THE STORY OF "UGLY DUCKLING". THE RUN-DOWN SLUM THAT SURVIVED THE SOCIALIST SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT HAS TURNED TO DESIRABLE RESIDENTIAL AREA

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ABSTRACT

The paper introduces a small Estonian wooden housing district in Tartu called Supilinn. It is an authentic borough next to the city centre of Tartu. Due to its location and qualities the district has transferred from a run-down suburb to one of the more desirable residential areas of today. The greatest qualities besides the location are the well-preserved buildings, plot structure, authentic historical milieu, natural environment and strong community. The district has been gradually built through several hundred years, that makes it unique both in Estonia but also in Europe, and its value will only increase with time passing. Its uniqueness makes it worthy to be submitted for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The district was not caught by the wind of modernism leading to irreversible changes, which has wiped out many other similar neighbourhoods. The Soviet-era poverty preserved its suburban authenticity as, unlike for example Finland, where wooden parts of the city have been refurbished, the Soviet Union had simply no funds for investment. With the arrival of the market economy, the district has become a very desirable area, which has been under strong pressure for construction and development in last ten years.

The paper presents the rise of this once unpopular district with related successes and pains. The main question for local people has become how to break the gentrification processes before the pleasant environment is exchanged with new glamour. The interests of different groups (residents, city government, real estate companies) and their plans for the future are presented. The thorough research conducted in the district in recent years provides an excellent opportunity for combined analysis of different aspects (architectural, cultural, social, economic etc.). An overview of the architectural, planning and social values is given, and development of discussion between the municipality and the local residents is presented.

Scientific as well as practical works provide a good foundation for sustainable planning for the future of the district. This is an excellent example because it is a neighbourhood, where valuable aspects have been changed, but where the third sector has organised itself to deliberately stop or at least delay the gentrification processes. The paper provides an overview of how the third sector has managed this undertaking. Will the ugly duckling always become a beautiful swan, or can the ducking, after growing up, still remain a duckling at heart.
INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Current paper focuses on the development of a small Estonian wooden housing district in Tartu city called Supilinn. Supilinn is unusual because, unlike other wooden neighbourhoods in Estonia (mostly created in the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century) Supilinn has existed in major part within its limits since at least the 17th century making it one of the oldest preserved residential areas outside city centres. There are no buildings preserved from earlier than the beginning of 19th century. The oldest streets have maintained their course from the mediaeval time but major part from the street net stem from the beginning of 19th century. About 70% of the buildings date from the 19th or the first decades of the 20th centuries. The district has been gradually built through several hundred years, that makes in unique both in Estonia but also in Europe, and its value will only increase with time passing. Its uniqueness makes it worthy to be submitted for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

During the Soviet occupation (1940-1941, 1944-1991) all planning documents indicated the demolition of old houses and establishment of completely new structures. Still, none of the plans was carried out and the whole district is almost entirely preserved contrary to similar neighbourhoods where modernistic plans have had smaller and larger impacts. The Soviet-era poverty preserved its suburban authenticity as, unlike for example Finland, where wooden parts of the city have been refurbished, the Soviet Union had simply no funds for investment.

The high proportion of pre-modern buildings form overall picture of Supilinn. Traditional buildings have both different architectural features and different construction principles than modern buildings. The construction for hundred years ago and earlier involved mostly handicraft, not industrial building methods typical at present day. Handicraft tradition with master builders was maintained also shortly after World War II, but today it has almost disappeared. Another share of buildings are in early modernist style constructed in the interwar period and simple 1,5-storey detached houses constructed immediately after WWII (15%) up to the end of the 1950s. The remaining buildings (15%) have been built in the years after 1960.

1There lives about 2000 people in Supilinn.
THE DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 1991

When the Soviet period general plans provided for the complete dismantling of Supilinn, they remained on paper only. Plans adopted since the restoration of Estonian republic 1991 have been put into practice more frequently. In 1991 the restitution of both plots and buildings started. The change of legal framework made it impossible to carry out the plans from the occupation period and the necessity to prepare a new plan for the district arose. In the end of 1997 a work with a new comprehensive plan was initiated and the final solution was approved in 2001.

The comprehensive plan has been carried out in a few quarters – one quarter is split with a new street and new buildings have risen in another, previously un-built quarter. Further, approved land-use plans for new plots allow 61 new buildings which is 18% of the existing building mass, about 20 of the buildings have been completed.

Already during the composition of the plan many residents opposed to the ideas of redevelopment and densification proposed in the plan. Active inhabitants formed a neighbourhood association, Supilinn Society after first local festival in 2002. On the initiative of the Society residents were encouraged to express their preferences in the development of the district. In 2004 a survey was conducted that investigated the values and priorities of the local people. After the survey the Society started to work out a development programme for the neighbourhood which was completed in

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6Tartu City Council, Supilinnna linnaosa üldplaneering (Comprehensive plan of Supilinn borough), Act of Tartu city council no. 88, 18 October, 2001.
2006. The document was presented for Tartu City Government that accepted the goals of the programme.

As the two documents, the valid comprehensive plan and development programme, were contradicting each other, the Society made a request to initiate a new comprehensive plan in 2006, 5 years after the last plan was approved. In 2007 the new planning process of the thematic plan was initiated. In 2010 the conditions of cultural heritage protection in thematic plan were composed on the order of city government. As a part of the work a new survey was carried out to refresh and improve the results from the 2004 survey on the population’s values. The city government drafted a planning proposal which followed the main principals of the development programme. In 2011 and 2012 Supilinn Society, Tartu City Government and Estonian Association of Planners conducted a joint project that included both interviews with opinion leaders in Supilinn and a general survey among the residents. The survey verified the popular support for the new planning solution.

The development in Supilinn is part of general tendencies in Estonia. The rise of public interest and establishment of non-governmental organisations has

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9 Supilinnna Society. The project “Osalusplaneerimine Supilinnna teemaplaneeringu koostamisel” (Collaborative planning in the process of Supilinn thematic plan), 2011.
accelerated notably in the last decade. There are many examples of new
neighbourhood associations in Tartu, Tallinn and other cities and in the countryside.
In addition, there are new sectorial non-profit organisations that deal with spatial
planning, environmental issues etc. The new initiatives have been greatly supported
by public funds like Open Estonia Foundation, National Foundation of Civil Society,
Enterprise Estonia et al.

THE CHANGE OF VALUES

Valuing of the Supilinn district has changed significantly over the past twenty years.
There has been a steady increase of people finding the neighbourhood attractive. In
1998 about 60% of inhabitants in Tartu (about 5% of all respondents were
residents of Supilinn) found Supilinn as the least suitable borough for living and 33%
of the population wanted to move away from the neighbourhood. Five years later, in
2003 the next periodical survey revealed that less than 50% of all respondents
(6.3% of the respondents were residents of Supilinn) found Supilinn least attractive
while figure in 2008 was 25% (9.6% of the respondents were residents of
Supilinn).

The recent surveys have revealed an overwhelming contentment with their
neighbourhood among the residents of Supilinn. 2010 survey which focused on the
preferred values of the population all respondents said that they liked the district.
73% of local people saw Supilinn as the most suitable place of residence. The
survey conducted in 2011 came to similar conclusions - almost all residents, 99%
liked the neighbourhood and 96% feel as belonging to the borough. 86% preferred
to continue living in Supilinn for the next decade.

The rise in popularity increased considerably the interest of real estate development
companies during the years of economic boom (2005-2007). The trend is
exemplified by the rise of real estate prices – in 1996 a flat in a hundred years old
wooden apartment building cost 37 000 kroons (2364 euros), while the same flat
cost in 2007 already 730 000 kroons (19 620 euros), the rise of 1870%.
At the time the overall prices of 2-rooms flats in Tartu rose 740%.
In the following years the prices decreased but even after the years of recession (see figure 1) in 2011
only 12% of respondents said that there was inexpensive property in Supilinn.

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13Hiob, M. and Nutt, N., Supilinna teemaplaneeringu muinsuskaitse eritingimused,
(Conditions of cultural heritage protection in thematic plan of Supilinn), 2010.
14Supilinna Society, The project “Oosalusplaneerimine Supilinna teemaplaneeringu
koostamisel” (Collaborative planning in the process of Supilinn thematic plan), 2011.
15The purchase contract in 1996 of Marja Street 10-6 flat and the official evaluation act of the
same flat in 2007.
Figure 3- Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate per capita in Estonia, percentage change on previous period. * - forecast. Statistics Estonia 2012.

There are three parties in the discussions about neighbourhood development – local citizens, real estate developers and municipality. The comprehensive plan from 2001 allowed a major renewal of the borough. There were planned new streets inside the quarters and the densification of existing building fronts were encouraged. We may notice that such development would promote the interests of real estate developers. Municipality would gain more efficient infrastructural network as there would be more users per metre, and new citizens as the current structure is intensified considerably. On the other hand, the local people were not consulted but the subsequent surveys in 2004, 2010 and 2011 showed their overwhelming opposition to the solution in the comprehensive plan.

The local citizens presented their own solutions in the development programme composed in Supilinn Society in 2006. The major differences between the official comprehensive plan and the development programme are given in the following table.

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<td>The popularity of the neighbourhood</td>
<td>According to 1998 survey among Tartu citizens Supilinn is one of the least popular residential districts</td>
<td>According to 2004 survey 78% of local respondents would like to stay in the area</td>
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<td>Projected number of inhabitants</td>
<td>The number of inhabitants is planned to increase from 1950 to 2700</td>
<td>The number of inhabitants to increase maximum to 2500</td>
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The plot structure is chaotic, does not compile with the structure of buildings and needs to be reformed. The current structure of long plots with the shorter side on street front is a value to be preserved.

The construction of new streets and reconstruction of the existing ones is necessary to improve functional connections with neighbouring areas. No new streets are to be built and the existing streets are to be constructed with historical materials and to pacify the traffic.

The built-up proportion of the residential plots to be increased to at least 20% but not more than 30% and establish new plots inside quarters. No new housing inside the existing quarters, follow the historical pattern where the major house is in the street front and auxiliary buildings are behind it.

Possibility to demolish most of the existing buildings, new street fronts on new and on a few existing streets. All existing houses to be preserved, restoration of alleys, new houses in street front.

The survey among the locals in 2004 showed that 2% favoured building new houses inside quarters and 86% supported change or annulment of the comprehensive plan.

The values described in the development programme were authentic and well-preserved wooden neighbourhood with simply and modestly designed original buildings and plot structure, human friendly, stable and pleasant milieu, strong and conscious community and great proportion of undeveloped, natural space. A good example of changing values is the look on plot structure that was regarded as an obstacle and incomprehensible in 2001 but which has gained a value of its own among the residents according to last surveys in 2010 and 2011. At present day the proposal for the new comprehensive plan has taken into these values and will probably have the popular support that the 2001 comprehensive plan has lacked.
SUMMARY

The case of Supilinn in Tartu, Estonia exemplifies the development of planning thought in historical areas where modernist planning conceptions of growth and the residents’ expectations clash. The planning document of 2001 was a product of its time, where the free use of private property and commercial profitability were regarded as primary aims. The neighbourhood was considered rundown and the city government wanted to introduce major changes to comply with visions of prosperous and effective urban environment.

On the other hand the local residents had to learn to express their preferences clearly and systematically. When the citizens were not organised their voice appeared fragmented and sometimes inconsistent. The composition of local development programme forced the residents to systematise their ideas and to choose between different scenarios with both positive and negative effects. The consolidation of the community was supported by rapid growth in real estate prices, development interest and thereby considerable changes in the neighbourhood.

After the establishment of Supilinn Society the efforts from the locals’ side were systematic and the city government had to recognise the new organisation as a partner. The growing importance of local people is reflecting the paradigm shift in planning practice where the collaboration had been more or less formal in 1990s. Nowadays, local activity groups have been established in many towns in Estonia. The tendency is strongly supported by the president of the republic. Better collaboration gives planning results that conform better with the expectations and yields improved living environments and higher quality of life.
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