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The Strategic Incrementalism of Lahti Master Planning: Three Lessons

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ABSTRACT

The city of Lahti, Finland, has developed a unique policy of combining city strategy work with strategic master planning in an iterative process. It thereby offers insights to research on strategic spatial planning, exemplifying how institutional frameworks of statutory planning can be utilized as resources in strategic planning. Three lessons from the Lahti case are drawn: (1) utilize the moments of opportunity in the institutional environment of statutory planning, (2) shift the focus from the level of 'strategic plans' to the policy level of strategy work, (3) develop strategic planning as a platform for diverse 'languages'.

Introduction

In the research discourse of strategic spatial planning, a critical discussion has recently emerged on the relationship between theory and practice, and, related to this, between the statutory and non-statutory instruments of strategic spatial planning. At around the turn of the millennium, strategic spatial planning was delineated as a concept by identifying it as distinct from "traditional" statutory planning (Albrechts, 2004, 2006) or blueprint-type planning (Faludi, 2000). It was seen to be action-oriented instead of plan-oriented, transformative instead of regulative, selectively visionary instead of comprehensive, to cope with uncertainty instead of fixing certainties, and to deal with relational space instead of the essentialist spaces of 'zoning' or given administrative boundaries. In order to gain these features, strategic spatial planning was expected to reach beyond 'the government' to networked and coproductive governance, transgressing boundaries not just between the public, private and the third (and fourth) sectors, but between the sectors and scales within the government, too. (Albrechts, 2004, 2006, 2013; Albrechts & Balducci, 2013; Faludi, 2000; Healey, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2013; Hillier, 2011) During the last decade some criticism has been raised against these "dualistic" delineations (Mäntysalo, Kangasoja, & Kanninen, 2015; Newman, 2008; Van Den Broeck, 2013). While such dissociations of strategic spatial planning from 'traditional planning' may seem appropriate to identify the nature of strategic spatial planning, they tend to lead us to theoretical conceptualizations and models that are unattached to planning practice. They convey the impression, perhaps inadvertently, that 'traditional planning', with its plan-orientation, comprehensiveness, fixations of certainties, zoning instruments and government

procedures, is 'non-strategic' and conducted due to lack of strategic understanding, skill, and imagination.

However, as this article exemplifies, this is a theoretical oversight, as the practice world with its political struggles and institutional path dependencies is much more complex than it may appear to the theorist's eye. Plans and planning procedures are never just instruments for managing spatial change strategically – they are also instruments for handling property rights, protecting environments *from* change, displaying and contesting legal validity and using political authority in a legitimate way. These other instrumentalities of planning necessarily lead to fixations of plans and planning procedures that theoretically may be perceived of as 'non-strategic': clear-cut zoning of property rights and protected sites, building evidence bases to validate planning solutions, and conducting law-based procedures of participation, decision-making and appealing. However, acknowledging these instrumentalities, which in the theory literature appear as 'non-strategic,' does not yet make the practice of planning non-strategic as such. Indeed, it means that practicing strategic spatial planning is much more demanding than the theory seems to give credit for, since it entails using strategically the non-strategic instrumentalities of spatial planning. (Mäntysalo et al., 2015; Newman, 2008; Searle, 2017; Steele & Ruming, 2012; Van Den Broeck, 2013)

Newman's (2008) advice is to shift attention from the theoretical idealizations of strategic spatial planning to the actual practices of strategic planning that may not, at the outset, appear as such; having to deal with political short-sightedness and institutional constraints and path dependencies. How, in such conditions, planners may still be able to utilize the moments of opportunity for strategic planning is an issue that needs to be better understood. Newman calls for a better grasp of the complex institutional contexts of strategic spatial planning practices:

> "The past is not just a convenient contrast to the ideal form of strategic spatial planning but the origin and residue of previous institutional designs that generate constraints and forms of path dependence. We should question the idea of radical transition from traditional, technocratic, hierarchical planning and acknowledge the often slow pace of institutional development." (Newman, 2008, p. 1374.)

Similarly, Mäntysalo et al. (2015) emphasize that planning researchers need to learn from the skilled and reflective strategic planners who manage to bring strategic insights to planning in such complex practice realms, and engage other actors in their strategizing, too. In this article, we respond to this call by examining strategic master planning in the city of Lahti, Finland. In Lahti, a unique policy of combining overall city strategy work with strategic land use planning in a continuous iterative process, has gradually been developed in a period of three decades. In view of the critical discussion above, the case offers three valuable lessons. Subsequently, we will introduce these lessons and the empirical data. In the sections that follow, we will elaborate upon the lessons through our examination of the Lahti case.

Three Lessons

Lahti is a middle-sized city with a population of 120 000, one hundred kilometres northeast from the capital Helsinki on the southern coast of Finland. In Lahti, strategic spatial planning is not decoupled from the statutory land use planning system. Instead, the institutional setup of statutory land use planning, e.g. planning hierarchy, zoning, legally binding status, and regulations on preparation, participation, decision-making and appealing of master land use planning, are incorporated as tools in the broader context of the city's strategy work. In Finland, with its arguably highly regulatory planning system, this achievement is extraordinary.

The Finnish regulatory planning system includes three planning levels in a hierarchically binding order: regional land use plan, local master plan and local detailed plan. The Land Use and Building Act 132/1999 (1999) sets requirements for their contents and preparation processes, and expects them to comply with the National Land Use Guidelines, which delineate objectives for land use in the whole country. The purpose of the local master plan is to provide general guidance on the urban structure and land use of a municipality, or a part of it, and to coordinate their functions. The local master plan, presented in a form of a map and accompanying zoning markings and ordinances, is usually drawn as legally binding, although the Act allows also non-binding or partly binding master plans. Although the master plan should comply with the content requirements of the Act (§39), the rather general nature of these requirements leaves room for adapting the master plan, with its level of detail and thematic focus, to the local environmental conditions and needs.

Nonetheless, it is commonplace in Finland, as well as in its neighbouring Nordic countries, that municipal master (or comprehensive) planning is not perceived to function properly as an instrument of strategic planning (Mäntysalo, Jarenko, Nilsson, & Saglie, 2014a). The Land Use and Building Act (§9) emphasizes heavily the need for "sufficient" surveys for goal-setting and impact assessment of planning, as well as the involvement of "interested parties" (§62), for which a 'participation and assessment scheme' is to be drafted and statutory hearing periods arranged, in the preparatory work of master plans. Despite the partipation requirements and related hopes for reaching consensus between the parties already during the planning process, the ratification of local master plans is often prolonged by appeals to administrative courts. Although, in Finland, the local governments are the authorities to decide on their master plans, appeals on their non-compliance with the Act may be filed to the regional and, further, surpreme administrative court, most often on the grounds of the insufficiency of surveys and impact assessments conducted in the preparation process (Holopainen, Huttunen, Malin, & Partinen, 2013; Malin, 2008; Wähä, 2008). Avoiding such court handlings in advance has made local master planning laborious and lengthy, beyond the actual requirements of the Act (Ministry of the Environment, 2014, pp. 36–37).

Each municipality is required to have a master plan, but due to the burdensome nature of plan preparation, municipalities may postpone the updating of their master plans. On the other hand, the master plans may be abstract in their contents and lack determination in their land use guidance to accommodate unexpected land use needs in the long term. In place of this planning level, the actual land use guidance is increasingly being conducted by the use of detailed land use planning instruments, with reactivity to developers' initiatives. This reveals the lack of practical feasibility of master plans as strategic planning instruments. (Valtonen, Falkenbach, & Viitanen, 2017; Mäntysalo, Saglie, & Cars, 2011; Mäntysalo et al., 2014a; see also Nyman & Mäntysalo, 2014; Rannila, 2018.) To 'fill' the widening gap between the abstract master plans and the development-driven detailed plans, new non-statutory planning instruments have emerged for the strategic coordination of development projects, such as 'development plans' and 'area studies' in Sweden and Norway, respectively, and urban centre development plans or programs in Finland (Mäntysalo et al., 2014a).

These problems have been identified by the Finnish Ministry of the Environment, too, which has recently (2018) started a reform of the Finnish Land Use and Building Act. The strategic empowerment of the statutory master plan instrument is a major issue in this reform, especially at the city-regional level (Ministry of the Environment, 2014; Luonnos …, 2017). The Lahti case, however, serves as evidence of managing with the strategic use of the statutory master planning instrument in its present form, with all its institutional rigidities. Where a conventional view perceives mere institutional rigidity, a shift of perspective may also reveal crucial windows of opportunity.

This is the *first lesson* that the Lahti case offers: utilizing the moments of opportunity in the institutional environment of statutory planning. The strategic planning policy developed in Lahti provides an interesting response to the institutional challenges presented by Newman (2008) above. In Lahti, a specific 'critical juncture' (cf. Mahoney, 2000; Sorensen, 2015) for the planners' transformative input can be identified in the city's institutional and organizational development path of strategic planning and management. Thereby a new institutional 'layer' (cf. Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) was introduced for establishing a new policy of reinterpreting the institutional rules of statutory master planning, using these rules strategically as resources rather than constraints. Key in this strategic use is a radical approach to statutory master planning: updating master plans incrementally instead of having them perform as long-term blueprints. But how can such incrementalism be strategic planning?

In Lahti, this has been achieved by shifting the focus from the level of 'strategic plans' to how the making of these plans is framed in the ongoing broader policy of the city's strategy work. This is the *second lesson*. In the iterative policy of Lahti, the processes of overall city strategy-making are interlinked with master planning in council term cycles and backed by a continuously updated and developed system of georeferenced datasets and procedures for public participation. A new master plan is produced every four years, fixing certain land uses and programming implementation in a short term in a regulative manner, while justifying these 'increments' with strategic insights in the longer term, and relying on the policy itself to provide strategic continuity. Hence, the strategy does not lie in the master plans themselves – they are 'traditional zoning plans' that may change only partially through planning iterations.

We call this approach '*strategic incrementalism*'[1]. It has some resemblance to Etzioni's (1967) idea of 'mixed-scanning' and Faludi's (1973) systems theory-inspired modification of this. Etzioni suggested mixed-scanning as a 'third approach' which, on the one hand, acknowledges the critical stance of the incrementalist approach on the unrealistic idealism of the comprehensive-rationalist approach to planning, but on the other hand, critically recognizes the conservatism and short-sightedness of the incrementalist approach itself. He argued that mixed-scanning makes it possible to combine the two approaches and to use each to overcome the particular shortcomings of the other:

> "[I]ncrementalism reduces the unrealistic aspects of rationalism by limiting the details required in fundamental decisions, and contextuating rationalism helps to overcome the conservative slant of incrementalism by exploring longer-run alternatives" (*ibid*., 390).

Faludi described Etzioni's (1967) mixed-scanning as a strategy, which

> "involves imposing patterns of information received (making *fundamental* decisions), formulating a programme within this framework (making *bit* decisions), and going back to *changing that framework* whenever one gets stuck on a more detailed level" (*ibid*., 111–12).

In his *Planning Theory*, the scanning between the incremental steps and strategic perspectives of planning is modelled as a cybernetic feedback system of iterative 'meta-planning.' Earlier, e.g. Meyerson (1956) and Friedmann (1964, p. 1965) had already conceived planning as a process rather than something producing a blueprint. Meyerson and Friedmann concentrated much of their efforts on the idea of providing information flows to the planning process and to decision makers. Both emphasized especially the interrelations and interlacing of policy orientation and (incremental) short-term programming.

Yet, the communicative planning theorists heavily criticized both Faludi and Etzioni in the late 1980s and in the 1990s for the technocratic implications of their theories (e.g. Forester, 1989, 1993; Friedmann, 1987; Sager, 1994). Among them was Fischer (1990) who saw systems thinking to turn organizations into technostructures, providing an ostensibly apolitical 'language' (e.g. cost-benefit analysis) for planning and policy analysis, and ultimately replacing political deliberation with feedback information coded in terms of this language. Is this the case in Lahti, too?

For Lahti, it is evident that the main focus of strategic spatial planning is not on the incrementally produced master plans themselves but on the ongoing process of strategic deliberation as, in Friedmann's terms, "a way of probing the future in order to make more intelligent and informed decisions in the present" (Friedmann, 2004, p. 56). This brings us to the *third lesson*: approaching strategic spatial planning as a continuously evolving platform for addressing diverse 'languages.' We will examine this issue by applying the concepts of '*trading zone'* and '*boundary object'* in reviewing the Lahti case. 'Trading zone' (Galison, 1997) denotes the emergence of inter-linguistic capacity in a given locality between groups and individuals representing different epistemic cultures and "social worlds" (Star & Griesemer, 1989). Local platforms of shared concepts may function as "localized exchange languages," transforming highly elaborate and complicated issues into "thin descriptions." As components, such platforms include shared 'boundary objects'

> "which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. [...] They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation." (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393.)

Strategic spatial planning may be intentionally developed to perform as a trading zone platform (Balducci, 2015, 2017; Kanninen, 2017). We associate this approach with Healey's (2009) idea of *strategic framing*. Healey conceives strategic framing as a joint activity of co-constructing meaning. Ideally, it would bring together local resources and imaginative visioning into a setting that invites the actors to change their thought and action schemes and their approaches to each other. At best, it would generate a platform for a Deweyan 'community of inquiry,' nurturing the collective intelligence of those it brings in, in a joint effort to understand the present conditions and envision different future possibilities. (Healey, 2009.) As this is an ideal that can never be fully achieved, what remains essential is becoming 'systemic,' not in generating exclusive techno-languages, but in employing a policy of continuous reflectivity on experiences in how the planning process is managed communicatively, and experimental work in developing inclusive 'interlanguages' of planning. In our view, Lahti exemplifies such efforts.

Our approach in reviewing the Lahti case is ultimately theoretical. We seek to draw insights from the case that would contribute to a more practice responsive normative theory of strategic spatial planning. Thus, our focus is on what we can learn from the Lahti case in theory development, not in making a thorough empirical examination of the state-of-the-art of planning in Lahti. In our case study, we draw from several empirical studies, some conducted by ourselves, some by others. We utilize the interview and planning document data gathered by Johanna Tuomisaari in 2013–2014 and reported in (Tuomisaari, 2015, 2017), including interviews of nine city administrators, three of them city planners and the other six from other sectors of city government, all members of the steering group of master planning. We also utilize the historically oriented planning document research data and the interviews of Raimo Airamo (in late 2013), conducted by Vesa Kanninen and Jonna Kangasoja, respectively, in tracking the origins and earlier development of Lahti's strategic planning, also reported in (Mäntysalo, Kangasoja, & Kanninen,

2014b; Mäntysalo et al., 2015). Regarding the very recent developments in Lahti strategic master planning, we draw on document analysis and interviews with the Lahti master planner Johanna Palomäki and transport planner Kristiina Kartimo by Tuuli Härkönen (2018). All interviews have been recorded and transcribed, and are utilized here as primary data. Furthermore, we utilize a longitudinal research study (1995–2017) on Lahti's strategic management (Jalonen, 2017; Vaara, Sorsa, & Pälli, 2010), and Lahti city planners' own accounts of strategic master planning in the city (Airamo & Permanto, 1997; Palomäki, 2013, 2018). In addition, our grasp of the case has been aided by the discussions with the city planners and administrators, as well as student material produced (strategic plans and various analyses), during the master level course Planning Studio (10 cr.) on strategically incremental planning of Lahti, held in autumn 2016, 2017 and 2018 within the Master Programme of Spatial Planning and Transportation Engineering at Aalto University School of Engineering. Finally, we have taken note of the comments by the Lahti master planner Johanna Palomäki on the accuracy of our empirical findings.

Lesson #1: Utilizing the Moments of Opportunity in the Institutional Environment of Statutory Planning

> "[W]hat is the momentum for an explicit spatial strategy-making initiative? What forces and actors are driving this? What is the scope for the transformation of discourses and practices through such an initiative? How strong is the momentum? Can it be strengthened and what might weaken it? What kind of process is already underway, what might evolve and what could be created? What seems to be at stake and around which issues will critical judgments have to be made? How are the initiators situated in relation to this momentum, and how am "I" as an actor in such a process situated, in terms of role, skills, potential to exert influence and legitimacy?" (Healey, 2009, p. 443.)

Drawing on Mahoney and Thelen's theory (2010) of gradual institutional change, we associate master planning in Lahti with Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) category of 'layering': conditions in which "institutional change grows out of the attachment of new institutions or rules onto or alongside existing ones" (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, p. 20). In Lahti, this was achieved by establishing a layer of iterative strategic planning policy between the institutional frameworks of statutory planning and municipal strategy-making. Thus, another local set of rules was introduced for approaching the general institutional rules of master planning in a new strategically responsive way. In Etzioni's (1967) language, this can be seen as an investment in scanning that enables adaptation to changing situations.

According to Mahoney and Thelen (2010), changes in institutional practices emerge in the "gaps" or "soft spots" between the institutional rules and how they are interpreted or enforced in practice. The ambiguities inherent in institutional rules may provide critical openings for their creative interpretation, as individuals may exploit their inherent openness to establish new precedents for action that can "transform the way institutions allocate power and authority" (Sheingate, 2010, p. 169). In our interpretation, Lahti exemplifies this.

In Lahti, the origins of strategic interpretation of the institutional rules of master planning can be traced back to the master planning process in the 1990s. Raimo Airamo, the city's master planner at the time, had stepped temporarily aside from leading this process, to concentrate more on planning the Ankkuri district at the city's lakefront. However, he had a specific role in the master plan preparation, too. His role was to develop approaches and methods for its impact assessment. It gave Airamo the opportunity to review the master planning process from a critical standpoint, utilizing his earlier experiences as master planner. It led him to contemplate the

ultimate essence and purpose of master planning, drawing on insights he gained e.g. by participating in the Nordic Nordplan postgraduate planning education programme in 1989–1990, which included readings on the 'classics' of planning theory (e.g. Lindblom, Etzioni, Faludi and Friedmann). Airamo studied the different ways master (or comprehensive) plans were made e.g. in Sweden, Norway, and North America, and came to realize the breadth of possible approaches to master planning. Based on these inquiries, he developed a concept of 'immanent master plan':

> [I]nherent to the idea of master plan is the need for a continuous presence of master planning expertise. An important notion was that life goes on all the time despite specific master planning processes, and all the time you have to be able to respond to different needs from the master planning viewpoint. Thus the mechanism does not work by just making the master plan first and then implementing it. […] The master planning process can be characterized as something overlaying, it runs its own course, sets its own preconditions and influences the decision makers the way it does. The master plan could rather be seen as a way of thinking than a strict norm. This is how the idea of the immanent master plan ('läsnäoleva yleiskaava') came about: you need continuous readiness for reflectivity and assessment at the master planning scale. (Airamo interview in Mäntysalo et al., 2014b, p. 38.)

According to this view, planning organization is in constant need of the ability to identify and monitor urban and environmental phenomena, beyond given stages of separate planning processes. This echoes Faludi's (1970, p. 4, quoting Friedmann, 1964) notion of the planning process understood as not that of making a plan but that of "an extremely fluid, ambiguous and indeterminate network of information flows." Airamo published (jointly with Timo Permanto) his ideas of strategic master planning and related impact assessment in 1997, in a book published by the Ministry of Environment (Airamo & Permanto, 1997). Intuitively, with his concept of an 'immanent master plan,' Airamo understood the value of continuously updated data resources, before digitalization enabled this. (Mäntysalo et al., 2014b.)

The moment of opportunity for renewing master planning in Lahti and the whole process of strategic city management, opened up in 2009 when a young planner architect, Johanna Palomäki, who was eager to develop Airamo's concept further, became his successor. This coincided with the reorganization of the city's organizational structure under the leadership of a new strategy manager. The aim was to increase the city's strategic responsiveness to meet the challenges of diminishing municipal finances and restructuring of the city's industry sector. (Jalonen, 2017.) The time was ripe for developing the strategic management of the city organization further by combining it with the reform of the master planning process, as the preparation of a new master plan to replace the outdated master plan from 1998 (with the target year of 2010) was about to start.

> Probably indeed the momentum was brought by the replacement of the master planner, although the department leadership also saw that this kind of cyclic process could be introduced. And then, on the other hand, we had this city strategy work at that stage sharpening a little bit, or it had already sharpened, and so it was thought that these are not separate issues. (City administrator interview in Tuomisaari, 2015, p. 46.)

In 2009, the work for the new master plan, Lahti Master Plan 2025, began. Its preparation was integrated with the four-year city council term. The newly elected city council outlined the city strategy on which the master plan was to be based. As reported by Palomäki (2013), the master plan aimed to visualize what the vision 2025 of the city strategy; "Lahti is a liveable and attractive green city" – meant in terms of land use choices.

In the first year of plan preparation (also the first council term year of outlining the city strategy) the need for basic surveys and data collection was determined. The Lahti planners agreed early on with the

overseeing regional state authority that there was no need for particular comprehensiveness, and that the surveys should not be conducted in an unreasonably detailed manner. (Palomäki, 2013.) In view of the generally rather strict policy culture of the regional state authorities, regarding the expected "sufficiency" of planning information (Ministry of the Environment, 2014, pp. 36–37), this agreement is remarkable, and not at all self-evident. In our interpretation, it is reminiscent of what Etzioni (1967) had in mind when he pondered on how a truncated form of rationalist inquiry or "reviews" could be both possible and more effective than a purely incrementalist approach.

Nevertheless, the survey and data collection work was still substantial in the first master planning cycle, as much of the existing data was from the 1990s. Additional work was also required in adapting the master plan to a digital georeferenced format. Nevertheless, this grounding work paid off, as in the second iteration of the four-year master planning cycle, starting in 2013, only essential updates had to be made to the planning database. Without utilizing such incrementalism in analysis, there would not have been resources for renewing the city master plan every four years.

> In this way we arrive at a continuous process which becomes lighter with its continuity, without a need to always start from a blank slate […] It became quite evident that making the master plan must be speeded up, and to be able to speed up its making, you have to be making it all the time, since in three years you cannot make such a perfect plan. Then you just keep updating survey and place-based data all the time. (City administrator interview in Tuomisaari, 2015, p. 50.)

The second year of the master planning cycle is designated to drafting alternative master plan sketches. In the third year, the impact assessments of the master plan sketches are made, and based on these, the proposal for the master plan is drafted and displayed. The fourth year is also the final year of the council term. Then the city council decides on the approval of the plan. Two monitoring reports for the next council are made, one on the city's state of development and the other on the conditions of implementing the master plan, using a variety of sustainability indicators. Then the four-year cycle starts again with a new elected city council and its revision of the city strategy, influenced by new political emphases but also information gained from the monitoring reports.

Path-dependent developments in political institutions are usually stable with gradual changes. Changes that are more radical can occur during periods of openness, when a momentary 'critical juncture' allows the institution to jump to an alternative development path (Mahoney, 2000; Sorensen, 2015). In Lahti, establishing its iterative master planning policy, as embedded in the broader policy of the city's strategic management, and integrating them both with the city council term cycle, can be seen as such a critical juncture in building a new path for the institutionalization of this strategic policy layer in the city governance. The path was further entrenched by coordinating work in policy sectors and systematizing data production and management in accordance with the iterative master planning policy. Utilizing this critical juncture in the late 2000s, when the city was faced with new economic challenges, the change of personnel in leading positions, and the outdatedness of its master plan, became the moment of opportunity for Palomäki, to elaborate and put into practice the idea of immanent master planning, suggested by Airamo over a decade earlier.

Lesson #2: Shifting the Focus from the Level of 'Strategic Plans' to the Broader Policy Level of Strategy Work

> "[W]hile strategic thinking may shape planning documents, strategies do not "live" inside them. They have to be continually "given life" as people call them up in justifications in the flow of practices." (Healey, 2013, p. 49.)

The Lahti master plans prepared in each cycle take the form of traditional zoning-based and legally binding master plans. They do not represent the characteristics of strategic plans, identified by Albrechts and Balducci (2013). On the contrary, each master plan produced every fourth year may be read as representing plan-orientedness, regulatory approach, comprehensiveness, fixation of certainties, and essentialist spaces of 'zoning' – and, what is more, only incrementally different from the previous master plan. Yet, in Lahti the strategy does not lie in the master plans themselves but in the broader *strategic policy* in which their preparation is integrated with the four-year city council terms, and in which their contents are grounded in the continuously updated city strategy. According to Palomäki (2018), this means continuous zooming near and far: "The continuous strategic planning of the whole city is necessary for gaining a holistic view in the long term, but in addition a more detailed view to the near future is also needed" (Palomäki, 2018, p. 21).

In the continuous master planning of Lahti, the implementation of each plan is programmed for the following council term, including programming of land and housing policy measures and investment needs for the public service networks. Thus, the succeeding city council is offered the task of making the necessary decisions to follow through the previous council's four-year implementation program. Thereby the cyclic planning policy encourages the city council to focus on longer-term strategic choices in political decision-making, while, at the same time, the policy supports short-term continuity. On the other hand, the city council can revise the implementation program, as abrupt changes in conditions may occur demanding immediate reflectivity. The longer-term strategic goals provide a horizon for strategic assessment of the feasibility of short-term implementation programming: are the infrastructure and service investments to be made, new land to be acquisitioned and areas to be developed through detailed planning advisable in view of the longer-term goals and related risks and uncertainties? The insights of strategic planning assessment that Airamo gained in his study (Airamo & Permanto, 1997) are discernible. The monitoring of implementation provides a rear mirror for updating the master plan in the next cycles: have the implementation targets been met and have the estimations of land demands for different purposes corresponded with the actual development? Furthermore, according to Palomäki, the monitoring of previous development is to be assessed in relation to broader strategic goals. For this purpose, a set of indicators on sustainable urban and regional structure, developed by the Finnish Environment Institute, were used as monitoring tools already in the first cycle. (Palomäki, 2018.)

Regarding the longer-term strategic objectives, the city councils have delineated specific focus themes in their cyclical revisions of the city strategy. For example, the city council 2013–2017 emphasized child-friendliness of the city. The focus on families and children was a specific approach to the city's long-standing strategic goal of increasing its attractiveness, and it was also motivated by the unmet population growth target. Co-aligned with this, another strategic focus theme was to advance walking and cycling in the urban environment. This theme provided a specific angle to two other long-standing strategic objectives: sustainable development (sustainable mobility) and increased self-responsibility in the use of municipal services (less need for health services by encouraging citizens' healthier mobility). (See Jalonen, 2017.) In the present city council term (2017–2021), the sustainable mobility theme is further strengthened. This is done by introducing the iterative Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) instrument, supported by the EU Commission, as integrated with the iterative master planning procedure (Härkönen, 2018). The target year for the new master plan in preparation is 2030.

The strategic incrementalism conducted in Lahti is based on *ongoing city strategizing with spatial implications that informs incremental updating of statutory master plans, with short-term*

programming of their implementation. The lesson is not to look for strategy in the plans themselves but in the strategic policy of using plans as its instruments.

Lesson #3: Approaching Strategic Spatial Planning as a Continuously Evolving Platform for Addressing Diverse "Languages"

> "In what *style* will discussion take place? What styles will most likely be able to "open out" discussion to enable the diversity of "languages" among community members to find expression?" (Healey, 1995, pp. 53–54, emphasis in the original.)

A critical question in the development of the strategic iterative policy of Lahti, and similar endeavours elsewhere, is whether its depoliticizing system tendencies can be avoided. It might end up instructing the local political community to identify planning problems and decision issues in terms of the 'system language' it has generated. Here, building a system of technical means would lead to its overtaking the political ends as well, as the communicative planning theorists have warned. In the quotation above, Healey advises the political communities to be critically aware of the discussion "styles" of strategic spatial planning, and to look for styles that would enable the diversity of languages and "open out" discussion. This normative aim has been shared in studies that have approached strategic spatial planning as a '*trading zone*' (Balducci, 2017; Kalliomäki, 2015; Kanninen, 2017; see also Balducci & Mäntysalo, 2013).

In terms of linguistic practice, strategic spatial planning policy should rather be thought of as a trading zone platform for mutual 'out-talk' between multiple languages than a highly stream-lined feedback system for exclusive data management and decision calculation. In Lahti, an elaborated system for producing and updating georeferenced data and monitoring metrics for its assessment have been developed, as a crucial part of the arsenal of managing iterative master planning. However, important efforts are continuously being made to increase interaction in the production of planning data, to introduce new formats of data, to communicate in 'colloquial' terms, and to approach master planning as a platform for participatory strategic deliberation.

> "During the first planning round, we as a steering group had to think how we are going to do this. Now we can learn from the previous round what worked, how could we do something differently and how we can make this work this time around. Now it is more about fine-tuning. And yes, documenting is very important to keep track on things and to see what worked and what did not. (City administrator review)

With the first master plan proposal in 2011, a new e-feedback system was introduced, alongside the traditional channels of collecting opinions and statements from the citizens and stakeholders. It includes an interactive map that enables making notes and remarks directly on the master plan map. With the second master planning cycle, several map questionnaires were made with an interactive map tool (Maptionnaire), designed for collecting place-based data on the residents' environmental experiences. Such tools serve as trading zone tools by providing a geo-referenced platform for the exchange of place-based information between the residents and various planning experts (Kahila-Tani, 2015).

In 2013, more resources were allocated to collaborative planning, e.g. a public participation planner was recruited. In spring 2014, four evening sessions with residents were held in different parts of the city, inviting the residents to envision the future, comment and present ideas on their living areas, everyday mobility and availability of services. Results were fed into the digital Maptionnaire tool (Kahila-Tani, 2015) and incorporated into the master plan documents. The

influence of this data is discernible in the area-based planning instructions and the planning report, which was written in a story format. The data has also been made available in the city's GIS for use in other planning processes. (Palomäki, 2018.)

At the start of the ongoing master planning cycle in 2017, scenario planning was introduced with the aid of a consultant firm. The scenario planning focus of the Planning Studio course in the previous autumn inspired this. Scenario planning has 'interlinguistic' trading zone potential, as it utilizes the linguistically inclusive format of *stories*, especially the so-called Intuitive Logics methodology of scenario planning (see Albrechts, 2005; Mäntysalo & Grišakov, 2017; Schwartz, 1991). The communicative strength of storytelling is its everyday familiarity and use of colloquial language. A scenario presented as a good story invites the listeners to share in imagining the conditions, events and episodes envisioned by it. (Mäntysalo & Grišakov, 2017.) The alternative scenarios were discussed in participatory events. The colloquial story format has been applied in drafting the master plan report, an open-access document describing the living conditions in the target year as a story. The report accompanies the actual legally binding master plan.

The ongoing master planning process is aimed at providing a discussion forum on the future of the city for different stakeholders and participants and also bringing broader strategy issues of the city into the discussion. The city government identified master planning as an important process to discuss and implement the city strategy. Monthly planning meetings with representatives from all branches of city administration were the only platform for them to discuss and implement the strategy with one another.

> "We recently realised that the master plan steering group is the only strategy group that covers the whole city administration and in which we take the city's strategic objectives and make them more concrete." (City administrator interview)

According to Palomäki (2018), the continuity of the planning process helped the participants to understand that the discussion continues and that there is no reason to halt the process because of a few unresolved issues. Instead, these could be left to be resolved in the next planning cycle. In this respect, the Lahti model again combines the rationalization of what appears immediately feasible, inherent in classical incrementalism, with provoking and managing change, central to strategic practice (cf. Albrechts & Balducci, 2013; Faludi, 1970). Indeed, the city administrators interviewed by Tuomisaari highlighted the role of continuous master planning as a learning process, for the planners as well as the other city administrators, politicians, stakeholders, and citizens. Alongside assessment of the master plans in terms of content, the planning processes are continuously assessed, and methods and procedures are altered if need be. The master plan is referred to as a tool that is being tested and developed according to experiences and feedback gained. Equally important to the quality of the plan, is the collaboration and interaction during the process, according to the interviewees. (Tuomisaari, 2015.)

> "Now we highlight even more that eventually the most important thing is not the plan but the process that includes all our fields of city administration that are responsible for developing the city, health and social services, education, technical department or the environmental department. That is our number one thing." (City administrator interview)

The city administrators from the other sectors mentioned several boundary issues between their work and the master plan. For example, the public service networks of the city, being influenced by master planning, came up in most interviews as boundary objects that connect all the sectors. (Tuomisaari, 2015.) Another boundary object is the Salpausselkä Ridge, crossing the city and its

centre east-west, a key determinant of the topography, geology, landscape and connectivity of the city. In the master plans, it has received a special marking in zoning. In addition to enhanced policy coordination, there has also been policy integration: previously separate land policy and housing policy have been integrated into master planning and its implementation programme.

The master planning process would ideally increase inter-sectoral understanding and knowledge of joint boundary issues between the different sectors of the city government. However, to achieve this, there is still work to be done in Lahti:

> In the steering group, too, it varies who is present and who is not. And who is interested in what, or, then in a way committed to the planning process and not just picking some issues from it. But still, considering this, it has worked quite well. (City administrator interview in Tuomisaari, 2015, p. 53.)

Additionally, engaging citizens in master planning calls for conscious effort and work. The Land Use and Building Act states that citizens have the right to participate in planning and that the planning practices must allow for public participation and civic engagement. In order to be legitimate, planning practices need to support public involvement and the articulation of issues that citizens consider important (Leino & Laine, 2012). Building the connection between the master plan and citizens' interests and concerns thus becomes a crucial, yet difficult task.

> In terms of communication, it is challenging. The master plan does not concern anybody directly but then again it concerns the whole city. It is so difficult to communicate why it is important to take part right now and how it affects their lives. And begin explaining what a master plan is. […] We try to make participation easy for people. (City administrator interview)

Three complaints were made to the regional administrative court and further, to the supreme administrative court, on the first cycle master plan. This number corresponds to the average number of complaints that were made on master plans (3,04) in Finland in the period of 2003–2006 (Malin, 2008, p. 10). While the the city-council accepted the plan in 2012, the supreme administrative court overruled the complaints in autumn 2014. In turn, only one complaint was made on the second cycle master plan which was accepted in summer 2016. (See Uuskallio, 2016.)

Conclusions and Discussion

The case study of this article was motivated by the claim of Newman and others (Mäntysalo et al., 2015; Newman, 2008; Van Den Broeck, 2013) that research on strategic spatial planning has been constrained by its theoretical distinctions between strategic spatial planning and 'traditional planning.' This research has not been appreciative enough of the complex institutional and political conditions and path dependencies that have hindered transitions from the 'traditional planning' frameworks towards such contexts that would meet the theoretical ideals of strategic spatial planning. Thereby the research has overlooked crucial insights to be gained from such planning practices in which strategic-ness has been incorporated into 'traditional planning' frameworks. With our Lahti case study, we have aimed to contribute to normative theoretical research of strategic spatial planning that addresses this shortcoming. We drew three lessons:

The first lesson, *utilizing the moments of opportunity in the institutional environment of statutory planning*, brings into focus the dynamic dialectics between institutional rules and their interpretation in planning practice. In this dynamic dialectic, critical moments of opportunity for a skilled strategic planner may open up for transformative action towards strategic planning policy, in which the institutional rules of planning are utilized as resources for strategic planning, rather than

contraints determining it in its 'traditional' form. From Lahti we learn that having a skilled strategic planner is not yet a sufficient condition to enable transformative change; what is also needed is tapping into moments of opportunity opening up in the critical junctures of the dynamic trajectory of practico-institutional dialectics. These dynamics need to be better understood in strategic spatial planning research. Dialectical approaches are suggested, combining pragmatist and institutionalist approaches (see Salet, 2018a, 2018b).

The second lesson, *shifting the focus from the level of 'strategic plans' to the broader policy level of strategy work*, follows from the first lesson. The strategic planning practice of reinterpreting the institutional rules of statutory planning means, in the Lahti case, that the clue of strategic-ness does not lie in the plans themselves but in the policy developed for their use as part of broader strategic action. Thus, the strategy in Lahti lies in how city strategizing and master planning is programmed, much in line with what Meyerson (1956), Friedmann (1965), Etzioni (1967) and Faludi (1973) already delineated several decades ago as central principles of planning processes. The Lahti master plans themselves are statutory plans with their 'non-strategic' features. The insight of the strategic policy of Lahti is to approach these non-strategic features incrementally. We call such a policy '*strategic incrementalism*.' Unlike 'disjointed incrementalism' (Lindblom, 1959), it is not just about making backward-looking incremental remediations to the existing planning policy based on feedback. It has the crucial forward-looking dimension, too, encouraging 'mixed-scanning' between incremental continuity and strategic (re-)scanning of longer-term horizons and themes. The 'Lahti model' of strategic incrementalism implies incrementally updated analyses of comprehensive plans, action orientation of continuous planning outputting statutory plans in an iterative sequence, and framing zoning decisions and certainty fixes through longer-term strategic assessments and monitoring of implementation. It thus enables the paradoxical use of non-strategic features of statutory plans as part of a broader policy with strategic features (see Mäntysalo et al., 2015).

Regarding research on how strategic spatial planning is conducted in practice in the contexts of regulative planning systems, a general lesson learnt from the Lahti case is not to settle with judging the strategic-ness of planning merely based on the planning documents produced. The 'non-strategic' instruments of statutory planning may be used strategically, too. Often this paradox is unavoidable, and the practice world may offer important insights for researchers on how the paradox could be successfully dealt with.

The third lesson, *approaching strategic spatial planning as a continuously evolving platform for addressing diverse 'languages,'* in turn, follows on from the second lesson as a crucial comment on it. A strategically incremental planning policy needs to uphold critical self-awareness of the technocratic tendencies of its own knowledge management. Otherwise it would lose its capability to function as a communicative and political platform for dealing with different languages of producing knowledge and expressing views, and deliberating on them. In linguistic practice terms, the spatial planning policy of strategic incrementalism, deliberatively developed into a trading zone platform for communication between coexisting languages, may avoid narrow codifications of producing, assessing and monitoring planning knowledge. This entails continuous learning and development of the policy in its relation to knowledge and communication. The Lahti case provides an example of efforts to bridge strategic 'systems' intelligence and communicative inclusiveness in its strategic planning policy, and of the need to maintain continuous reflectivity on these efforts. Intentional development of strategic spatial planning as a trading zone is a promising way forward in such bridging, and, in our view, worthy of further theoretical and empirical research. In the Lahti case we saw signs of trading zone development, with related boundary objects, but this has been more intuitive than intentional.

The Lahti case encourages revisiting the connections of contemporary strategic planning theory to the aforementioned ideas developed in the 1950s-1970s. These connections seem to have been overlooked in the present theoretical discourse of strategic planning, in the aftermath of the communicative turn of planning theory with its Habermasian systems-critical connotations. Rather than pitting systems-oriented strategic planning theory and communicative planning theory against each other, the Lahti case educates us to look for policy responses and pragmatic 'interlinguistic' tools for the coexistence of the key insights of these two theoretical strands.

Since the strategic planning policy has been in use for a relatively short period in Lahti, it may be difficult for the other actors in the city administration to evaluate what its concrete benefits could be for their own work, and why it would be worthwhile to spend time and effort on it. The participants need confirmation through experience that handling the previously siloed issues becomes easier when they are brought to the shared planning platform. However, there have already been notable advances in avoiding crucial conflicts in spatial planning politics in Lahti. For example, the annexation of the sparsely populated neighbouring municipality of Nastola to Lahti in 2016 provided the city with ample possibilities for loosening up its strategy of sustainability and related urban densification at the start of the third cycle of master planning in 2017. However, the strategic-incremental planning policy with its accumulating and integrated knowledge base and concrete sense of emergence – not fixing a comprehensive set of development issues on partisan grounds but focusing on handling topical issues with reference to a sustained strategic framework – has thus far aided in keeping the plans for urban development on a sustainable footing. The integration of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) process with the ongoing master planning cycle has brought further insights into the planning discussion, regarding the perspectives of mobility and accessibility to urban sustainability.

Through a careful combination of systems-rationalist, deliberative and pragmatic insights within a process that 'strategizes' statutory master planning, Lahti has been able to work around some of the perceived limitations of the Finnish planning system. In 2016, the City of Lahti received an award for its innovativeness in strategic master planning from the Finnish Society of Urban Planning, and its iterative master planning policy is now being applied in some other Finnish cities, too (e.g. Tampere and Riihimäki). For the Ministry of Environment, the development work in Lahti offers important insights regarding the ongoing Land Use and Building Act reform: what changes in the statutory planning system are really needed – and what not – to better enable strategic spatial planning in the local contexts?

However, at the city-regional level Lahti suffers from similar problems in strategic inter-municipal collaboration as many other Finnish cities (cf. Kaupunkiseutujen …, 2015). Although the Lahti city region has been pioneering in developing city-regional strategic spatial planning since the late 1960s (Mäntysalo et al., 2014b), it has remained as a discussion forum mainly for the municipal planners only, while the political decision-makers of the municipalities neighbouring Lahti have not committed themselves to the planners' city-regional strategic schemes. What is especially problematic, is the loose, developer-oriented land use policy of the municipality of Hollola (Rannila, 2018), resulting in city-regional sprawl, as Hollola borders the urban fabric of Lahti in the north, west and south. Strategic spatial planning is often associated with capturing strategically the 'soft spaces' of city-regional and metropolitan planning, where statutory planning has been viewed as inappropriate, due to being territorially confined to local and regional administrative spaces (e.g. Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009; Majoor & Salet, 2008; Salet, 2006). In the Lahti city region, the municipalities have also resorted to developing non-statutory planning

instruments, the so-called structural schemes (see Mäntysalo et al., 2014b), in trying to capture strategically the soft space of their city region – but with limited success.

Note

1. Cf. the term 'visionary incrementalism' used by Albrechts, Healey, and Kunzmann (2003) in their description of strategic spatial planning in the city region of Hanover, Germany.

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