participation process started much earlier than the Finnish Land Use and Building Act (2000) requires. Normally in Finland, the first possibility for a citizen to participate is when a draft of a plan is made public (Tulkki and Vehmas 2007). In this case, the citizens could do more than merely comment on the almost ready-made plans: they were involved in developing them further.

Shared spaces, resources and sustainable energy infrastructure

The term Nordic Superblock resonates with planning history, as well as with other projects taking place now around the world. In the 1930s' United States, Wright and Stein (Larsen 2016) presented the concept of Neighbourhood Unit, consisting of several blocks with a green common space offering shelter from the noise and pollution cause by traffic. The

formation of superblocks within the existing urban structure in Barcelona (Müller et al. 2019; Rueda 2018) is a good example of contemporary thinking on the benefits of urban development that pays attention to groups of blocks. There the focus has been on the streets, aiming to reclaim space for people, reducing motorized transport and promoting sustainable mobility, health and active lifestyles (ibid.). In addition to developing better-shared green spaces and streets, the Nordic Superblock of Hiedanranta uses the power of the new scale of cooperation to create better and more varied shared indoor spaces, as well as sustainable energy infrastructure in a new urban development. The novelty of Nordic Superblock in Hiedanranta thus lies in widening the understanding of shared resources between blocks and enhancing a mixed-use idea in a Nordic neighbourhood development.

In the Hiedanranta planning competition, the winning entries presented various typologies of block yards and blocks of semipublic and porous nature, but most presentations remained at the scale of diagrams or descriptive texts. Due to the broad scope and scale of the competition task, the scale of housing was not yet discussed in the entries. Still, the competition provided a fertile ground for developing a rich assembly of ideas in the follow-on workshops with experts and citizens. One of them, the 'Bustling Block' workshop, focused on housing and work at the block level, and these themes in particular turned out to be relevant and interesting to the diverse group of participants. It was in this workshop where the idea of Nordic Superblock was first discovered.

Developing Nordic Superblock as a planning issue required bringing citizens and experts together in a new kind of planning setting. The setting was modified by the researchers, who collaborated with the city of Tampere and jointly offered the spaces, materials and facilitators for this. The Bustling Block workshop began with the architects' inspirational speech, which included a visual presentation of the 'Supervaried Hiedanranta block', borrowing a picture from the Naerheden project (Karres en Brands & Arkitema 2016). The architects saw value in Naerheden's aim of mixing housing typologies and making new social neighbourhoods with a strong social coherence. Thus, they shaped the thematic framing of the workshop (Figure 1) .

From the conversations between the experts and the citizens at the Bustling Block workshop, the following themes were identified as the contents of the superblock issue: 1) inclusive mixed-use urban development; 2) collaboration; and 3) flexibility. These assembled, but also contested, existing urban planning ideas in interesting ways.

First, *inclusive mixed-use urban development* is a principle referring to how the Nordic Superblock was described as combining various kinds of housing, work and services, as well as communal spaces and meeting places. The block would open out to the street but would also have green courtyards and roof gardens. It would have diverse buildings, blocks of flats, townhouses, and perhaps a completely new type of building. Its residents would have diverse backgrounds. There would be housing for families, individuals, the elderly, young adults, and vulnerable groups.

> Everything would be within a walking distance, so that I could work there, I could live there, and I could go to a shop for basic goods. – female citizen

> [T]here could be offices, for example, on the second floor, where you could easily move from a common space to a kind of office level. – male citizen

Figure 1. Naerheden project as inspirational material from architects at the beginning of the workshop (Karres en Brands and Arkitema 2016).

The superblock idea (Figure 2) contested the current urban development regime on several fronts. Finnish residential areas outside city centres are usually built primarily just for housing. They are also built in stand-alone building style, not in a city-block structure. The idea of denser urban fabric, instead of separate buildings, brought forward a new idea in residential planning, enabling mixed-use development and a rich set of amenities. Furthermore, Finland has a strong history of inclusive cities, based on the ideas of the welfare state. This idea has not vanished in recent years, but declining municipal tax revenues have steered the development in a more market-oriented direction. The superblock discussion challenged this development by proposing an inclusive idea of varied housing tenures at the rather dense block level: owner-occupied, rental, co-housing, right of occupancy, and cooperative housing.

Second, the Nordic Superblock was described as being organized around *collaboration* at the block or multiple block level. The communal spaces and uses organized at the block level could create more opportunities and savings for residents than communal spaces based in individual housing companies. Sustainable energy solutions and solutions of circular economy could be organized at a block level or in cooperation between multiple blocks. Communal spaces and meeting spaces would create a sense of community and communal belonging.

> There could be this sort of block where on the ground level you could have a communal space with a restaurant maybe, so if you didn't feel like cooking yourself, you could easily go and eat there; and yes, there could also be a gym and craft spaces, and that sort. – male citizen

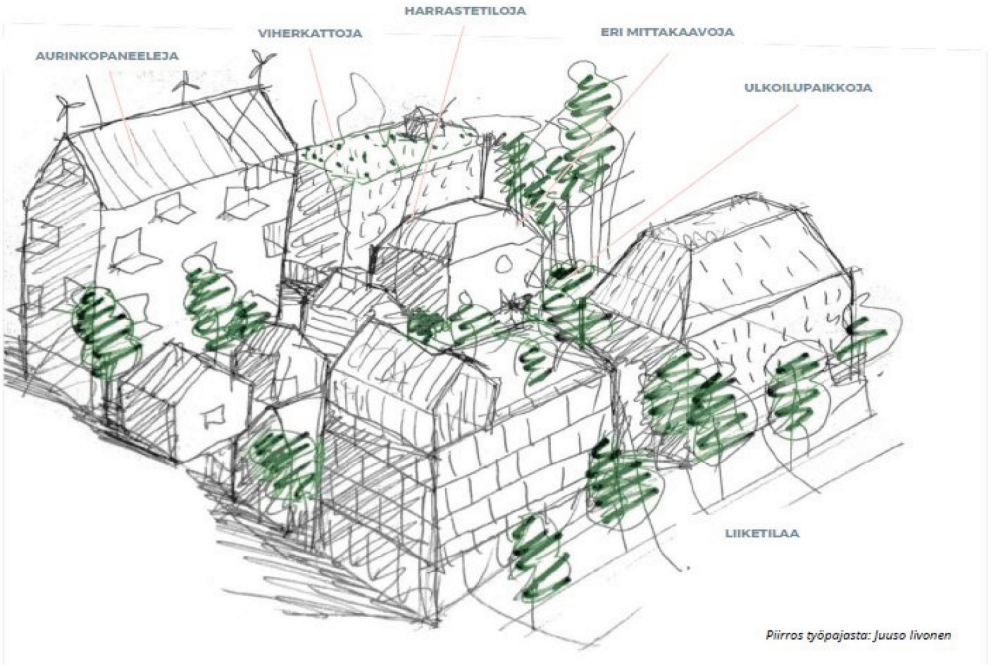

Figure 2. Drawing by an architect, summarizing the superblock-kind of idea of one group at the workshop (TUPA architecture 2017).

In contemporary Finnish urban planning, neighbourhood planning is done at the master plan level, but currently neighbourhoods are made in a developer-driven way in stages by constructing stand-alone buildings one by one on separate lots. Therefore, planning common spaces at the block level is not possible at the moment. The superblock issue varied from this practice as it anticipated more nuanced and functional understanding of common spaces at the block level, collaboration between residents and routes that would create encounters between dwellers.

Third, the Nordic Superblock was described as *flexible* in everyday use. The flexibility of spaces, raw spaces and different kinds of additive spaces would support people in changing life situations and prepare for the unknown needs of the future. There could also be innovative, overlapping and shifting uses.

> [T]hen on upper levels, there could be living spaces, – but what if there were kind of modular flats with the basic elements like kitchens, toilets and bathrooms? And while one room would be a studio, it would always have next to it more bedrooms or additional spaces that could be combined with it, or with the neighbouring flat. – male citizen

The superblock idea contests current, typically rather inflexible and one-dimensional use of spaces and challenges developers' cost-benefit approach in order to produce best value for residents.A new kind of collective of actors, both experts and citizens, was formed around the issue; it was necessary for the emergence of the issue. The selected quotations of the citizens above illustrate ideas that the citizens brought into the discussion. Many of the ideas discussed did not concern the physical planning of the area but rather the ways of organizing everyday cooperation between residents. Ideas considering

a wider planning scale were also presented. These included, for example, a commitment to allocate five per cent of the constructed buildings for communal space in each block and allocating plots of land for co-housing projects.

Institutional boundaries reconsidered

What made the emergence of the superblock issue possible was the modifying work, namely re-timing and re-location of the planning process. However, this promising start of public articulation collided with institutional boundaries. The issue formation was continued by a smaller group of experts and also travelled to new arenas.

Organizing the workshops was an exceptional experiment. In a typical Finnish master plan process, citizens can comment only on a draft of a master plan made by the urban planners. Thus, in the case of Hiedanranta, there was a crucial shift in timing: the issue emerged due to re-timing (see Asdal 2015, 80) the collaborative practices in the planning process.

However, the modifying work upon the issue, that is, defining when, where or at which level of governance it would be taken care of, continued after the workshops (see Asdal 2015, 79–80). The document Asdal investigated was able to establish the issue as part of the national system and, at the same time, re-allocate power and the actor roles. The lifting of the issue from its unique local context to a national level meant, in Asdal's case, that the issue was de-politicized and limited from growing in scope and weight. (Asdal 2015, 79–80.) In this case, Nordic Superblock was seen and defined as an issue that could not be handled in the early structural stage of the planning but in a later, more detailed level of the process (City of Tampere 2017, 2020). According to the urban planners of the city, most of the citizens' ideas at the workshops were too specific and detailed to be compatible with the structure plan but would become more relevant when the planning went further.

> The architectural plan itself has a strong idea about the dense centre and small block structure, which has then fitted the [workshop] themes, the thoughts about communal use, really well. However, at this point we have nothing concrete to demonstrate this [aim of integrating the themes of the superblock into planning], but that is exactly that challenge of how we speak about the ideal communal spaces in the master plan. But at least the block structure has been configured so that it makes [communal use] possible, – The ideal and wish for the existence of such communal or temporary spaces is certainly a lovely philosophy, but [concretizing it] –, organizing administration, dividing construction, and delegating responsibilities, makes it quite a challenging equation. – urban planner, city of Tampere

In the structural plan, the workshops with the citizens are presented as a part of the planning process, with the promise that their results will be integrated into the design solutions of Hiedanranta (City of Tampere 2017, 7). The workshop results have limited concrete impact although the planning principles in the structural plan, such as the small block size, density, spaces of the street level, and block parks, are in favour of the idea of superblock. The rich variety of specific block-level ideas was condensed to few general principles more appropriate to the larger scope of this structural planning phase.

As such, the planning process did not support the energy created around the superblock issue during the workshops. In a more flexible planning process, the civic energy could have been utilized to further develop the district. In the current planning process, the urban planners found it difficult to reflect on the impact of the workshops although they considered the workshops important in general.According to the interviews with the core

group of Hiedanranta's master planners, the main result of the workshops was realizing they had a mutual aim with the public for how the district should be developed. The urban planners assured that the city would continue to develop the superblock idea in the next, more suitable stage. Thus, the superblock idea continued to develop and arguably kept its status in the planning process, but importantly, it was hidden from the public as an issue.

> [The workshops] had credibility and could be used in a way to prove that "Hey, this is the right thing to do and this is what we want." That this is not something that is easy to disregard but will remain there. Those big goals, connected to the district's functionality, attractiveness, ecology, diversity, – would be there even if there were no specifics about the exact location – But it made it all clearer that "Yes, this is actually a good thing, that this is worth keeping."–architect

As Asdal (2015, 83) notes, the documents not only reflect the reality but also modify and transform it. As an issue moves to an official planning process and to planning documents, it gains weight and is taken more seriously. (Asdal 2015). This did not happen in the trajectory of Nordic Superblock. One implication of this was that the superblock issue, as well as the whole thematic of housing, was absent in the public hearing where the citizens had an opportunity to comment on the latest developments of the master planning in spring 2018. Consequently, the network of actors involved in the discussion about the issue shrank. Excluding the issue from the public process of preparing a master plan hindered its opening for further public involvement (Marres 2007). As a result, the energy invested in the process by the participants with potential transformative power was lost, at least temporarily.

Nevertheless, the superblock issue proved flexible and fluid enough for relocation. It was an inspiring concept of everyday life, promising better future living in a way imaginable to many. It was easy to adopt and assimilate to different contexts and purposes. Consequently, the issue travelled to new arenas and was articulated in various ways. For example, it received attention from the Ministry of the Environment (Alatalo et al. 2018) in relation to how the Finnish Land Use and Building Act should be renewed. Business developers saw promise in it (Alatalo et al. 2018), leading to the establishment of a new enterprise (Evolving Symbiotic Cities, 2019). At times, interest in block-scale energy solutions (Joensuu, Norvasuo, and Edelmann 2020) pushed the social themes out of discussion. Also, the superblock development continued as a spin-off research and development project jointly by Tampere University and the city of Tampere in 2019.

Re-thinking actor roles

As described earlier, the follow-on workshops offered an opportunity to step aside from the formal planning process. New kinds of actor roles provided an opportunity to engage with issues of urban everyday life in order to generate more ideas for the development of the area. The role of researchers was important in initiating the process and creating the arena for the idea of the superblock to emerge. The researchers initiated the idea of organizing the participatory workshops and chose the theme Bustling Block for the third workshop, where they had a facilitating role. They also shaped the ideas from the workshops into four themes and named one of them Nordic Superblock. Furthermore, the workshops provided a relatively different role for the planners and architects compared to a typical competition process. The professionals could take a role that they felt most comfortable with at the workshops, some

asking specific questions or setting problems to be solved together and some inspiring the citizens, while others remained in the background answering questions and listening.

The workshops had many citizen participants, who generally held positive attitudes towards the development of the area, currently mostly empty of housing and unoccupied but with an active cultural event, artisan and skateboarding profile. There seemed to be no controversial issues or strong stakeholder groups involved in the process. However, the question of stakeholder interests in the process was raised later in the process.Both the researchers and the urban planners thought that the tacit knowledge of the citizens was important although it was obvious that the participants did not represent the average citizen of Tampere. Some of the participants were in some way engaged in urban planning issues through their studies, work or organizational activities. For the researchers, this was not problematic because they regarded participants not as actors representing special interests among the general public but as actors with ideas and knowledge on the everyday life in the cities. The participants of the workshops were, in Asdal's (2015, 82–83) terms, issue-experts, referring to actors that are drawn around a concept because they are knowledgeable about it.Within the city organization, however, this kind of thinking still seems relatively rare. As the process proceeded, the urban planners involved in organizing the workshops stated that they had received a lot of negative feedback from the city council members concerning the representativeness of the workshops. Participants were seen as representing narrow, specific interests. The distribution of the publication presenting workshop results (Alatalo et al. 2018) to key politicians in Tampere was cancelled at the last minute, without a clear explanation of why and by whom.It seems that citizens were defined as stakeholders with interests, instead of issue-experts. In Asdal's (2015) case, the modifying work turned some stakeholders with interests into neutral issue-experts, increasing their right to participate in its definition, while at the same time excluding and detaching others. This case tells a rather different story. In the context of public participation, the citizens' role was questioned because their role as issue experts was not established in the official planning process.Yet the superblock issue empowered the participants, citizens and experts. It started to create an alliance – a potential collective – among architects, city planners and residents to tackle the market tyranny (see Carmona 2009). This setting created a platform where the needs and wants of the citizens could be discussed together with the ideas of architects and planners. Market discussion will follow because the city of Tampere is currently (September 2020) forming incentives that would encourage superblock realization in Hiedanranta.

Conclusions

This paper examined how to integrate citizen participation into an expert-only planning competition. In particular, the paper identified some significant potentials and challenges in the development and establishment of planning issues that are initiated in collaborative processes and outside traditional institutional settings. The planning issue Nordic Superblock, which had emerged in the workshops, showed the potential of expert-citizen cooperation and challenged the planning process in various ways.

First, it turned out to be sufficiently concrete, yet versatile enough, to be inspiring for many civic groups. Second, it encouraged experts to create new block-level approaches to

urban development. Third, it empowered the participants, both citizens and experts, as they saw that there was a coalition against market forces.

Therefore, Nordic Superblock was not only a concept but it was a coalition between citizens and experts and strengthened the possible implementation of the superblock idea. The citizens' role was elevated from merely presenting discontent after the plan had been made to that of a partner in the deliberations. The coalition thus developed as a potential to be a transformative force. Nordic Superblock has become a mosaic-like issue, consisting of several pieces that offer various entry points to different people. This is central to its success and has made the superblock idea travel to diverse arenas where it has been repeatedly articulated anew and has thus survived. (Marres 2007).

This paper argued for the importance of re-timing the processes in the issue formation and revealed institutional boundaries and processes that need to be reconsidered and modified more nimbly. In regard to re-timing, the study experimented with the early-phase citizen participation. Early collaboration helps in creating favourable circumstances for superblock realization. Still, the early-phase documents of legal planning have difficulties in making citizen collaboration visible because the regulators are accustomed to dealing with large-scale and infrastructural questions. These documents could just as well contain strategies for building social inclusion or diversity in housing, for example. Throughout the process, from competition briefs to public meetings, there seemed to be a continual risk of slipping into large-scale and general themes that as a rule are handled by professional planners and developers and often remain alien to citizens' everyday life.

Fortunately, there is an opportunity to follow the development further in a research project with the city of Tampere during 2019–2020. The question of how the city can help realize a Nordic Superblock is explored in various workshops and interviews with planners and other public servants in the field of city-building. It remains to be seen how the Nordic Superblock issue will progress as the legally binding and more rigid planning process proceeds. Also, it is uncertain how construction companies and developers will be tied to the Nordic Superblock development. In order to understand planning issues and to bridge the gap between academic research and applied practice, the potential next steps include adopting and developing ethnographic sensibilities and methods to study complex urban governance settings (Henderson 2016). Furthermore, a methodology of action research provides tools to simultaneously seek solutions for public participation and conduct research, enabling all participants to learn from each other while in action (Tossavainen 2016).

What has been learned about planning competitions that have often underestimated citizen participation? Expert juries selecting the winners in the competitions do not usually search for a flawless proposal but a future development potential (Kazemian and Rönn 2009). This puts the future in the focus of the assessment, and minor details and shortcomings of the proposals, which are easy to rectify, may be put aside. In terms of the evaluation criteria of the development potential, the case of Nordic Superblock has shown that citizens are also capable of spotting planning ideas with high potential and can create alliances with experts to overcome market forces, especially when housing environments are being planned. But they do it differently from professionals; they do it mostly from the perspectives of their diverse everyday lives.

Planning competitions are organized in order to develop better cities. The workshops in Hiedanranta showed that citizen participation right after the publication of the competition results was useful. It gave architects an opportunity to present, develop and validate their ideas in depth that was not possible any other way. This was made possible by re-timing the participatory process and re-locating the public deliberation in the earlier planning phase where options were more open than in the standard process. The power of the public interest should not be ignored by claiming it is not representative enough. It is necessary that we understand how planning issues are developed and how the public can be tied into the planning process. Ultimately, this helps us understand how planning issues can help in developing a better city. In order to keep the issue formation alive, one must stay alert to moments and arenas that might carry the transformative issue on, even if that calls for some modifications in the planning process.

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