

SPATIAL PLANNING IN ESTONIA – FROM A SOCIALIST TO INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Mart HIOB

Nele NUTT

Mart HIOB (corresponding author)

Lecturer, Department of Landscape Architecture, Tallinn
University of Technology, Tartu College, Tartu, Estonia
Tel.: 0037-2-501.4767
E-mail: mart.hiob@ttu.ee

Nele NUTT

Lecturer, Department of Landscape Architecture, Tallinn
University of Technology, Tartu College, Tartu, Estonia
Tel.: 0037-2-501.4767
E-mail: nele.nutt@ttu.ee

Abstract

Spatial planning in Eastern Europe has gone through major changes during the years after the Soviet occupation ended around 1990. New planning standards were eagerly accepted but the practice was often carried out in a socialist manner. This article gives an overview of planning law and practice in Estonia during the transition period. The example presented is a district in Tartu, the second largest city of 100,000 inhabitants. The article analyses different master planning documents covering the whole district and compares both their process of compilation and their content to former Soviet era plans. The conclusion is that the transition from socialist to inclusive planning in Estonia has taken at least two decades, and the process is still not finished. This shows that the legal framework alone is not sufficient to transform planning practice – a new ideology has to be accepted by the specialist as well as the politicians and the general public.

Keywords: spatial planning, planning practice, Eastern Europe, transition, Supilinn.



1. An overview of planning changes in Europe

The goal of the article is to exemplify the changes that have taken place in spatial planning thinking and practice in Estonia in the last quarter of a century using a suburb of Tartu as a case study. The authors looked both at the planning ideology revealed in planning documents and manuals, and in the conducting of planning processes by local municipality in the observed period. The authors have a deep insight into the background data as they have actively participated in these discussions over the last 10-15 years. The article starts with a general overview of theoretical spatial planning and how Estonia's position has changed since the end of Soviet occupation. Thereafter one concentrates on the case study to reveal deeper connections and influences.

Following the environmental and social crisis launched by the industrial revolution, European countries enforced social and building standards by mid-19th century (Benevolo, 1971). First attempts at systematic, more expansive urban planning were made in the second half of the 19th century in larger European cities (Paris, Vienna, Barcelona, etc.). Before in that period, towns were often designed (not necessarily planned) according to defensive and visual aspects only. However, modern systematic urban planning began at the beginning of the previous century. The need for more consistent and systematic urban planning was created by the desire to control, at least on some level, the fast expansion of cities that occurred due to rapid industrial development that, in turn, created the need for common technical networks and facilities to resolve social problems in overgrown city regions.

Until the 1960s architectural and technical plans were drawn mainly for cities and urban areas. From the 1960s onwards, regional planning has become increasingly common. In Western Europe, systematic planning of whole countries began in the 1980s. The first significant economic growth period after the Second World War occurred in the 1960s and brought along a radical change in ownership patterns. Owning real estate (i.e., your own house, a tract of land, or an apartment) became possible for more and more people. An increasing number of people and their control over their properties were directly influenced by planning. On the other hand planning theorists, most prominently Jane Jacobs (1993), argued that the genuinely valuable result of planning is possible only when residents are consulted in the process. Since the 1960s and 1970s it became a general requirement in the Western European legal system to make the plans accessible to the public. These processes caused changes in the essence of planning, the way planning was conducted, as well as, the legal side of planning (The European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter, 1983).

Urban planning was dominated by architecture and design during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the middle of the 20th century the scientific approach, whose goal was to create structure-oriented efficient city-plans, became popular. This type of urban planning was done by specialists, and the role of local government representatives was modest. The general public usually did not have a say in planning (Lass, 2012). From the 1970s and 1980s the scope of planning has enlarged both in topics,

such as the addition of physical, social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects, and in public participation where all interest groups should be included. In the center of this kind of planning is the city as a complex, spatial and technical system, and the co-effect of the different components of the system.

This kind of interdisciplinary planning became known as spatial planning. The collaborative planning approach described by Patsy Healey (Healey, 1997) which built on the communicative planning theory of Jürgen Habermas (Healey, 2003) has become widely accepted in Europe both among theorists and in planning acts. Collaborative planning puts emphases on the planning process and information exchange among experts and concerned people. The collaborative planning approach seeks to include all interested parties in the planning procedures. In principle, all opinions should be taken into account equally and all proposals should be considered. Collaborative or inclusive planning supports social integration and helps to build more viable and resilient communities. The critics have claimed that collaborative planning is not as inclusive as theory and legal instruments suggest (Fainstein, 2010). The difficulties lie both in getting every concerned resident involved and weighing opposing opinions equally. The problem is divided into a question of technique – how to get the information to all necessary people, and a more practical question whether the planning process gains from the opinions of people who have no will to participate, yet the decisions influence their situation. More radical critics uphold that the inclusive planning approach, in a neoliberal society, does not benefit the poor as the aim is not a more fair society but simply the justification of unfair planning decisions (Miraftab, 2009). There is a disjunction between formal and substantive inclusion, which has to be dealt with to move toward an equal and fair planning practice.

Most of Eastern Europe has some experience with democracy before WWII, but spatial planning was not necessarily an acknowledged profession. Soviet totalitarianism attempted to manage all facets of the society. Contrary to Western discussions, the totalitarian Soviet controlled system preferred submission and tried to avoid participation, but the rise of democracy in late 1980s and early 1990s directly influenced the spatial planning field as a fully visible sector of the society.

2. Spatial planning acts and their implementation in contemporary Estonia

During the Soviet influence over Eastern Europe, socialist, top-down spatial planning practice prevailed. After the end of communism regime in the 1990s, new Western style planning standards were implemented all over Eastern Europe. Preparations for compiling the modern Planning and Building Act were made even before Estonia gained independence on August 20, 1991. The Planning and Building Act (PBA) came into effect on July 22, 1995 and remained in effect without any major changes for more than seven years. The need for changes in the act came from its implementation. The most radical change proposed was that planning issues and those related to engineering and building were divided into two separate acts. Separate acts for planning and building both came into effect on January 1, 2003.

Compiling plans in Estonia is currently regulated by the Planning Act. No. 2 of the Act states that a plan is a document created in the process of planning which consists of text and blueprints, which complement each other and form an integrated unit. There are four types of plans in Estonia: a national spatial plan, which is the state's spatial development strategy that sets the state's balanced spatial development goals and ways to achieve those goals; county plans, which describe the county's general prospective spatial development (there are 15 counties in Estonia), sets the conditions for the development of settlements and the locations of the main infrastructure facilities; comprehensive municipal plans, which set the main goals of the spatial development of a parish or a town and defines the general terms of land use and building conditions; and detailed plans, which set the definitive terms of land use and building conditions in built-up areas as well as in other areas and in cases where detailed plans are necessary.

In Estonia, the Constitution, the Local Government Organization Act, and the Planning Act all state that the local government has the final say on matters that deal with building and planning on their territory. In practice, the majority of planning documents are compiled in private bureaus and financed by real estate owners or developers, sometimes also by governmental organizations and municipal governments. The right to compile planning documents belongs to experts with higher education in the field of spatial planning, architecture or other relevant disciplines. Because of the building boom of 2005-2008 there was a sudden need for plans to apply for building permits, and plans were compiled by people with higher education in any field. Despite the fact that the act states that plans can be compiled by planners, no planners have been educated in Estonia. Planning has been taught together with architecture (urban design), landscape architecture and human geography (regional planning). In addition, there are several other fields that have a lot to do with planning, such as urbanistic (deals with urban studies) and real estate development.

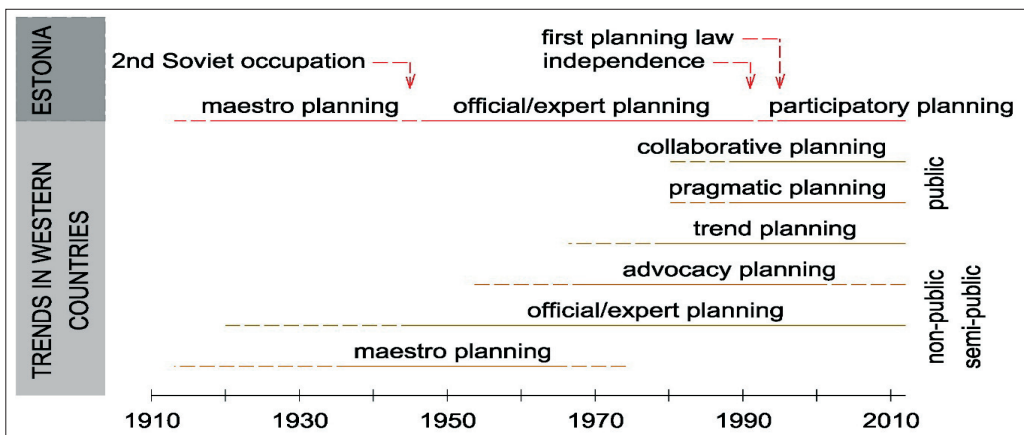


Figure 1: Planning strategies in Western countries compared to the developments in Estonia

Source: Virtanen *apud* Lass (2012)

During the years of the building boom, plans were also compiled by real estate administrators, land surveyors, and representatives of several other fields, who actually did not have the necessary qualifications. After the end of the building boom, the demand for plans has greatly decreased. To overcome the problem of incompetence of plan compilers, attempts have been made to create the profession of 'planning' (spatial planner), which would also be the starting ground for planning studies.

3. The role of civil society and opportunities for public participation in planning matters

In countries with European style planning cultures, a term, local government planning monopoly, is used to describe the jurisdiction, the rights and the obligations of the local government; this means that the local government has complete control over all issues of planning. The European Charter of Local Self-Government (Council of Europe, 1985) that was ratified by Estonia also emphasizes this fact; it states that the local government has complete control and exclusive rights within its area of authority (Charter article 4, section 4). Spatial planning of their own territory is the duty of the local government in Estonia and in all democratic European countries. While planning decisions are made, it is the duty of the local government to do the following: pay attention to the existing laws and state level planning documents and to all restrictions created by the laws, cooperate with the local community, with state institutions, with non-profit organizations, and with other people who are interested in the matter, and guarantee that various interests are all taken into account.

As such, local government planning monopoly means that only the local government has the right to make planning decisions on its territory. However, it also means that the local government is fully responsible for guaranteeing that the decisions are legal and legitimate. Since the local government and the municipal council are the chosen representatives of the local community, the local government planning monopoly, in the European sense, is actually the local community planning monopoly. This, in turn, means that the local government is obligated to fulfil the preferences of the local community in the process of making planning and building decisions, at the same time sustaining the rights of plot owners and developers.

This cannot be done without the local community actively taking part in the planning process. Local government often yields to the pressure of real estate owners, who often impose solutions that are unsuitable for the local community, in order to maximize their profits. This is usually the reason for planning conflicts. Often, the local government does not offer sufficient possibilities for the local community to actively and extensively take part in the planning process, and the decisions are made in spite of popular protests from the community.

In order for the planning process to be successful it is necessary that the local community, the local government, and the planner, all play their proper role. The local residents have the first-hand knowledge about the details in the planned area. Their experiential knowledge should be taken into account to create sustainable development options. In Estonia, it is often said that the local government does not have the

necessary specialists who could compile comprehensive plans, and therefore a consultant has to be hired. Often, this results in preparation of all planning documents by private companies. In theory, compiling plans and planning development should be an interdisciplinary team process lead by the local government with active local community participation. It is a process that requires cooperation and negotiating agreements, and even the most qualified expert cannot make effective locally sensitive decisions instead of the local government institutions and the local community. Estimating developments, motivating conclusions, and assessing the effects are necessary for public cooperation, which will result in planning decisions that will improve the local life while taking into account and further developing the environmental assets. The main message of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Council of Europe, 1985) is summed up in the § 1 subsection 3 of the Planning Act, which states that spatial planning is democratic, it coordinates and integrates development plans of different areas, is functional, and is a process of planning long-term spatial development, which takes into account the long-term tendencies and demands of the development of the economic, social and cultural environment as well as the natural environment. In a situation where the role of local community and even of the municipality is reduced, this aim cannot be achieved.

4. Case study: Supilinn

The case study approach allows the authors to trace the planning and development patterns in a defined unique neighborhood over half a century of planning efforts, perspectives and practice. The next part of this paper focuses on the district of Supilinn. Supilinn, situated in Tartu city, is a central historical district that borders the medieval city center and the river Emajõgi. The Supilinn area belonged to Tartu during the medieval times but was not included in the boundaries of the fortified city. A few street trajectories date from medieval era but the orthogonal street network dominating today dates from the first decades of the 19th century. 70% of the buildings – one to two story small wooden apartment houses – are from 19th century and the first decades of 20th century, about 15% have been built in the period between 1930 and 1960 and the rest ever since (Hiob and Nutt, 2010; Hiob, 2012).

There are about 2000 inhabitants in Supilinn. The area is renowned for poor artists and students, but the majority have been working class people since the last decades of 19th century.

5. Planning market activation and its causes

The popularity of the Supilinn district has radically changed in comparison with the Soviet era. The area that was once considered a slum has now become a residential district that is known for its livable environment. The Soviet era plans (general plans), which ordered the demolition of the Supilinn district, were not put into action because of sheer neglect (Hess and Hiob, 2014). However, after Estonia gained independence in 1991 all the plans that have been approved have also been at least partially carried out. Before the Building and Planning Act came into force (in the 1991-

1995 period) 31 Tartu city planning projects were approved, mostly Soviet era plans reinforced, two of which dealt with city blocks in the Supilinn district or the whole area. After the Building and Planning Act came into force, 91 plans were approved in Tartu until 1999, again two concerning Supilinn (Tartu City Government, 1999). To plan the development of the Supilinn district as a whole a comprehensive plan was started in 1997 on the request of the city government, and it was approved in 2001 (Tartu City Council, 2001).

The need for new plans increased in Estonia and in Tartu at the first half of the 2000s (Figure 2). Due to the district's favorable location on the bank of the river, near the heart of the city, the value of the Supilinn district increased, and therefore, the district was considered attractive by real estate developers, which in turn created the pressure to build more (Nutt, Hioband Sulev, 2012).

The level of planning activity in Tartu was influenced by several factors. Firstly, because of the ownership reform (Principles of Ownership Reform Act, 1991) and the land restitution (Land Reform Act, 1991) of 1991, land was given back to its rightful owners and it now had private owners who had the right and often the desire to put the land in commercial circulation. Secondly, an important factor was also the real estate market that peaked during the real estate boom in 2002-2007 (Figure 2 and 3; the number of transactions was highest in 2006). Businessmen dealing with real estate were looking for favorably located building grounds near the city center, and properties with run-down buildings or empty lots were increasingly attractive. Of course, this was done in the hope of earning as much profit as possible, and therefore, they needed to develop as much sellable construction area as possible. As a result, both the building size and the building area density increased.

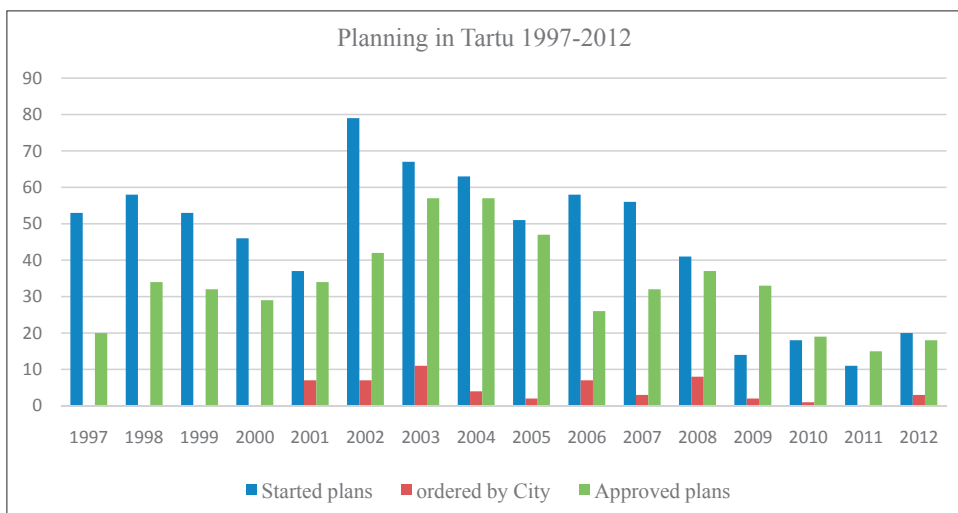


Figure 2: The volume of planning projects started and approved in Tartu city, Estonia in 1997-2012

Source: Tartu City Government, 2012



Figure 3: The volume of real estate purchases of private persons was highest in 2005-2008 in Estonia

Source: Lepik, 2008

The number of initiated planning processes reached its height in Tartu in 2002. In 2012, 79 city planning processes had been initiated (Figure 2). Since the process of creating plans takes several months or even years, the largest number of plans came into effect in 2003-2004, with 57 planning projects during both years. The building boom peak was still a few years away, but the preparations for building had been made. Between 1991 and 2012, 27 completely new houses had been built in the Supilinn district (8.4% of the total number of the buildings). By now the real estate boom is over, due to the economic recession, and the pace of change has slowed down. Still, the developments of the boom-years left their mark. The detailed plans that have been accepted allow 41 more houses (12.7% of total number of the buildings) to be built (Figure 4).

The following section deals with chronological planning efforts that have taken place in the Supilinn district over half a century. These include Soviet era plans, the comprehensive plan from 1990s, and the current (thematic) plan under compilation. This analysis of planning documents, coupled with opinion surveys of residents conducted in 2004 (by Society of Supilinn), 2010 (by the authors) and 2011 (by Tartu City Government, Estonian Association of Spatial Planners and Society of Supilinn), provides a clear indication of changes in attitudes, perceptions and practice, as an exemplified model for the whole country.



Figure 4. Buildings in the Supilinn district, Tartu, Estonia: grey are buildings built before 1960s, black are buildings built between 1960s and 2010s, hatched are new buildings according to approved plans

Source: Hiob and Nutt, 2010

6. Soviet era general plans. Politics of development

Throughout the Soviet occupation, consistent yet inadequate attention was paid to the Supilinn district. Many plans and ideas were considered, but none materialized. A combination of lack of funding and low priorities worked to somehow protect the authentic and unique character of this area (Hess and Hiob, 2014).

Initial plans drawn up during the Soviet occupation called for the housing stock in Supilinn to be upgraded. Under the Stalinist regime after World War II, the Soviet town centers were rebuilt in grandiose style. In Supilinn, wide streets and new facades on the streets were proposed. In the 1950s new plans showed the demolition of all existing structures and building a new street arrangement. New functions like a school and green areas along with new 2- and 3-story buildings were planned.

The 1960s new, more realistic housing policy planned to preserve structures which did not need much renovation. However, in Supilinn most of the houses were considered in poor condition and slated for demolition. Multi-level streets were proposed as new traffic solutions which would have resulted in an even larger scale demolition. In 1970s the modernist approach suggested a new street network, one new loop street for main traffic and the rest for mostly pedestrian traffic (Figure 5). Historical housing was to be replaced by tower blocks in open landscape. In the next decade (1980s) a modest preservation was introduced in the plans. Three key areas in Supilinn were

proposed as valuable and the street network was preserved, though widened, at the expense of houses. The area was to be designated mostly for residential use (Hess and Hiob, 2014).

All the plans over almost half a century called for the destruction of older residential homes and widening of streets. Fortunately, none of the plans were implemented, which is the reason why the unique character of Supilinn has been preserved. Through chaos and neglect, the 1990s see new beginnings and opportunities for Supilinn.

7. Supilinn district planning after gaining independence

The Supilinn district comprehensive planning process was started in 1997, and it was approved in 2001 (Tartu City Council, 2001). The reasons for the planning project have been declared in a statement 'due to the ownership reform, during which building grounds and buildings became private property and changes were made to the statutory acts on land use and its restrictions, creating a general development concept for the district has become topical again'. The planning project was compiled at the request of Tartu city government by Siim and Põllumaa architects. The vision of those planners included significant changes in the structure of the area. Specifically, densification of the area and building-up the blocks by filling them up with houses was planned; this was done by dividing the big blocks into smaller ones, and by adding extra streets (Figure 5). The planning project was compiled without previously analyzing the city planning sufficiently. Many of the claims that the planners made have been proven false as a result of research. It has become evident that in most part the historical block division had been well preserved, which was something that the project compilers were unaware of. Back then, during the public discussions on the planning project, the residents were strongly opposed to the solution proposed by the local government, but their opinions were ignored.

Currently, there is increasingly more talk of inclusiveness in connection with planning. In 2011, the National Foundation of Civil Society funded ten projects that dealt with the question of inclusion, one of these focused on the Supilinn district (Society of Supilinn, Estonian Association of Spatial Planners, Tartu City Government, 2011-2012). The opinion poll that was carried out for the project in 2011 requested the residents of Supilinn to evaluate the efficiency of different ways of inclusion. They were also asked whether they thought that the local government was taking their opinions into account or not. The results of the opinion poll indicated that 32% of the respondents thought that the city government was not taking their opinions into account on issues concerning the Supilinn district, 28% thought that their opinions had been taken into account, while 40% had never expressed their opinion. Out of different ways to achieve inclusiveness, the local residents thought that the best results were achieved by taking part in opinion polls (93%), taking part in public discussions (81%), and notifying and stating their opinions via e-mail (80%). This was followed by taking part in invitation-only discussions (75%), notifying through newspapers

	<p>Zoning Map of Supilinn and Tartu City Centre (Proposed), 1974</p> <p>According to the general plan, a completely new street network with new housing was proposed in Supilinn. Among preserved buildings were only the brewery and a public bath. The plan represents a period of totalitarian planning when the residents were not informed about the plans.</p>
	<p>Supilinn district comprehensive plan, 2001</p> <p>The planning solution proposed a significant densification of the street net and housing. The plan represents an intermediate period in planning when the residents were informed, but their opinions were not followed.</p>
	<p>Supilinn district comprehensive plan, 2012</p> <p>The planning proposal generally preserves the historical street net and housing. The plan represents a period of collaborative planning when the residents were informed and their opinions were followed in most cases.</p>

In grey there are existing streets, with continuous line new motorized streets and with dashed line new pedestrian passages.

Figure 5: The planning solutions for the Supilinn district (Tartu, Estonia) during the last 40 years

(71%), notifying and stating their opinions by letter (68%), and notifying on the Supilinn message board (61%).

Carrying out opinion polls, which according to the residents provide the best results, requires the most resources and, in practice, this is generally not used. However, in Supilinn this has been done on several occasions (2004, 2010 and 2011) for various projects. Residents' answers to several questions surprised both the Tartu City

Government and the Estonian Association of Spatial Planners who were responsible for the 2011 poll together with the Society of Supilinn. One example of such case is the residents' strong residence based identity, as 96% considered themselves to be citizens of Supilinn. This fact shows that neither the planners nor the local government can sometimes guess the preferences of the local residents, and that it is wise to ask the local residents' opinion on questions concerning the values of the area and on both possible developments and conservation. In addition, after finding out the results, the planners and the local government should not impose their vision of the planning project in cases where great public benefit is not in conflict with local preferences (like when determining the placement of important social or infrastructural facilities). Instead, the planners should keep in mind that the possible developments of the planning project affect, first and foremost, the local residents not the planners or the local government officials.

Planning projects are important documents, which can influence the future living environment of all the residents of the district, and therefore, the importance of carrying out opinion polls should not be underestimated or dismissed because of the one-time expenses.

After the planning project that did not consider the residents' opinions was accepted in 2001, a local activists' group (Society of Supilinn) became active and in 2004 carried out an opinion poll which asked questions related to the planning project, such as, attitudes towards adding extra streets and densifying the building area (at the expense of big private green areas) (Society of Supilinn, 2004).

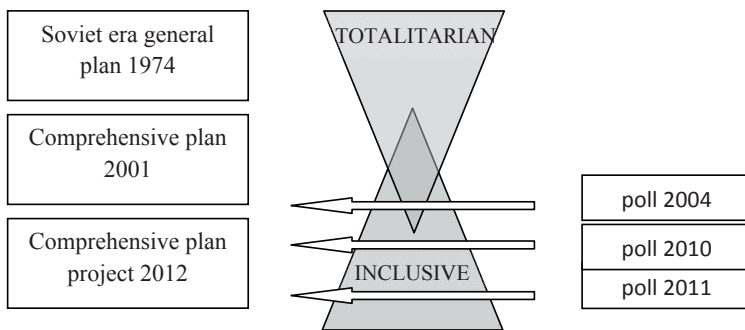


Figure 6: The increase of collaboration in planning processes exemplified by plans in the Supilinn district

The results of the 2004 opinion poll indicated that two thirds of the respondents were against adding new streets. This shows that the environments which are created through formal planning can be completely different than the living environments which are valued by the local residents (Nutt, Hiob and Kotval, forthcoming 2016). This is caused by the local governments and planners' lack of real interest in the planning area and occasionally because of their incompetence. The fact that the inclusion of the local residents is only formal or that their opinions are not taken into account has led to the destroying of the environment which is valued by the local residents.

Half of the respondents (50%) stated that they are unhappy with the plan that was accepted in 2001, and that they would like it to be annulled and that a new one would be compiled (Society of Supilinn, 2004).

If we compare Supilinn plans from different eras, we can see several significant changes. Table 1 shows the comparison of the changes of three different criteria that affect city space.

Table 1: The comparison of three planning documents

Criterion	Soviet era general plan The plan was compiled by experts	Comprehensive plan of 2001 The plan was compiled by experts without considering residents' opinions	Comprehensive plan project of 2013 The plan is compiled by city government, the solution is based on preceding research and preferences of the residents
Street network	Complete renewal of street network	Significant densification of street network	Preserve street network
Housing	Demolish all historical housing	Replacement and significant densification of housing	Preserve the historical housing as valuable, densification only within the existing structure
Plot structure	Rearrange the whole plot structure	Change plot structure to adopt the proposed densification	Preserve historical plot structure as valuable

Source: Archives of Tartu City Government

Table 1 shows the main difference between the two recent plans, which deal with the densifying of the area by adding streets inside the blocks. The opinion poll conducted by Estonian Association of Spatial Planners, Tartu City Government and Society of Supilinn that was carried out in 2011 indicated that 72% of the respondents thought that inner block streets should not be added. The planning project of 2001 made it possible to add seven extra streets (one of these has been built by now), but the new plan of 2014 (Tartu City Council, 2014) allows to add only one inner block street and accepts another one that has been partially completed. Another important difference between the two planning projects has to do with block structure. The planners who compiled the planning project of 2001 stated that the blocks had been created according to the ownership reform of 1991 in a chaotic manner, and that the block structure was not uniform with the building structure, and that the comprehensive plan will revise the existing block structure (Tartu City Council, 2001). That planning project was not preceded by thorough research of the area, and these statements have been proven false by now. Specifically, the research project that was carried out in 2010 analyzed the block structure origins, discovering that in most part the block structure had been preserved since the end of the 19th century (Hiob and Nutt, 2010) and represented a unique piece of 19th century neoclassic style of city planning in Estonia that has been lost in other cities. The planning project that was approved in 2014 states that the historical block structure has to be preserved.

However, the discussion which preferences of the residents to accept is still continuing. The opinion poll questionnaire of 2011 was created with the active participation of the city government. Nevertheless, in the meetings on the topic of implementing the results of the opinion poll, it turned out that the city government officials

do not think that the residents' opinion should be taken into account. For example, 60% of the respondents (Society of Supilinn, Estonian Association of Spatial Planners, Tartu City Government, 2011-2012; Nutt, 2012) stated that new buildings should be in wood construction. Another example was street pavement where the residents' preferences were ignored. The local community and the city government have to continue the discussions where to prefer characteristic but unusual solutions and where to implement standardized design and materials. Understanding all the issues requires extensive prior knowledge. Fulfilling their civil society roles can sometimes be challenging for the residents and often professional aid is needed.

Since the Society of Supilinn has actively and sometimes even aggressively intervened in Supilinn planning projects on a regular basis, arguing with the local government and stating their opinions in a professional manner (some members are experts in the field), the local government has been forced to listen to the residents' representatives. This has resulted in a significant breakthrough. The local government has shared some of its responsibility, which in practice means that all activity in the area has to be discussed with the residents' representatives. Despite the fact that the society has no veto power, better information flow between the city government and the residents is guaranteed. Moreover, this also offers opportunities to explain to the residents the politics of the government. The main role of the society has always been to provide explanations where needed, to both the local government and the local residents.

8. Conclusions and discussion

Looking at the development of planning, and in particular the Supilinn district of Tartu, we can see that the Soviet era totalitarian command economy style planning, according to which the entire area was subject to demolition, has gone through a significant change as a result of developments that have taken place in planning and in society. While the Soviet era plans (general plans) stated that the area should be demolished (at least in most part) after Estonia regained independence and the totalitarian regime was replaced by the democratic regime, planning became more transparent and appreciative of local assets. The development of the Supilinn district plans demonstrate the significant changes that have taken place in the democratic planning practice over the past twenty years in Estonia. The plans (2001) of a relatively young republic did not order total demolition but instead suggested substantial changes. In the last decade the democratic process has evolved and the opinions of the local residents are taken into account more and more.

Still, the practice of planning demonstrates the shortcomings of the inclusive planning theory. The two principal problems are: (1) how to reach all residents and know their opinions, and (2) to consider all opinions equally and fairly. In contemporary Estonian planning practice, the involvement of the public is generally poor. The public displays and public meetings on the planning documents that cover a whole municipality are not popular; in small municipalities of a few thousand inhabitants

there are seldom more than a dozen people who show some interest. In the case of Supilinn's planning procedure that ended with the 2001 planning document, the involvement of the public was relatively high as there were more than one hundred propositions made during the planning process. The second problem was demonstrated much more vividly. The opinions of all segments of the populations were not considered properly, and the decisions were made in spite of overwhelming protests. The protesters were not organized and the city government largely ignored the critics of densification. The expert consideration that the denser city would be more effective and hopefully livelier prevailed.

In the last decade the inclusive planning practices have spread rapidly. New neighborhood associations have emerged in Tartu, in the capital city Tallinn and elsewhere. The local people have become better aware of their rights and have started actively promoting their preferences. Still, the residents are in a difficult situation – on the one hand, the law offers an opportunity and states that they have the right to have a say in the planning of their living environment, but on the other hand, dealing with many of these issues may require special knowledge and the community members may not be competent enough. Since the residents cannot become planning experts, the training of spatial planners has to include knowledge how to listen, understand and meet the concerns of the residents, whether the concerns are grounded or not. One of the latest examples of successful grassroots activity is the redesigning of a main street in Tallinn historic district of Kalamaja where a parking lane was turned into a pedestrian area as a result of local initiatives.

The rise in neighborhood activities reflects the general dissatisfaction with the establishment. The large political parties have been criticized for their lack of contact with the grassroots. In local politics, the politicians have responded in recent years by avoiding unpopular decisions. The planning decisions have largely been based on expert opinions even in the situations where popular opinion is against it. There are cases where opinion polls cannot resolve spatial planning problems, but there have also been examples of ungrounded conflicts where experts know better how to improve the living conditions of the residents against their own will.

In conclusion, it can be said that over the past twenty years a significant change has taken place in the planning process, which is evident first and foremost in greater inclusion of local residents. However, this has happened mostly as a result of the constant and active pressure of the local community. The local residents know the local values best and can point out which ones are the most important for them. Together with the rise of grassroots activity the expert ideology in spatial planning has also shifted. The solutions that involve encouragement of pedestrian and bicycle traffic and restraint of motor vehicles have become popular in planning documents. Not many have yet been put into real life but the overall sentiment both among the experts and the political decision makers favors a pedestrian friendly approach.

The current article is one of the first to register and discuss the role of the public in post-Soviet Estonian planning. A study from 2004 on planning shift in Tallinn after

independence (Ruoppila, 2004) did not emphasize the role of the grassroots activity. The reason could be both the researcher's different angle, and the little influence of the public in that period. It remains to be seen whether the increased activity of grassroots activists will also be transferred into practical results how our common space is treated, to yield equal opportunities to all users or favor the privileged.

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