STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING'S ROLE IN LEGITIMIZING INVESTMENTS IN TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses to what extent spatial visions might play an important role in not only supporting, but also legitimizing the need for investments in transport infrastructures. Drawing on discussion of an 'infrastructure turn' in strategic spatial planning (Dodson 2009), this paper explores how the recently proposed vision of a *Loop City* for the Danish/Swedish Øresund Region has played an important role in legitimizing and building political support for a light railway connecting the outer suburbs of Copenhagen. It is not unusual for large investments in new transport infrastructures to be a key part of spatial visions. However, within the case of the cross-border *Loop City* vision, a specific light railway project in a local area is being framed as a key link and the main factor in the future competitiveness of the region. Drawing on interviews with key planners involved in the light railway and *Loop City* planning processes together with document analysis of background reports and analyses from the last 10-15 years, the paper investigates to what extent the vision of a *Loop City* has played an important role in legitimizing the need for a light railway in the outer suburbs of Copenhagen. Furthermore, the paper discusses to what extent the vision of a *Loop City* represents a 'moment of opportunity' (Healey 2006a) for strengthening national spatial planning in Denmark, or whether the *Loop City* just conveniently unites a policy problem with a policy solution, which has existed for decades (Kingdon 2011). In conclusion, the paper suggests that the case of the *Loop City* potentially reveals a wider trend in strategic spatial planning, in which political lobbying for key infrastructure projects, rather than land use policies, becomes the focal point for preparation of strategic plans. Such a development raises a number of concerns about strategic spatial planning's potential for guiding future urban development.

1 INTRODUCTION

> "In the current confusion you can get projects approved, if they only are so massive that nobody can comprehend the economic scope of them, but only see them as impressive signs of our admirable technical abilities and great drive. It could be a *power centre* in the shape of an airport on Saltholm or a *gigantic work of engineering* in the shape of a Great Belt Bridge, or a *city planning masterpiece* in the shape of a transport corridor city, of which there can be found nothing like in the whole world. They will all serve to increase the 'national product', but not create any real product, only contribute to the increasing transport from one place to another, worsen the balance of payments – and then let the future pay for the party." (Steen Eiler Rasmussen, Politiken 1978: 11, italics in original)

Infrastructure projects have become the focal point of strategic spatial planning, often portrayed as being paramount to competitiveness and economic success. The demand for new infrastructure is never-ending, and often, rather unreflectively, portrayed as a quick technological fix to increase mobility and/or achieve ambitious goals of sustainability and climate change mitigation. In the last decade, the concern with infrastructure provision has become so dominant that it is argued to have replaced or superseded strategic spatial

planning in some countries (Dodson 2009; Marshall 2013a, 2013b). Commentators have argued that spatial planning is increasingly dominated by 'infrastructuralism' (Marshall 2013a, 2013b), and that we might be witnessing an 'infrastructure turn' in strategic spatial planning (Dodson 2009). Marshall (2013a, 2013b) argues that the demand for infrastructure is no longer perceived as an argument open for debate, but as a fact, rationalised through a narrow neo-liberal economic logic. Often the realisation of a piece of infrastructure becomes a goal in itself, with arguments of its essentiality being added later.

The opening quote by Steen Eiler Rasmussen, one of the leading planners behind the 1947 Greater Copenhagen Finger Plan, suggests that infrastructuralism might not be a new phenomenon in Danish spatial planning. On the contrary, debates on where to build the next 'great bridge' seems to be a recurrent theme in Danish politics. This is perhaps not surprising in a country divided by water in many places. However, it makes Denmark an interesting case for analysing how strategic spatial planning might be used to support and legitimize investments in transport infrastructures.

The persuasive and imaginative power of spatial visions has been widely discussed in the strategic spatial planning literature, in particular the use of spatial concepts, icons, and metaphors to communicate spatial policies (Dühr 2007; Healey 2006b, 2007; Jensen and Richardson 2003; Zonneveld 2000). However, only a few studies have researched the role of the persuasive and imaginative power of spatial visions in legitimizing transport infrastructure. Jensen and Richardson (2007) illustrate how the imagining of future mobile subjects in the strategy-making and visioning of a transnational transport corridor from Oslo to Berlin plays a central role in legitimizing the need for new border-crossing infrastructures. Here, the identity of a transnational community of elite citizens is constructed to rationalise and legitimize the need for particular transport infrastructure projects (Jensen and Richardson 2007).

This paper analyses how spatial visioning is used to legitimize particular investments in transport infrastructure in Denmark. The paper demonstrates how the recurrent dream of the Øresund Region has been reframed in the spatial vision of the *Loop City* (BIG et al. 2010) to rationalise and legitimize the need for a suburban light railway along the outer ring road in the Greater Copenhagen Area. The case of the Loop City illustrates how powerful strategic spatial planning can be in bringing a local transport infrastructure project onto the national policy agenda. Drawing on the language of Kingdon (2011), the paper traces municipal efforts in bringing their 'pet' solution of a light railway onto the national agenda. It is argued that coupling the preferred solution of a light railway to national policy agendas of economic growth and competitiveness via strategic spatial planning played an important role in paving the ground for a political agreement on the infrastructure project.

The analysis of the Loop City spatial vision and light railway project traces the ideas of the Øresund Region back to the 1950s and the lobbying for a light railway back to the 1990s. The analysis builds on document analysis of background reports, newspaper articles, press releases, and a pilot interview with the project manager for the Ring City spatial vision carried out in November 2012. Further interviews are scheduled to take place in the autumn 2013.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the paper traces the dream of the Øresund Region back to the initial ideas from the 1950s to illustrate how the Øresund Region comes up again and again in Danish strategic spatial planning, each time in a new package fulfilling different purposes. Second, the paper traces municipal efforts in getting a light railway along the outer ring road of the Greater Copenhagen Area on the national transport agenda. The paper argues that coupling the light railway as a policy solution to the policy problem of decreasing competitiveness of the Øresund Region provided a breakthrough in the municipal lobbying. Third, the paper discusses in what way the *Loop City* vision helped to bring the light railway

onto the national transport agenda and pave the way for a political agreement. Finally, the paper discusses to what extent Danish strategic spatial planning is taking an infrastructure turn, and whether the reinvigorating of the Øresund Region represents a moment of opportunity for strengthening national spatial planning in Denmark.

2 THE RECURRING DREAM OF A ØRESUND REGION

On October 1st 1959 the Danish national newspaper Politiken presented the first grand spatial vision of the Øresund Region in a special section of the newspaper.[1] The proposal for the *Øresund City* [Øresundsby] was a private initiative prepared by the architects Ole Thomassen (the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts) and Stefan Ott (Malmø city planning office). Thomassen's and Ott's vision of the Øresund City in the year 2000 included among other elements two fixed links across the Øresund, a nuclear reactor on the island of Hven, an airport on the island of Saltholm, a circular link connecting the old market towns of Køge, Roskilde, Frederikssund, Hillerød and Helsingør, and a population of 3.5 million, see figure 1. With the proposal, the two authors wanted primarily to raise awareness of what they believed to be a lack of strategic spatial planning in the Greater Copenhagen Area at the time (Gaardmand 1993). They argued for a need for a much stronger spatial framework in light of the expected future population growth, urban growth, and pressures on the transportation system. Thomassen and Ott stressed that Copenhagen's future urban development was of national interest, urging the Danish Government to intervene and stop the 'administrative anarchy', which they believed was threatening the future development of a future Øresund Region (Politiken 1959).

Inspired by the ideas of the Øresund City, in 1965 the mayor of Copenhagen arranged an architecture competition as a first step to realise his dream of a new city of the island of Amager. Nature preservation interests were strong at the time and the idea became stranded fairly quickly. However, it is worth mentioning that the second prize winner in the competition was Knud E. Rasmussen, who would become the director of planning in the City of Copenhagen at the end of the 1980s (Gaardmand 1991).

Despite significant debate at the time, it took about three decades for the far-seeing vision of the Øresund Region to re-emerge on the scene of Danish strategic spatial planning, even though its re-appearance would be rather chaotic. In the end of the 1980s, Copenhagen was on the edge of bankruptcy. National spatial planning had for more than a decade prioritised investments elsewhere in the country with the aim of securing equal development across the Danish territory. At this point in time, a rare coalition formed between the social democrats and the conservatives aimed at re-invigorating Copenhagen.[2] A committee charged with the task of proposing ideas to boost Copenhagen's development was quickly formed. The Stallknecht-committee[3] presented the idea of Copenhagen as a Nordic growth engine in 1989. The idea included a fixed link across the Øresund, new urban development areas with international aspirations, and a new 3 million people Øresund City (Gaardmand 1991, 1993).

The Danish Parliament quickly adopted the ideas, but the specification of the ideas into spatial policies progressed slowly, due to disagreements between the state and the City of Copenhagen (Gaardmand 1993). Instead, a new committee was formed, charged with the task of proposing investments in transport infrastructure in the Greater Copenhagen Area

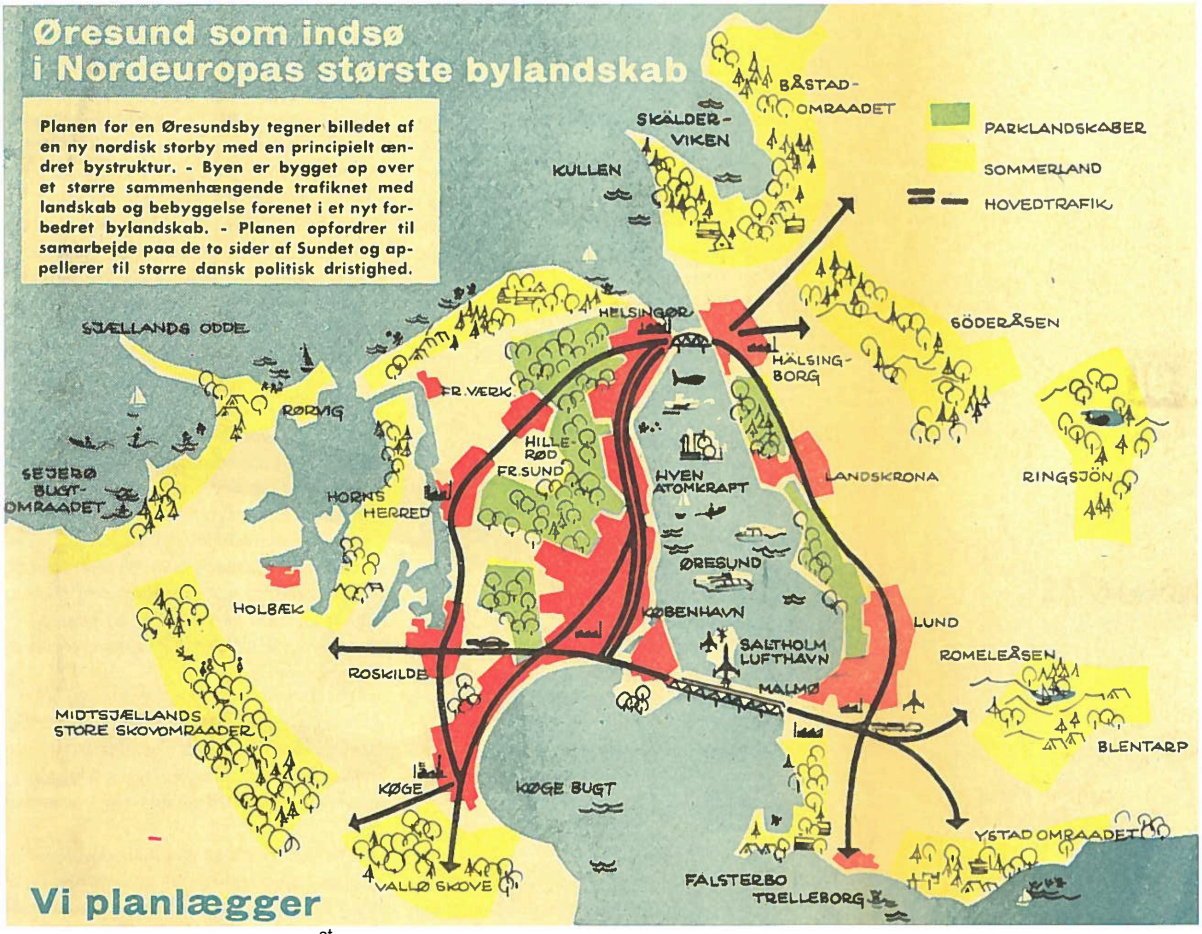
[1] According to Gaardmand (1991), the first sketch of a Øresund City was made on a piece sandwich paper at a cafe in Copenhagen in the summer of 1959, where the two professors in urban planning Sune Lindström and Peter Bredsdorff (father of the Copenhagen Finger Plan) had lunch.

[2] At the time, the social democrats held the power in Copenhagen with Jens Kramer Mikkelsen as Lord Mayor and the conservative Poul Schüter was Prime Minister.

[3] Named after the chairman of the committee Kirsten Stallknecht (Gaardmand 1993)

(including how to finance the investments). The Würtzen Committee[4] expanded along the way its mandate to include considerations of how new transport infrastructure might further urban growth and business development (Jørgensen et al., 1997). This became essential as the committee was preparing a model in which the development of a new city district on the island of Amager, Ørestad, would be combined with a metro line linking Ørestad to central Copenhagen. The committee worked on a model of financing in which the increase in land value in Ørestad would cover the cost of the metro in the long term (30-50 years). The plan would be self-financing. The plans fitted well with the ideas of the director of planning at the City of Copenhagen, who himself had presented the same ideas more than two decades earlier.

Figure 1: The Øresund Region Anno 1959



Source: Politiken October 1st 1959, 79 (reprinted in Gaardmand 1993: 117)

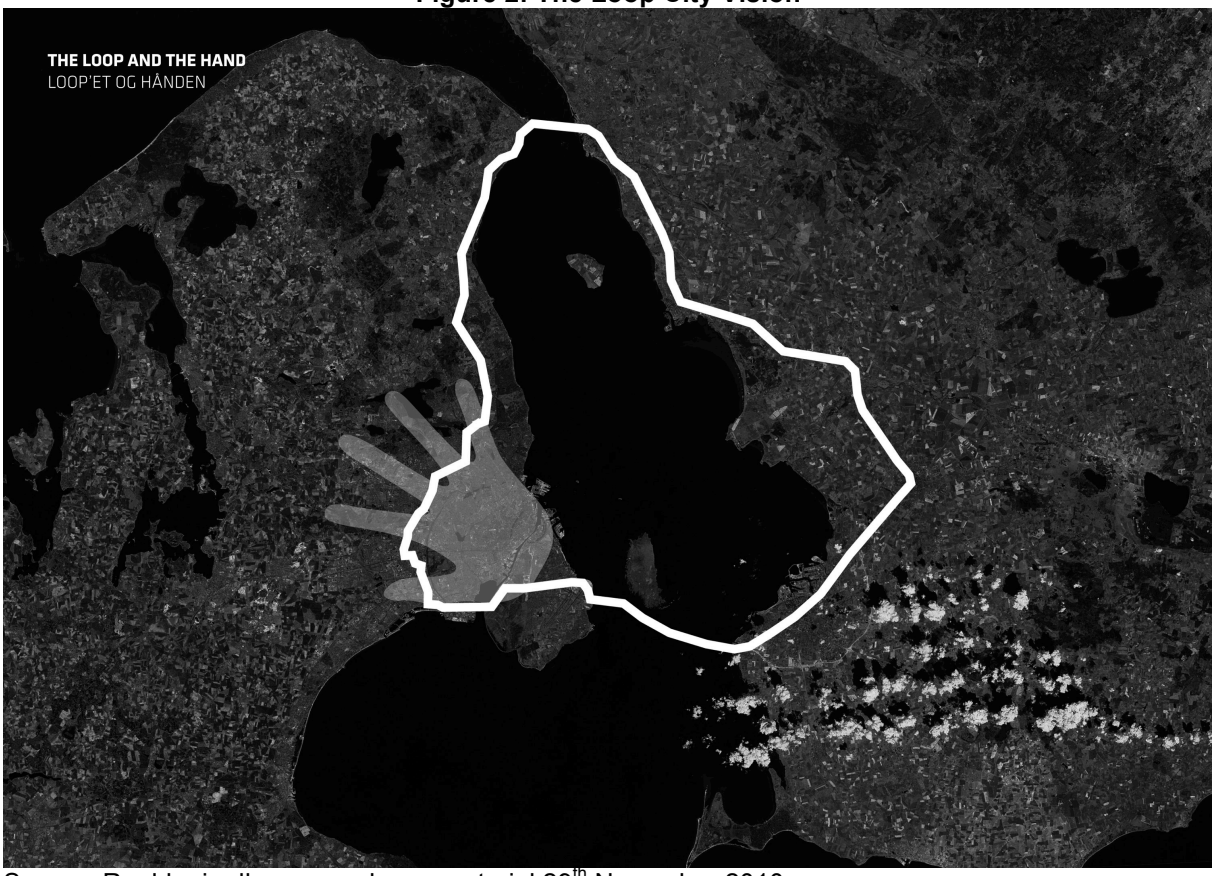
The committee worked secretly on its plans, reporting back to only a few key top politicians. It is said that the Minister of the Environment, responsible for spatial planning, was only informed about the plans a few days before they were announced to the press (Gaardmand 1993). However, this did not prevent the Minister from adopting the plans whole-heartedly. The plans were adopted in the national spatial planning perspective from 1992, which presented the vision of the Øresund Region in 2018 (Ministry of the Environment 1992), in which a fixed link across the Øresund, the new city district of Ørestad, a metro line between Ørestad and central Copenhagen, and an expansion of Copenhagen Airport were the cornerstones. The new cross-border region was articulated as the future growth engine of the Nordic countries, 'the North's Europole' (Ministry of the Environment 1992: 70). The spatial planning perspective promoting the Øresund Region was supplemented by a change

[4] Named after the chairman Hans Würtzen, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Finance

in the Danish Planning Act, which legitimized the more Copenhagen-centric spatial development perspective (Gaardmand 1993; Jørgensen et al. 1997).

The dream of the Øresund Region remained part of Danish strategic spatial planning throughout the 1990s. However, with the election of a new government in 2001, strategic spatial planning in Denmark took a more inward looking perspective, primarily concerned with domestic policy agendas. The national spatial perspective from 2010 represents a low point in the history of Danish strategic spatial planning (Olesen and Richardson 2012), and there was not much evidence suggesting that the dream of the Øresund Region would once again re-emerge at the turn of the millennium's first decade.

Figure 2: The Loop City Vision



Source: Realdania.dk, press release material 29th November 2010

In November 2010, the Danish private foundation Realdania presented the spatial vision of the *Loop City* for the Øresund Region (Realdania 2010b).[5] The vision was prepared for Realdania by a team of planners and architects with the international architecture company BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) in the lead. The *Loop City* claims to take a point of departure in the Finger Plan for the Greater Copenhagen Area from 1947, aiming to expand the spatial framework to encompass the entire Øresund Region in a loop, see figure 2 (BIG 2010). The *Loop City* shows remarkable resemblance to the 50-year-old dream of the Øresund City (compare figure 1 and 2). However, a new central feature in the *Loop City* is a 30 km light railway connecting the outer suburbs of the Greater Copenhagen Area. In fact the spatial vision is more concerned with stressing the importance of the light railway to strengthen the competitiveness of the Øresund Region, than highlighting more (obvious) central features of

[5] Realdania is a wealthy strategic philanthropic association supporting built environment projects in Denmark. Many Danish spatial planning projects have been realised with funding from Realdania since its foundation in 2000.

the *Loop City*, such as a second fixed link across the Øresund. The spatial vision of the Loop City raises at least two questions for further analysis:

- Why did the old dream of the Øresund Region re-emerge as the *Loop City* in 2010?
- Why is a local suburban light railway highlighted as the most important missing link in the Loop City?

To answer these questions, the next section traces the history of the proposed light railway connection in the Greater Copenhagen Area.

3 FROM LIGHT RAILWAY TO A RING CITY

The legacy of the famous Finger Plan for the Greater Copenhagen Area from 1947 is still the foundation for contemporary spatial planning in the Greater Copenhagen Area. The spatial framework, of a hand with spread fingers in which urban development is concentrated in the palm and along the fingers supported by public transportation lines (S-trains), still constitutes the spatial logic of the city region. Since 1947 the spatial logic has been supplemented by several ring roads (motorways) leading car traffic around the city centre rather than through it. A central policy in the 1947 Finger Plan was to locate housing in close proximity to railway stations to increase the passenger base (Egnsplankontoret 1947). This policy is known in Denmark as 'the principle of station proximity' [*stationsnærhedsprincippet*]. With the restructuring of the industrial sector, the principle of station proximity was expanded in the 1989 spatial plan for the Greater Copenhagen Area to include also office-based businesses, and the regulation was further strengthened in the 2007 Finger Plan (Hartoft-Nielsen 2002; Ministry of the Environment 2007).

The industry in the suburban municipalities in the Greater Copenhagen Area has traditionally been centred on the ring road (Ring 3). The contemporary spatial framework, in particular the principle of station proximity, sets limitations for the potential of revitalising these industrial areas into office-based business parks.[6] In 2005 a report based on collaboration between seven municipalities[7] and various ministry and regional bodies concluded that a light railway along the Ring 3 would open up for more intensive use of the former industrial areas (Ministry of the Environment et al. 2005).

The idea of expanding the existing public transportation network with a ring connection dates back to the mid-1990s. In the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s various transport analyses were carried out with the aim of establishing the potential of a ring connection, the possible mode of transportation, and the model of financing. During the 2000s the lobbying intensified, centred on a light railway as the preferred option. The cooperation between seven suburban municipalities played a central role in the lobbying. The light railway also featured in the Danish Infrastructure Commission's report from 2008, which stressed the need for further analysis of a light railway (Infrastructure Commission 2008).[8] In the December 2008, the Danish Government announced a political transport agreement, which momentarily rejected the light railway as a viable option for Ring 3,

[6] The 2007 Finger Plan opens up for the possibility to revitalise the industrial areas along ring 3 with the expectation that the areas in the future will live up to the principle of station proximity when a light railway connection is constructed (Danish Ministry of the Environment 2007).

[7] The seven municipalities (Albertslund, Brøndby, Glostrup, Hvidovre, Høje-Taastrup, Ishøj, Rødovre and Vallensbæk) have since 1997 cooperated on business development issues. In 2003 the cooperation was formalised in '*Vestegnssamarbejdet*'. Today the cooperation includes 15 municipalities in the auspices of *'Omegns Samarbejdet'*.

[8] The Danish Infrastructure Commission presented in 2008 its recommendations on the need for future investments in transport infrastructure in Denmark until 2030 (Infrastructure Commission, 2008).

highlighting the bus as the preferred mode of transport (Danish Government 2008). Less than two months later, the Danish Government announced its 'Green Transport Policy', which dedicated 2 billion Danish kroner to a light railway project in Aarhus[9] and public transportation in Ring 3 (Danish Government 2009), thereby reopening the debate over a Ring 3 light railway. During 2010 further analyses were carried out to determine the preferred mode of public transport along Ring 3 (bus vs. light railway).

Figure 3: The Ring 3 light railway's integration (yellow line) into the existing public transport network in the Greater Copenhagen Area

Source: The Ring City / Light Rail Collaboration, www.ringtre.dk

In the meantime the cooperation between the seven suburban municipalities in the Greater Copenhagen Area progressed to include additional three municipalities. The ten municipalities initiated in the summer of 2008 a collaborative spatial strategy-making process with the aim of preparing a common spatial vision. In the beginning of 2010, the municipalities presented their spatial vision of the *City Circle* (Byvision Ringbyen 2010). The spatial vision caught the attention of the private Danish foundation Realdania, which a month later announced a cooperation with the ten municipalities (Realdania 2010a). Realdania hired a team of leading planners and architects with BIG in the lead, and charged them with the task of concretizing the *City Circle* in a new spatial vision. The result, the spatial vision of the *Loop City,* was presented at the end of November 2010 (BIG et al. 2010, Realdania 2010b).

In the *Loop City* vision, the suburban light railway is framed as a key missing link in the spatial metaphor of the *Loop City* (BIG et al. 2010). Overnight the Ring 3 light railway was transformed from a local suburban project into a key transport infrastructure project for the Øresund Region. According to the spatial vision, a light railway opens up potential of

[9] The plans of implementing a light railway in Aarhus are at this stage quite far. 500 million of the 2 billion Danish kroner are specifically dedicated to the implementation of the 1st stage of the Aarhus light railway (Danish Government 2009).

revitalising 11 km^2 of industrial areas (the size of Midtown Manhattan or 3.5 times the size of Ørestad) (BIG et al., 2010). A large proportion of these industrial areas are owned by the municipalities, which hope for future economic profit from selling (hopefully) attractive plots in new business parks to private investors.

In June 2011, the first political agreement was made between the Ministry of Transport, the region, and the municipalities to work towards the realisation of the first stage of the Ring 3 light railway (Ministry of Transport 2011). In one-and-a-half years the national mood on the light railway seemed to have softened. The next section discusses whether the spatial vision of the *Loop City* has played any role in bringing the light railway onto the national agenda and legitimizing the its need.

4 COUPLING POLICY STREAMS AND OPENING POLICY WINDOWS: THE *LOOP CITY* SPATIAL VISION

Spatial strategies are rarely invented from scratch. Often endeavours in strategic spatial planning are merely about 'recognising' or 'naming' strategies (Healey 2007: 192). As in policy-making more generally, innovation in spatial strategy-making is often the result of repackaging and combining familiar elements in new ways (Kingdon 2011: 124). Drawing on a metaphor from biology, Kingdon (2011: 116) suggests that proposals, alternatives and solutions float around in a 'primeval soup', just like molecules before life came into being. At a certain point in time proposals, alternatives and solutions bump into each other and couple. Just like molecules, many combinations are possible. Some ideas become prominent, whilst others quickly fade away, waiting to form part of new combinations. In the policy primeval soup, solutions look for problems to couple with, just as much as problems look for solutions. Often policy communities have their pet solutions ready, being on a constant outlook for policy problems, which they can couple their solutions to (Kingdon 2011: 123). Once an opportunity presents itself, a 'policy window' opens, and actors have to react fast to dump their proposals, alternatives and solutions into the window, like surfers waiting for the big wave (Kingdon 2011: 165). Often successful policies have a long history of trial-and-error behind them before the field is fertilised sufficiently and softened up for an idea to be considered political viable (Kingdon 2011).

The language developed by Kingdon (2011) to explain agenda-setting and transformations in American policy-making offers a helpful point of departure for shedding light on contemporary Danish strategic spatial planning and its seemingly important role in legitimizing particular transport infrastructure projects. The section demonstrates how coupling transport infrastructure projects (solutions) to spatial strategies (proposals) help to legitimize the need for investments in transport infrastructure.

The dream of the Øresund Region keeps floating in and out of Danish strategic spatial planning. Every time it reappears, it comes in a new package coupled to other policy agendas. In 1959, the Øresund City was launched as a critique of the lack of ambition in Danish strategic spatial planning. In the end of the 1980s, the idea of the Øresund Region re-emerged in an attempt to boost Copenhagen as the Nordic growth engine. In 2010 the spatial vision of the *Loop City* was presented to highlight inadequacies in the public transportation network in the Øresund Region. However, there are also common threads running through all three versions of the Øresund Region. The dream of the Øresund Region is inextricably linked with policy agendas of stimulating growth, competitiveness and mobility. In half a century the Øresund Region has been Danish strategic spatial planning's preferred policy solution to turn economic decline into prosperity.

The dream of the Øresund Region is inextricably linked to a requirement for investments in (transport) infrastructure. The 1959 vision illustrates this more clearly than any of the later

versions. Without investments in infrastructure the dream of the cross-border region can never be realised. However, if we explore the rationalities behind the proposed investments further, we see an interesting pattern emerging. The proposal for a metro line linking Ørestad to central Copenhagen is at the end of the 1980s coupled with the urban development potentials of developing the Ørestad. The problem of how to finance the infrastructure project is 'solved' by coupling the metro to the urban development project of Ørestad - a proposal that conveniently could be pulled out of the policy soup and reused. As Jørgensen et al. (1997: 52) highlight in their case study of Ørestad, the urban development project seemed to be an add-on to legitimize the metro investment:

> "We have come across the perception that some of the parties instrumental in supporting and bringing about the Ørestad-plan have done this with the sole aim of having the infrastructural improvements (the new subway) brought into reality. They appear to care very little about the financial aspects of the venture."

A similar rationale can be identified in the case of the light railway project in Ring 3. Continuous municipal lobbying and the preparation of transport analysis after transport analysis seemed to have resonated little with national policy agendas throughout the 1990s and 2000s. At most, it might have contributed to a slow softening up of the Ministry of Transport's policy on the light railway. The lobbying for a light railway begins to have a greater impact when it is coupled as a solution to the problem of how to revitalise former suburban industrial areas in Ring 3 in a ministry report in 2005 (Ministry of the Environment et al. 2005). In the 2007 Finger Plan it is recognised that supplementing the existing public transportation network with a Ring 3 light railway would open up for new urban development potentials (Ministry of the Environment 2007). However at this point in time, the light railway is still politically perceived as the solution to a local problem. The project manager for the *Ring City* summarises the Ministry of Transport's perspective on the light railway in 2009 as stated below:

> "Well, you held political meetings with all the political spokesmen in transport and tried to get the message through. But it was met by a 'speak to the hand' attitude. The Minister of Transport, it was Lars Barfoed, said directly, 'well it is fine that you want a light railway in Ring 3, but it is a municipal task. It is a local railway.'" (Interview, project manager Spatial Vision Ring City 2012, author's translation)

As a consequence of the lukewarm ministry interest, the municipalities decided to tone down their lobbying and concentrate their efforts on developing the spatial vision. This work sparked the interest of Realdania, who was about to initiate a project on rethinking the Danish suburbs, a currently very prominent policy agenda in Danish spatial planning.[10] Coupling the spatial vision to the prominent suburb agenda provided a path forward. With the funding from Realdania, the *Loop City* spatial vision was prepared, which directly links the light railway to the Øresund Region. In the *Loop City* the local light railway project is being reframed as a key piece of infrastructure of national importance and coupled to policy agendas of economic growth and competitiveness. The *Ring City* project manager explains:

> "… I have to say, I believe actually that this [*Loop City*] is contributing to placing the light railway on the national agenda. Not necessarily because the politicians have read it [the spatial vision], but the rhetoric is moving towards it. Everybody is at the same time talking within this growth agenda, and OECD highlights that infrastructure and growth are inextricably linked. So in this way the ground is fertilised, so that the arguments come at the right time. And then there is an

[10] More information about the project 'Forstaden version 2.0' [the suburb version 2.0] can be retrieved from: www.realdania.dk/Projekter/Saerlige-indsatsomraader/Forstaeder.aspx. See also the Ministry of the Environment's think tank on suburbs: www.naturstyrelsen.dk/Planlaegning/Projekter/Fostaedernes_taenketank/

> opening. […] The rhetoric shifts in two years. […] So in this way, you might say that we have succeeded in coupling the two things." (Interview, project manager Spatial Vision Ring City 2012, author's translation)

As the project manager indicates above, the *Loop City* has helped to pave the way for the light railway. It has contributed to the breakthrough of the political agreement signed six months after the spatial vision was published. Whilst it is probably too much to credit the political agreement entirely to the *Loop City*, there is no doubt that coupling the light railway to regional and national agendas of economic growth and competitiveness has been an important contributing factor. In addition the project manager highlights how the *Loop City* has had an important 'internal pedagogical effect', facilitating a common understanding among the municipalities of the need to collaborate and finance a part of the light railway (Interview, project manager Spatial Vision Ring City 2012).

Healey (2007) argues that contemporary spatial strategies are best understood as inspirational visions, steering by persuasion rather than regulation. "Strategy formation that has effects involves the generation and consolidation of a new frame, a new discourse with its supportive storylines and metaphors" (Healey 2007: 189). To generate mobilising force the ideas of a spatial strategy have to resonate with certain values (and politics), which allow them to travel across the governance landscape and gather force (Healey 2007). In this sense, a spatial strategy's imaginative power is crucial for its transformative potential (Healey 2006b). The *Loop City*, in particular the metaphor of a loop, seems to hold such imaginative power, even though the metaphor is not to be understood literally:

> "No, we have created it [the loop] to broaden it out across the Øresund Region. But it is not like, the loop should not be taken literally as a coherent metro connection, which runs in a loop. In that way it is an abstraction, which is about drawing a ring around the Øresund - common strategies on infrastructure, which are thought together, instead of being separate projects. That is what this strategy is about." (Interview, project manager Spatial Vision Ring City 2012, author's translation)

The rhetoric of the *Loop City* is gaining prominence, even though politicians and policy-makers have not necessarily read the spatial vision. Whether the spatial metaphor of the *Loop City* will take on a life beyond its origin, as other policy icons have done in the past (Jensen and Richardson 2003), remains to be seen. The attention the spatial metaphor has received until now suggests that future revisions of the Copenhagen Finger Plan and the National Spatial Plan (both due in the autumn 2013) would somehow have to relate to the *Loop City*.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This paper has analysed strategic spatial planning's role in legitimizing investments in transport infrastructure in Denmark through a case study of the *Loop City*. Transport infrastructures have always played an important role in spatial visions of the Øresund Region. However, evidence from spatial strategy-making at the end of the 1980s and end of the 2000s suggests spatial visions become a means to realise transport infrastructure projects, rather than the other way around. The *Loop City* brings this issue to a head by reframing a local suburban light railway as a key link in a loop around the Øresund Region.

As the case of the *Loop City* clearly illustrates, spatial visions are not neutral. They portray certain spatial rationalities and perform important roles in constructing persuasive storylines about possible futures (Jensen and Richardson 2003). Endeavours in spatial strategy-making can play an important role in bringing certain policy issues, and as illustrated in this

paper, particular policy solutions on the national agenda. This paper illustrates how strategic spatial planning, in particular the dream of the Øresund Region, has been used and reused to rationalise and legitimize particular investments in transport infrastructure through time. In fact, much of Danish strategic spatial planning seems to be guided by (narrow) policy agendas of realising particular infrastructure projects. This suggests that Danish strategic spatial planning is driven by infrastructuralism. As the opening quote clearly illustrates, this is not a new phenomenon in Denmark. Against this background, it is surprising that the topic has only received little attention in the Danish planning community and wider international academic debates.

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