EXPLORING PROCESSES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION AND CONCRETIZATION: NAVIGATING THE ROAD TO REALIZATION IN LOCAL LEVEL SPATIAL PLANNING PRACTICES IN STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

ABSTRACT

New governance approaches challenge prevailing statutory planning practices since urban development initiatives emanate not only from central and local government. This study explores the road to realization, i.e. how local planning practices organize the process of assessing the appropriateness of urban development initiatives. The results show how planning organizations face a variety of interrelated organizational and procedural conditions and choices that make planning situations unique and contextual. To deal with this contextuality, planners use processes of contextualization and concretization to relate an initiative to its environment and to gradually transform an initiative to a final land use design.

Keywords: land use planning, local government, statutory planning

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition towards a more networked society, characterized by interactive governance arrangements in which actors build coalitions to address local environmental or sustainability problems from a bottom-up perspective, has challenged prevailing legal structures since urban development initiatives emanate not only from central and local government (Salet and de Vries 2019). Consequently, the prevailing model of conformance, which characterizes many European planning systems, has experienced challenges with ‘plan implementation in the context of reconciling multi-level collective strategies to a growing plurality of local and individual projects of spatial development’ (Janin Rivolin 2008, 168). The emergence of ‘soft spaces’ (e.g. Allmendinger and Haughton 2009, Haughton et al. 2010, Olesen 2012), contrasted against the ‘hard spaces’ of statutory planning, has led to a hybrid landscape of planning approaches, in which local governments possess the regulatory power to adopt plans but are increasingly dependent on other actors to initiate and implement urban development projects. This has led to an increased interest in the interface between statutory planning and the more informal processes of local and regional governance approaches, especially in regard of the relation between strategic spatial planning (e.g. Balducci et al. 2011, Albrechts 2010, Healey 2006) and strategic statutory planning (Mäntysalo 2013, Mäntysalo et al. 2015, Mäntysalo et al. 2019).

For both planning practitioners and planning researchers, this development has resulted in a situation in which it is becoming significantly more difficult to trace the origin of different urban development initiatives, and to find forms for answering a fundamental question for planning practice, namely: ‘what is the most appropriate thing to do with any particular site?’ (Wheeler 2004, 67). Furthermore, it has also become more difficult to understand the nature and whereabouts of the ambiguous and fuzzy ‘front end’ of governance processes where problems are defined, rather than solved. The literature on travelling ideas (e.g. McCann and Ward 2010, Tait and Jensen 2007) shows the importance of being able to frame problems in local contexts in order to facilitate translation processes of different design ideals or planning concepts, e.g. Business Improvement Districts (BID). As a result of this sea-change in how urban development processes unfold, local governments are faced with a situation where they need to be able to continuously match their own territorial development agenda with the ambitions of other actors. However,
in considering that even though government aims and governance outcomes often differ in practice, government and governance are necessarily coexisting dimensions of the planning process and cannot be assumed as mutually exclusive perspectives … [i]f the building of planning decisions is or can be a multi-level, multisector and multi-actor governance process, the ultimate outcome of planning activities is however a government action, because the legitimate power to modify the existing use rights in land belongs to public authorities. (Janin Rivolin 2008, 171)

Thus, in the hybrid landscapes of governance-based initiatives and legislative-based frameworks, it is becoming increasingly important to understand how the process of assessing the appropriateness of different initiatives is organized, how such initiatives are translated into contextualized action, and how the planning process is used to cater for sustainability. This turns the attention to how local level planning organizations deal with assessments of appropriateness as well as to the practice of practical judgements of planners in these organizations. In a recent study, Forester (2019a, 13) discusses the necessity of practicing ecological wisdom and, when faced with complexity, conflict, plurality and politics, making use of a triad of practices aiming to answer three, according to Forester, unavoidable questions in practice:

“What matters here—what is significant, in the case at hand?”

“What do we know and still need to learn?”

“What can we actually do in this case?”

To address the broad range of problems related to the mismatch between existing urban development practices and prevailing legal norms (see Salet and de Vries 2019, 195-196), there is a need to explore the interface between the two (interconnected) worlds of governance and government as well as the processes that support assessments of the fit between an initiative and its local environment. The overall aim of this study is to explore and analyze the conditions and the organization of the road to realization, i.e. the interface in which development initiatives enter the statutory planning process and are transformed from an initiative to a land use design. More specifically, this study aims to identify aspects of significance for the design of the planning process and project realization in local spatial planning practice. We address the following research questions:

1. How do local spatial planning practices organize the process of assessing the appropriateness of urban development initiatives and which are the key issues of significance in this process?

2. How do the key issues of significance influence the process of contextualizing project proposals and urban development initiatives in local spatial planning practices?

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SWEDISH PLANNING SYSTEM AND PRACTICE

The Swedish planning system belongs to the family of comprehensive-integrated planning systems (Nadin and Stead 2008). This family is characterized by the ambition to achieve vertical and horizontal integration between planning levels and policy domains. In contrast to the development in other European countries, the distribution of spatial planning competence across levels of government (i.e. the state-, regional-, and the local level) has remained stable in Sweden over the last two decades (Nadin et al. 2018).

Swedish planning is characterized by the interaction between different sector plans prepared at the national, regional, and local level and municipal land use planning (Balfors et al. 2018). The Swedish spatial planning system is, from an international perspective, strongly decentralized (Johnson 2013). The municipalities hold a strong planning mandate due to what is often referred to as the municipal planning monopoly, i.e. only they can adopt legally binding land use plans (see Blücher 2013). Thus, much of the responsibility for spatial planning resides with the 290 municipalities (Persson 2013). The municipal planning instruments range from the compulsory, yet non-binding, municipal comprehensive plan to legally-binding detailed comprehensive plans (see Table 1 in Högström, Balfors, and Hammer 2017, for an overview of statutory planning
Between 2014 and 2017, almost 5000 detailed development plans were adopted across Sweden (National Board of Housing 2014, 2015, 2016a, 2017).

In Sweden, recent research has focused e.g. on the complex characteristics of city strategy-making (Brorström 2015, 2017), the strategic role of the comprehensive plan (e.g. Persson 2019, Fredriksson 2011), and how comprehensive planning is used to cope with sustainability issues (Persson 2013, Bjärstig et al. 2017). Other studies have focused on the detailed development level, e.g. analyzing the shift towards a development-led approach in the municipality of Stockholm (Zakhour and Metzger 2018), and how the organization of the detailed development planning process influences the cross-level interplay in local spatial planning practice (Högström, Balfors, and Hammer 2019).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used an integrated qualitative research design to explore and analyze the road to realization for urban development initiatives. In accordance with Stock and Burton (2011), a transdisciplinary approach was used to identify aspects of significance for the design of the planning process and project realization in local spatial planning practice. The research process was based on a case study approach in three peri-urban municipalities in the Stockholm region, Sweden.

3.1. The Research Process

This study was part of the six-year research program Södertörnsmodellen (2014-2019). The overall aim of the research program was to explore new, more sustainable, trajectories for spatial planning practice. The overarching structure of the program included three thematic think-tanks, a creative assembly aiming to elaborate upon the results from the three thematic think-tanks, and an external forum – the Södertörn Academy – where participating project-external actors (e.g. municipalities, consultancy firms, developers etc.) were invited to reflect and further elaborate upon the results findings.

This study was initiated by the formation of one thematic think-tank aiming to explore new forms for cooperation between municipalities and developers in the planning process. The think-tank was comprised of key representatives with experiences from different phases of the planning process, including participants from four different municipalities. In accordance with Lang et al. (2012), an iterative process was designed in which practitioners and researchers jointly defined, explored and analyzed challenges and opportunities in planning practice based on real-world planning examples. In the research process, the three municipal cases acted as a basis for the activities in the think-tank. First, the selected cases were used to identify challenges in particular planning situations. Next, these challenges provided a basis for an iterative reflection regarding experienced planning problems, specifically aiming to identify aspects of significance. At this stage, the research activities were designed to facilitate the inclusion of the practitioners’ experiences and knowledge based on their participation in other previous and current planning processes. Finally, the cases were used to contextualize the overall findings from the research process. In this paper, the selected cases are used to exemplify the challenges outlined in the research process.

In total, 18 research activities, each lasting for three hours, were carried out in the think-tank over three years (2017-2019). Throughout the research process, a core group of 6-8 practitioners attended all activities which were documented by participating researchers in the form of extensive notes and mind-map visualizations. The activities in the think-tank were designed to have practitioners share and expound ideas concerning their procedural conduct, i.e. there was a specific focus on the organization of the planning process. For example, a detailed schematic of the local-level detailed development planning process (see Högström, Balfors, and Hammer 2019) was used to identify procedural similarities and differences between participating municipalities.
In parallel with activities in the think-tank, a cross-disciplinary, academia-based formation was set up to reiterate and analyze the sampled material from the think tank. The results from this analytical process were then continuously fed into the think-tank, which allowed for continuous validation of the empirical findings. Moreover, the results of the analyses were iteratively cross-checked in the creative assembly and the Södertörn Academy. As an example, two senior planners from the municipalities of Uppsala and Örebro were invited to participate both in the Södertörn Academy and a subsequent think-tank meeting where preliminary results were validated and elaborated upon.

3.2. Three Municipal Planning Cases

The three cases are located in the municipalities of Haninge, Huddinge and Nynäshamn, all situated in the southern part of the Stockholm region, Sweden, see Figure 1. The main characteristics of the three adjacent municipalities are described in Table 1.

According to the regional plan, the population in the Stockholm region is 2.3 million and is expected to reach 3.4 million by 2050 (Stockholm County Council 2018). In 2016, there was an estimated shortage of 70,000 units of housing in the Stockholm region (National Board of Housing 2016b). The regional plan acts as guidance for other planning instruments, and envisions a polycentric development which is supposed contribute to the fulfilment of national goals, plans and programs of importance for sustainable development (Stockholm County Council 2018).

Figure 1: Sweden’s 290 municipalities and a land use map of the Stockholm region.

The three cases are located in the municipalities of Haninge, Huddinge and Nynäshamn, all situated in the southern part of the Stockholm region, Sweden, see Figure 1. The main characteristics of the three adjacent municipalities are described in Table 1.
Table 1: Main characteristics of the three municipalities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Haninge</th>
<th>Huddinge</th>
<th>Nynäshamn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>89,989</td>
<td>111,722</td>
<td>28,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth (2010-2018)</td>
<td>13,752</td>
<td>15,924</td>
<td>25,09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>A2: Commuter municipality close to major city</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted comprehensive plan (most recent)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted detailed development plans (new + changed) 2014-2018</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated housing shortage (2015)</td>
<td>2,547</td>
<td>3,987</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.1 Lillängsvägen – Haninge Municipality

The population in Haninge is expected to reach 105,000 by 2030, and until then the municipality plans to construct 9,000 housing units at a rate of 600 units per year (Haninge Municipality 2016). Haninge town is one of the eight designated regional cores in the Stockholm region (Stockholm County Council 2018). The recently adopted detailed comprehensive plan for Haninge town envisions urban development through three strategies which are to support sustainable urban development: dense and mixed, connected and intimate, and green and vibrant (Haninge Municipality 2018). The Lillängsvägen project is situated in the area of Vendelsö, not part of Haninge Town, see Figure 2. The area faces, due to its topography, significant problems with stormwater (Haninge Municipality 2018). Furthermore, the area holds recreational and cultural values, and two green links cut through the location (Haninge Municipality 2008).

3.2.2 Norra Grantorp – Huddinge Municipality

The area of Norra Grantorp is located in Flemingsberg, Huddinge municipality, see Figure 2. In Flemingsberg, one of the eight designated regional cores in the Stockholm region (Stockholm County Council 2018), the municipality, in close cooperation with the adjacent municipality of Botkyrka, plans to construct at least 10,000 new housing units, to create 20,000 more jobs, and to attract 15,000 more students by 2030 (Stockholm County Council, Huddinge Municipality, and Botkyrka Municipality 2018). Norra Grantorp is located to the north of the existing housing area of Grantorp, and close to existing infrastructure. Moreover, Huddinge municipality has participated in the state-led negotiation on housing and infrastructure, resulting in a decision to build a new light-rail system (Spårväg Syd) cutting across Flemingsberg and providing the area with additional public transport facilities (Swedish Government 2017).

3.2.3 Ösmo – Nynäshamn Municipality

Ösmo is a designated countryside node in the Stockholm region (Stockholm County Council 2018). Ösmo is the second largest urban settlement in the municipality with a population of approximately 3,700 (Nynäshamn Municipality 2012), see Figure 2. The municipality has developed three scenarios for future development in Ösmo, spanning between 780 and 1350 new housing units (Nynäshamn Municipality 2016). The existing center of the area, which incorporates the school, a grocery store, the municipality’s only swimming facility, and a library has a weak connection to the railroad station connecting the area to the Stockholm region (Nynäshamn Municipality 2016).

1 Statistics Sweden (2018)
2 Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2016)
4 National Board of Housing (2016b)
4. RESULTS

The results are divided into eight sections. In each section, one theme derived from the analysis of the results from the research process is presented. These themes are: (i) the organization of planning activity, (ii) initiatives and appropriateness, (iii) the architecture of plans, (iv) land ownership, (v) the planning approach, (vi) local level planning pathways, and (vii) process design and project realization. In the final section, a summary of the results is presented.

4.1. The Organization of Planning Activity

Over the recent years, the participating municipalities have experienced a shift in terms of development volume. As a consequence, one comprehensive planner explains how the municipality has recently changed its stance from 'grateful' (towards external developers) to developing (which implies a more pro-active approach to planning). This turn makes new demands on the municipal organization and has led to a need to adapt, and advance, governing
processes. According to the practitioners, a significant share of the planning activities is organized as projects, including planning at the detailed development planning level. In the municipality of Nynäshamn, a rather small planning organization, is according to one planner engaged in over 70 different planning projects at different stages. In the municipalities, there are project manuals that describe tasks and how to organize competencies in different phases of the planning and development process, e.g. PLEXMAN (Huddinge Municipality 2010).

However, throughout the research process, the practitioners outline a wide variety of aspects which influence their project-based practices. In particular, the municipal officials point to four interrelated factors that influence the conditions for the municipal planning process: the overarching budgeting process (resulting in the three-year Goals and Budget document), the comprehensive plan, the project plan for urban development projects – a shortlist of potential and ongoing projects, and the management of the detailed development planning projects, see Figure 3.

According to one planner, the Goals and Budget document contains key performance indicators and allocates resources across the organization. This allocation is important, since involved competencies who, according to the manuals are to participate in the projects, are positioned at different departments. Moreover, according to the practitioners, both municipal officials and politicians are, directly, or indirectly, involved in making decisions regarding all four factors, and thus in co-constructing the relations between them. Based on the practitioners’ accounts, these relations influence the conditions for governing spatial development processes across the municipal territory, and vary between municipalities. One reason for this is differences in size and population. For example, according to one planner, it is uncommon that politicians in larger municipalities engage in individual planning processes. Nevertheless, one planner highlights the difficulties with making the politicians to understand how the pressure for development influences the planning organization – priorities need to be made, which is difficult when many projects are given high priority.

4.2. Initiatives and Appropriateness

Based on the practitioners’ accounts, the municipalities play a key role in orchestrating urban development processes, but quite often the initiative comes from someone else. This, according to the municipal officials, makes it important to be able to assess the appropriateness of such initiatives. According to one planner, it is essential that this process is transparent and open for broad participation since it is risky ‘to have thought too far in a world that does not exist’. In a hierarchic and departmentalized organizational structure, it becomes important that a vision tied to individual project proposals correlate with the intentions of, and decisions made in, different parts of the organization. It is necessary to be able to level the expectations tied to any initiative with a realistic understanding of the character, or nature, of a site, location or area – the potential challenges and problems need to guide and inform the vision. In practical terms, relevant

![Figure 3: Factors influencing the municipal planning process.](image-url)
competencies from different parts of the organization need to become involved in assessing the appropriateness of specific proposals, based on their understanding of the situation at hand.

In the view of one planner in the municipality of Haninge, where the initiative often comes from private actors, it is important that different proposals are treated in accordance with legislation, i.e. developers are to ask for a preliminary response. This approach gives the municipality time to assess and evaluate whether there is a fit between the proposal at hand, and the municipality’s intentions. In Tyresö, the municipality has advocated a different approach where developers have been able to meet key representatives from the municipality to discuss their ideas, partly to screen the market for interesting initiatives, and partly to avoid applications for a preliminary response which are likely to result in a negative outcome.

4.3. The Architecture of Plans

According to the practitioners, the cross-level interaction in municipal practice and the interplay between plans prepared at different levels – the architecture of plans – is of influence both for the process of assessing the appropriateness of individual intentions as well as for guiding actions in the local-level detailed development planning processes. However, whether strategic documents act as guidance is related to their relevance. According to the planners, relevance has a temporal dimension, in general, the municipal officials claim that relevance declines with time. Sooner or later, the link between the formalized intentions of e.g. the comprehensive plan and actual development is broken. This happens when the intentions of the adopted comprehensive plan diverge from the real, prevailing, intentions. Nevertheless, one planner underscores the importance of formalized, adopted, intentions (including goals) as a policy reference, and for being able to hit the politicians over the head with what they themselves have previously decided.

Based on the practitioners’ accounts, the guiding role of strategic documents, and another aspect of their relevance, is associated with the level of detail. For the strategists, the comprehensive plan and other more strategic plans are to constitute a basis – an underlying programming – for individual projects. However, according to the local-level planners, the strategic visions are often characterized by their generality, and lack the precision and distinctiveness sought for at the detailed development planning level. According to this planner, important issues decisive for the implementation of individual projects are not investigated at the proper level. In particular, the planner claims that relevant guidance needs to be available in the early phase of the detailed development planning process because, if not, it becomes difficult both to be clear about what the municipality expects from the developer(s) and to find the means to safeguard the implementation of these expectations. The newly introduced mid-level, non-statutory area planning process in the municipality of Huddinge has, according to one planner, been introduced to facilitate the translation of overarching visions into more precise guidelines for spatial development in selected areas (see also Huddinge Municipality 2018).

In the municipalities, the architecture of plans differ. In the three planning cases, there are variations in terms of scope, format, and content. In Ösmo, the municipality adopted a statutory detailed comprehensive plan in 2006, followed by a statutory plan program in 2010 and more recently, a non-statutory structural plan in 2016. These plans have different content but are, spatially, overlapping. In Haninge, the municipality adopted a non-statutory general development program for the area of Vendelsö in 2008, and an area-specific plan program for Lillängsvägen in 2016. These plans differ in terms of content and spatial scope. In 2009, Huddinge and the adjacent municipality of Botkyrka jointly prepared a statutory detailed comprehensive plan for Flemingsberg. This plan reached the consultation phase, but was never adopted. Today, the overarching vision for the area is defined in a non-statutory development program, co-produced by the municipalities of Huddinge and Botkyrka, and Stockholm County Council (see Stockholm County Council, Huddinge Municipality, and Botkyrka Municipality 2018). Moreover, Huddinge
municipality has decided to prepare non-statutory development plans for different municipal areas, of which Flemingsberg is one (Huddinge Municipality 2018). The strategic, upper-tier, planners are keen to have individual projects to pay regard to the outcomes of existing analyses, and planners at the detailed development planning level expect higher-tier plans to constitute usable guidance and to support their work. Thus, according to the practitioners, the available architecture of plans influences the contextualization of individual projects as well as the cross-level consistency, i.e. how development on the ground, in total, contribute to established strategic goals.

4.4. Land Ownership

According to the practitioners, the design and orchestration of the detailed development planning process is associated with land ownership. Depending on whether an area or site is owned by the municipality, or by private actor(s), the trajectory of development, and the sequencing of action in the planning process differs. In the research process, the practitioners outline three main features related to land ownership.

First, land ownership is related to, but does not dictate, how the initiative emerges. In other words, who owns the land thus influences the origin of specific planning, and project, proposals. The planning in Lillängsvägen was initiated by the private property owners, and the municipality owns only a small piece of the land within the area. According to the planner, the property owners had previously applied for a preliminary response from the municipality which was refuted. According to participants from Nynäshamn, the municipality has traditionally not initiated planning by themselves. This makes the Ösmo case quite different, even unique, since the municipality, due to political will, has taken the initiative and the area is, to a great extent, municipally owned. Hence, the planning in Ösmo challenges the traditional way of working in the municipality and, due to the prior ‘grateful’ stance, the officials have not engaged with land allocations for a long time. In Huddinge, the municipality owns most of the land in the area of Norra Grantorp. Embedded into the overall development of Flemingsberg, the municipality took the initiative to engage private actors in an envisioning process for the area. According to the planner, this constitutes a novel vision-led approach to planning in the municipality, aiming to include private actors in programming the area at a very early stage of the process without discussing or granting land allocations.

Second, planning on municipal land vis-à-vis private land determines the statutory procedure to be applied. In recent years, new legislation has been passed, providing definitions of land allocations5 and land development agreements6. Moreover, these pieces of legislation made it compulsory for municipalities, who intend to enter into these agreements, to adopt guidelines for both land allocations and land development agreements. Both Huddinge and Nynäshamn have adopted such guidelines, aiming to support the choice of procedure (Huddinge Municipality 2016, Nynäshamn Municipality 2018). In Haninge, the documents have not yet been adopted, despite recurring requests from the municipal officials.

According to the practitioners, and in accordance with the adopted guidelines, municipal land ownership implies a choice between different land allocation procedures (direct, bid, competition). However, the practitioners report that there is also a fourth option (comparative

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5 A land allocation is defined as ‘an agreement between a municipality and a developer that gives the developer the exclusive right to negotiate with the municipality for a limited period of time, and under given conditions, on the transfer, or lease of a certain area of land owned by the municipality’ (SFS 2014:899, our translation)

6 A land development agreement is an ‘agreement on the implementation of a detailed plan and on co-financing between a municipality and a developer or a property owner for land not owned by the municipality, but not an agreement between a municipality and the state on development of state transport infrastructure’ (SFS 2017:181, our translation)
bid), which implies that the selection is based not only on price, but also on other qualities. Furthermore, the municipality need to decide whether the land is to be sold or leased (site leasehold). According to one developer, whose primary business concept is to develop rental apartments, the choice regarding the latter drastically influences their ability to participate in e.g. a land allocation bid.

Third, land ownership indirectly influences the possibility to realize certain strategic objectives (e.g. mixed housing). For example, it is not possible to regulate the form of tenure in the detailed development plan. Hence, if the municipality owns the land, it becomes possible to initiate a search for, and grant a land allocation to, a trustworthy actor who has specialized in rentals. In general, the municipal representatives assert that it is more difficult to pose demands when the municipality does not own the land, and consequently the municipalities become more dependent on the character of private initiatives. This trait is exemplified in Lillängsvägen, where the planned development, if it exceeds a specific limit in terms of development rights (the total amount of housing), will generate a need for a pre-school within the area. The future location of the (eventual) pre-school becomes a matter of negotiation between the property owners and the municipality.

4.5. The Planning Approach

According to the municipal officials, they face different challenges due to the unique situation at hand and the character of planning activity. The project manuals define the process for detailed development planning projects. However, as exemplified in the case of Norra Grantorp, the municipal planner operates in an earlier phase. According to the planner, this means working in a landscape between the comprehensive plan, and individual projects. The planner expresses, a view which is confirmed by the participating developers, that the early phase is characterized by ‘a multitude of actors, but no structure’. In other words, the vision-led process is non-formalized and non-standardized – there is no protocol. According to the planner in Huddinge, planning formally starts after the early phase, when different projects are initiated. Participants from other municipalities refers to this early phase as an informal phase. In Norra Grantorp, Huddinge, the planner tried to engage private actors in an envisioning process prior to detailed development planning and land allocations. This effort, according to the planner, was unsuccessful and failed due to the private actors’ unwillingness to participate. One reason for this was that it became difficult for developers to make risk estimations – the developers were unable to calculate the potential rewards from their participation. The municipality’s aspirations to involve the developers at this early stage of the planning process did not match the developers’ expectations regarding how far planning had come.

According to the municipal officials, the role of the plan has changed, and it is no longer appropriate to ‘point with your whole hand’. This influences both the approach to plan preparation and the character of the plan. Whilst the former revolves around how private actors become engaged in plan preparation, the latter concerns the character and content of different instruments (e.g. the map of plan, the plan description, the land allocation) utilized in the planning process. As an example, one representative from Tyresö municipality explains that detailed development plan preparation is in most cases a joint venture, and the municipality has developed programs of quality which are appended to the land development agreement. As a consequence, the sought for qualities are not necessarily formalized as plan regulations in the legally binding map of plan.

In Ösmo, Nynäshamn, the municipality took the initiative to initiate planning. However, the municipal officials search for an established actor, an ‘anchor’ (Sw: Ankaraktör) who can assist the municipality and play an advanced and advisory role during plan preparation. Because nothing has been built in Ösmo for a long time, and accentuated by its peripheral location, the municipal officials are faced with uncertainties regarding both land value and market interest. The anchor is
considered pivotal for testing the feasibility of the plan – how much is a reasonable volume of development in the particular case of Ösmo? Moreover, the planners struggle with deciding where to initiate detailed development planning, to decide upon the scope of the first detailed development plan (i.e. establishing plan boundaries), and the sequencing of implementation within the plan area (different sites). One reason for this is parallel, ongoing debates regarding the existing, centrally placed, school, and the high-voltage power lines that cut through the area.

4.6. Local Level Planning Pathways

Based on the accounts of the participants in the research process, ten local level planning pathways can be identified, see Table 2. According to the practitioners, these pathways generate different trajectories for the planning process. The investigated cases are related to the pathways. Lillängsvägen, characterized by private land ownership and active participation belongs to pathway 6. In Ösmo, the planners are faced with the challenge of choosing between different pathways (2-5, 7-10). Furthermore, in Ösmo, the municipality can use different approaches during different stages of planning since one pathway, according to the practitioners, can eventually lead to another. For example, a proposal being the runner-up in a land allocation competition may stand out as an appropriate initiative which, at another site, can render a direct allocation given specific conditions.

Table 2: Ten local-level planning pathways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land ownership</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipality alone</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality and developer(s)</td>
<td>6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan preparation</td>
<td>Direct Bid Comparative bid Competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land allocation procedure</td>
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</table>

According to the practitioners, the ten pathways all have (and sometimes share) distinct features. For example, pathway 2-5 predispose quite flexible plans. One reason for this is that the municipalities, in general, do not possess the means to implement their own plans – construction is not a municipal activity. A flexible plan is recognized as having general and allowing characteristics and plan regulations. This allows for a variety of land uses and, due to its flexibility, the plan can last longer and attract developers with different specializations and niches. However, this does not mean that anything goes – the imposed flexibility results in a greater responsibility to pay regard to subsequent stages of the development process. In the case where the land allocation is conducted after the plan is adopted, it becomes necessary to translate the intentions of the plan into a document specifying the criteria for the land allocation.

In the study, the practitioners highlight that some pathways are more common than others in different municipalities. As an example, pathway 1 is unusual since it involves a change of land use on private land without the participation of the private actor(s). If the municipality needs to change the land use in such locations, it is more common to buy the land prior to plan preparation. This results in a different trajectory and another pathway. The differences among municipalities exist due to land ownership, the characteristics of the area at hand (low / high land value, market interest) as well as organizational and personal experience and preferences. For example, since it is more resource-consuming for both the municipality and developers to craft the criteria and to participate in a land allocation competition, this pathway is preferable for sites with a high estimated land value. One senior planner compared the evaluation of proposals resulting from the use of pathways 3→4→5 / 8→9→10 as going from long jump (bid) to figure
skating (competition). In short, the local-level planning pathways make different organizational, professional and procedural demands regarding how the projects travel from initiation to realization, and a municipality characterized by high land values and which owns much of the land faces a richer variety of pathway options.

Finally, the practitioners highlight variations not just between different pathways, but also within them. In some pathways (7-10), the municipality can choose when to proceed with the land allocation (e.g. before or after consultation on the plan), i.e. to some extent the municipality conducts planning themselves and then they invite private actors. According to the practitioners, the differences between, and within, the identified pathways make different demands on the interplay between different municipal departments as the trajectory of the process changes.

4.7. Process Design and Project Realization

Due to the differences of the identified pathways, the process of assessing how a proposal relates to its environment takes different forms. Nevertheless, according to both the municipal officials and the developers, it is important to create a vision for the project in the beginning of the detailed development planning process. In the case when the planning process is a joint venture (e.g. pathway 6), the municipal planners and the developers agree that it is favorable to keep things open in the very beginning of the process. An idea is enough, the important thing, at this point, is to devote time to elaborate on the major, decisive, questions. One developer claims that certain issues cannot be resolved in the early phases, neither is there a need to do so – it is however important to ensure that such questions are not lost as the process advances. For the developers, a common vision, without too much detail is just enough, as long as this vision has been firmly established with the politicians. The developers enter the process with certain expectations, and for them it is of the essence that the politicians’ expectations are levelled with their own throughout the process, to avoid surprises along the road. Such expectations regard e.g. an indicative development volume and an estimation of cost distribution. To one developer, it is essential to be as clear as possible at the earliest possible stage since everything that is not quantified implies a risk for the developer.

The municipal officials, on the other hand, are keen to simultaneously have just enough information to be able to be very clear about what is negotiable, and what is not. In other words, they are in need of an understanding of the nature of the major questions. According to one planner, it is not unusual that developers have, in general, come too far already at the start of the process. According to a developer, one reason for this is that the developers are keen to gain political support for a project, a process which is facilitated by detailed representations and drawings of a project.

Activities in the initial phase of the project are important since they influence subsequent phases and the implementation of the project. According to one developer, the municipalities’ procedures differ at this stage. In certain municipalities, the developer receives a compendium containing important documents and a checklist with demands regarding e.g. sustainability aspects and guidelines for parking. However, the developers experience that posed demands are often too strong, too many and unrealistic in terms of implementation. One developer asserts that national building regulations are enough. If not, there must be economic incentives for the proposed demands, and this becomes a matter of negotiation. Moreover, the strategic documents often are too focused on how to do something instead of focusing on a purpose (e.g. providing a standardized parking norm instead of aiming to increase mobility).

Furthermore, it is important how the vision is formed and who is involved. Based on the case examples, this process varies quite a lot depending on the situation at hand. For example, in the early phase of the Lillängsvägen project, which was initiated by private property owners, the planner conducted a workshop to establish a common vision for the project. According to the planner, this was challenging, because the planning included actors with different experiences and
some of these actors were not used to think in this way. Consequently, they struggled with articulating their intentions and ambitions. Some of the actors had their architects with them which, according to the planner, facilitated the process. The planner collected the participants’ perspectives and their statements and, by linking what the actors had said with existing municipal strategies, formed 10 guidelines which were then communicated with the involved actors. According to the planner, it is necessary to include existing municipal guidelines since, at times, there is a need to feedback political decisions. To create trust and to shape solutions, engagement and openness, the planner emphasizes the importance of being inclusive, honest, open, informative and responsive.

Due to the character of the project, the actors needed to cooperate in order to pull it through. The plan program was adopted, and the project has entered the detailed development planning phase. New actors, who did not participate in the process of preparing the program, have entered the planning process which makes new demands on how to proceed. Now, the challenge, according to the planner, is to stand by the vision, especially when things get tough. As the process is moving forward, the planner explains that the vision is continuously tested – is it clear enough? Will everyone be faithful to it as it becomes more detailed? Can it act as guidance when carving out the details? As put by one developer, ‘in some cases, it is difficult to know until you start digging’.

4.8. Summary of the Results
Based on the practitioners’ experiences from different phases of the planning process, the results highlight the organizational and procedural challenges related to planning and project realization. Based on the results, planning organizations face a variety of interrelated choices regarding the organization of the organization, how to organize the assessment of internal/external initiatives are to be considered appropriate or not, how the architecture of plans is to be designed in order to facilitate the cross-level interplay across the planning hierarchy, whether the municipality should actively buy / sell land to position the planning process, how to approach the planning process and how to involve developers, to carefully assess the consequences of entering different planning pathways, and finally, how involved actors are to design and use the planning process to realize appropriate projects.

5. Discussion
Based on the results, and as illustrated by the case examples, planning organizations face both site-specific conditions and interrelated organizational and procedural choices that make planning situations contextual. Consequently, echoing the argument of Forester (2019b), planning practice need to be able to improvise creatively in unique and changing settings. In the following discussion, a model aiming to elucidate the character of such improvisation in the planning process is presented. Based on the analysis of the results, creative improvisation includes engaging with the interrelated processes of contextualization and concretization. For conceptual reasons, the discussion is presented in two main sections. In the first section, the key characteristics of the process of contextualization are discussed. In the second section, the focus shifts to processes of concretization and the road to realization.

5.1. The Process of Contextualization
The results show, irrespective of public or private origin, the importance of organizing the process of assessing the appropriateness of different initiatives. Based on the analysis of the results, in practice, this is a process which aims at generating an increased understanding regarding if, and how, to change land use in a location (u), and includes looking back (1) into organizational and individual, experiential, history, looking up (2) to search for guidance across the architecture of plans, looking around (3) in space to identify issues of significance, looking down (4) on the planning-implementation interface, and looking forward (5) towards future action in the process, at different points across time (t), see Figure 4.
Exploring Processes of Contextualization and Concretization: Navigating the Road to Realization in Local Level Spatial Planning Practices in Stockholm, Sweden

The process of looking back (1) concerns the logic of appropriateness, i.e. rule-following in organizations (e.g. March 2009). For example, based on the results, available manuals contribute to shaping protocol for process participation. The manuals prescribe a given project-based structure to guide the process, i.e. connecting (1) and (5). However, in both Ösmo and Norra Grantorp the planners express that they are engaging with something new – one interpretation is that this can be explained by a lack of individual and/or organizational experience regarding this specific planning situation. As discussed by Rydin, Amjad, and Whitaker (2007, 368), new usable bureaucratic knowledge – one which is ‘fit for purpose as shaped by perceptions of political feasibility and the structures of institutional processes’ – need to be created.

Regarding the process of looking up (2), the results echo the findings of Högström, Balfors, and Hammer (2017) since the role, format and content of adjacent planning instruments are claimed to influence the cross-level interaction in practice. In particular, the results highlight the necessity to continuously monitor the relevancy of the existing architecture of plans. The cyclical strategic incrementalism (Mäntysalo et al. 2019) adopted in Lahti, Finland, offers a promising perspective on how to deal with this temporal-related issue within a statutory framework.

The process of looking around (3) relates to the two first skills of Forester’s (2019a) triad of practices: contextual diagnosis (what matters here and why is it of significance?) and leveraging expertise (what do we know and what is yet to learn?). This echoes the argument that there is a need to pay regard ‘to the objective and physical matters of space and place as well as the subjective and social concerns about space and place’ (Davoudi 2012, 432). The planning in Lillängsvägen exemplifies the planner sewing together an understanding of the location’s physicality (severe stormwater problems) with the actors’ desires. Furthermore, looking around (3) is interlinked with looking back (What do we usually pay attention to? Who is typically involved?) and looking up (What can we learn from existing policy, programs and plans?). As illustrated by Rydin (2012), actor-network theory constitutes a promising analytical concept for understanding both the role of planning documents as intermediaries, and how actants shape agency in specific planning situations.

Looking down (4) relates to, in different planning situations, understanding the conditions for action. Based on the results, at the detailed development planning level, this is related to land ownership, the implications of the utilized planning approach (i.e. how to involve private actors, and when) and how different planning pathways influence the process. At the strategic levels, in Sweden, the regional plan, the municipal comprehensive plan and detailed comprehensive plans are not legally binding, and accordingly, are to act as guidance. Based on the results of this study, it seems as this capacity resides in the relation between practices across the planning hierarchy, rather than in the strategic plan – detailed development planners and developers struggle with looking up (2) (see also Högström, Balfors, and Hammer 2019). This makes it necessary to
connect the process of looking down at the strategic level with the process of looking up conducted in the planning processes at the local level. Zakhour and Metzger (2018) portray the difficulties with inserting another layer of planning, in their case area planners in the municipality of Stockholm, as a means to facilitate this process. The interfaces, and the eventual/potential red thread between the strategic level, the detailed development planning level and the realm of developers need further exploration and analysis.

Looking forward involves understanding how to proceed and how to design subsequent phases of the process, i.e. what to do in (t´), given the simultaneous processing of (1)-(4) in (t). What is of concern is how to organize future thinking and interaction, i.e. (1)-(5) in (t) based on the prevailing understanding in the present (t). This, following Forester (2019b), involves also how to work with others, and to avoid deliberative malpractices. Accordingly, the planner in Lillängsvägen emphasizes the virtues of being inclusive, honest, open, informative and responsive in order to shape solutions – doing is not enough, the character of doing matters too.

In short, the process of contextualization aims mainly to respond to the question of how a certain initiative is related to its environment – a key ingredient for assessing the appropriateness of any initiative. Based on the results, this environment means not the environment, but many (e.g. institutional, organizational, legislative and physical). Through the process of contextualization, the understanding of appropriateness grows by relating the intention to these environments throughout the planning process.

5.2. The Process of Concretization and the Road to Realization

Based on the analysis of the results, the realization of an initiative involves navigating between the interrelated processes of contextualization and concretization. Whilst the former aims to answer how an initiative is related to its environment, the latter aims, echoing the third strand of Forester’s (2019a) triad of practices, to craft negotiated action – i.e. to decide what to do. This leap of materialization reverses the process of contextualization, and transforms established relations (1)-(5) between the intention and its environment into a provisional design – a representation of what to do in the planning situation, see Figure 5. In other words, the process of concretization is an activity in which estimations of appropriateness resulting from the process of contextualization is gradually (t)→(t´) transformed into a final land use design (u´).

Based on the results of this study, local spatial planning practices use the interrelated processes of contextualization and concretization to structure the road to realization, see Figure 6. The road to realization, generated by the oscillatory processes of contextualization and concretization, both establishes object-environment relations and reworks such relations into a land use design through multiple iterations leading to increased clarity. In other words, the road to realization is defined by the recursive processes of contextualization and concretization, defining both the initiative as well as their own future use. Consequently, past experiences and future expectations derived from the oscillating processes of contextualization and concretization become
constitutive elements of creative improvisation in the present.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 6: The road to realization – the processes of contextualization and concretization.**

The presented model of the road to realization resembles how Hoch (2009) thinks about the planning process as an act of composition, pending between framing the planning situation and creating representations. Moreover, the model reflects Campbell’s (2012) distinction between the analytical (contextualization) and the synthetic (concretization).

However, the empirical findings shows the importance of positioning the model into its organizational and procedural context. Based on the results of this study, this context is influenced by a range of interconnected aspects including the organization of the municipal organization, how the process of assessing the appropriateness at an early stage is organized, land ownership, the utilized planning approach, the ten identified pathways and, finally, how individual planners use their practical judgement to design individual processes, either alone or in collaboration with others. Thus, the results show that the road to realization is not a concern only for individual projects, but needs to be understood through its interdependency with practices across the planning hierarchy as well as in relation to the outcomes of local and regional governance approaches.

Based on the experiences from the research process, it is common to state that a project proposal is appropriate due to its very entrance into the process, instead of assuming that the process is the tool planners use to assess the appropriateness of any initiative by relating to its environment.

### 6. Conclusions

This study shows that knowledge regarding the identified aspects of significance is essential for practicing the road to realization, and for the design of the planning process and project realization in local spatial planning practice. Based on the results, three main conclusions can be drawn.

First, the study shows that the process of assessing the appropriateness of urban development initiatives takes different forms depending on planning context. In the case of private land ownership, the process of assessing the appropriateness at an early stage becomes important and relevant competencies from different parts of the organization need to become involved in assessing the appropriateness of specific proposals, based on their understanding of the situation at hand.

Second, the study identifies five aspects of significance for the process of contextualization, which is used to relate the initiative to its environment. These include looking back (into personal and organizational experience), looking up (engaging with the architecture of plans), looking around (in space, to search for matters of fact and matters of concern), looking down (to assess the conditions for action), and looking forward (to decide how to proceed and how to design subsequent phases of the process).
Third, the process of looking down is of particular importance for the realization of plans and projects. At the detailed development planning level, this means engaging with developers to continuously assess the feasibility of the plan proposal. Here, as shown in the Lillängsvägen case, the process design is essential for how to navigate the road to realization.

7. REFERENCES


Haninge Municipality. 2016. Översiktsplan 2030.


