

## **Towards a narrative typology of urban planning narratives for, in and of planning in Jätkäsaari, Helsinki**

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### **Abstract**

Urban planning and theory have witnessed an increasing interest in narratives. There remain, however, diverging notions of what is meant with narratives, and of their function and use. This article provides a taxonomy of narratives in the context of planning, illustrated by the redevelopment of Jätkäsaari, Helsinki. Three distinct types of narrative can be identified in the context of urban planning: narratives for, in and of planning. This paper argues that a narrative typology of urban planning that draws on concepts from narrative theory could bring new insights into the discursive urban practices that have appearing during past decades.

### **Keywords**

urban planning  
waterfront development  
Helsinki  
urban form  
narrative

“The city should be thought of as a story”

Tuomas Rajajärvi, former head of the Helsinki City Planning Department.

### **Introduction**

Urban planning and urban studies have witnessed an increasing interest in the potential of stories, narratives and discourses as building blocks for urban (re)development. Some have even seen a distinct “narrative turn” or “story turn” (Cohen, 2008, pp. 111–115; Sandercock, 2010) in urban planning practices. While, in the wake of the argumentative (Fischer and Forester, 1993) and communicative paradigm shifts (Innes, 1995), there has been an expanding research tradition that examines narratives in the context of planning, there remain diverging notions of what is meant with such narratives, and of their function and use. This article will sketch the tentative outlines of a narrative typology of urban planning, drawing on recent advances in narrative and literary theory. This paper proposes to distinguish between three types of storytelling in the context of planning: narratives for planning (local narratives of an area, prior to the planning process); narratives in planning (narratives in planning documents and activities, authorized by planners); and narratives of planning (the local narratives of an area and its planning as they develop after, and simultaneously to, the planning process proper). The threefold taxonomy proposed here seeks to dispel some of the considerable conceptual unclarity that still reigns in the field. The second aim of this article lies in the application of this typology, which is aimed to constitute a hermeneutic tool to enable scholars, planners and the general public to talk in more precise terms about the authorship, context and objectives of specific kinds of narratives in the context of planning. This would be beneficial also for more critical assessments of the use and misuse of narratives in planning contexts, and the

appropriation or mixed authorship of narratives, especially when they are presented as local or authentic.

I will start out with a brief overview of the main trends in contemporary research on narrative planning. A typology of narratives used in relation to urban planning will be drawn up, illustrated by the planning of a waterfront area in Helsinki, Finland. The controversial plans for a tower hotel in this area in the Finnish capital will be examined in more detail to illustrate how this proposed typology can shed light on the dynamics between competing narratives in the context of planning. The conclusion sketches some of the remaining challenges and avenues for future research.

## **Methods and Sources**

The conceptual and methodological framework, laid out in the following three sub-sections, is drawn up from approaches to narratives within urban studies and planning theory, and, in particular, from concepts from literary and narrative studies. These include the distinction between story and narrative, and the concept of the micro-narrative. Drawing on this methodological framework, this article engages in a narrative analysis of selected texts from one planning case in Helsinki, Finland: Jätkäsaari, part of the West Harbour area, one of several waterfront areas in the Finnish capital currently undergoing large-scale urban development. The material comprises a selection of the following texts, published roughly between 2000 and 2014: planning documents (including commentaries to local master plans), media articles, texts by private companies, official websites and leaflets, relevant social media sites, branding texts and including also relevant literary texts.

There are several reasons for choosing this specific planning project. First of all, it is an area in which urban planning's narrative characteristics have been explicitly foregrounded by the city, the City Planning Department, as well as by consultancy agencies involved. The former head of the Helsinki City Planning Department, Tuomas Rajajärvi, has been called "the man who zones stories", and he has stated on several occasions that the city should be thought of as a story (Häkkinen, 2000). In the planning process of Jätkäsaari, narratives can be found in manifold forms, from official websites with historical stories of the area to the graphic identity created for Jätkäsaari by the marketing agency BOTH. The most conspicuous narrative element in Jätkäsaari's planning process was the commissioning of *Hyvä jätkä* ("Nice Chap"), a literary novel written by Hannu Mäkelä (2009), to be distributed to everyone moving to Jätkäsaari. The case of Jätkäsaari, moreover, may have considerable relevance for our understanding of international examples of urban waterfront development, since it shares characteristics with a range of other international post-industrial harbour areas, from Hamburg's Hafencity to Toronto, from London's Thames Gateway to Tokyo's Odaiba area. While some of Jätkäsaari's key characteristics are fairly prototypical, the development adds to the existing literature on post-industrial urban waterfront renewal through the specificities of its periodical and regional context. It exemplifies and contextualizes the early twenty-first century rhetoric of inner city renewal and of the renaissance of the (inner) city, while also shedding light on the current renewed appetite for high-rise and iconic identity markers in the urban realm, both in the Nordics and internationally. Furthermore, as a Nordic case study with original textual material that is primarily written in Finnish, the examination of Jätkäsaari complements the considerable existing research on waterfront developments in English-speaking countries, and it makes available to an international audience material that would otherwise have remained largely inaccessible.

Jätkäsaari is located in the south-western corner of the Helsinki peninsula. Construction, which began in 2009, is projected to reach conclusion in 2025, when it is planned to be the home of 16.000 inhabitants and 6.000 jobs (see Othengrafen, 2012, pp. 137–174) (Figures 1, 2).

Figure 1  
Information pillar in Jätkäsaari. Picture by the author. Picture taken on 14.4.2015.



Figure 2  
Jätkäsaari under construction. Picture by the author. Picture taken on 27.5.2015.



## **The “Narrative” Turn in Urban Planning**

The paradigm shift from a top-down kind of planning towards a more dialogic, participatory and discursive form of planning (cf. Fischer, 2009) also includes a move towards the acknowledgement and increasing use of diverse urban narratives. Sandercock (2010) situates the origins of what she calls the “story turn” in an epistemological crisis in planning theory – the need to account for the diverse kinds of ways of knowing that exist apart from technical knowledge. It is a paradigm shift that can be traced to Boyer’s Foucaultian analysis of American planning history and its discourses (1983), and which gained critical impetus with Fischer and Forester’s volume *The Argumentative Turn* (1993), which drew its inspiration from the linguistic turn and from Habermas’s theory of communicative action. In the wake of the argumentative turn, new analytical approaches towards planning narratives appeared, drawing on rhetorics (Throgmorton, 1993, 1996), and the analysis of story lines and discourse coalitions (Hajer, 1993), amongst others. Simultaneously, new conceptions of how planners work came into being, proposing communicative models of planning to take into account more diverse local narratives. Following a distinguishable communicative turn (Healey, 1993; Innes, 1995), new roles for planners have been proposed, such as that of the deliberative practitioner (Forester, 1999), and more recently, models for dealing with complex and differing narratives in public policy (Fischer, 2009; Forester, 2009; Innes and Booher, 2010). If planning practices have moved towards becoming more discursive and more dialogic, this entails a vision of the planner as a moderator of potentially competing narratives (see Mandelbaum, 1991). Leading urban theorists such as Patsy Healey have consequently called for planners to actively take part in conscious “city story-writing” (2000, pp. 527–528).

While there has been a remarkable amount of writing within urban theory concerning narratives and planning, it could be argued that there prevails a proliferation of approaches to narratives in the context of planning, and that there is, by consequence, a limited degree to which these various studies communicate with each other. Recent research speaks of “imaginaries” (Bridge and Watson, 2000; Weiss-Sussex and Bianchini, 2006), urban “images” (Pagano and Bowman, 1995, pp. 44–67), “mythical chronotopes” (Keunen and Verraest, 2012), “narratives” (Tewdwr-Jones, 2011), “tales” (Dormans, 2008), “stories” (Sandercock, 2003, 2010) and “metaphors” (Baeten, 2001), amongst many others. Applying concepts from narrative studies and drawing up a taxonomy of narratives in the context of planning – a task this article sets out to do – will be helpful in distinguishing the different kinds of narratives at stake in planning, and the way in which stories may “travel” from the one context to the other. The analysis of planning narratives on the basis of such a typology and their transformation during planning processes could then provide a helpful instrument with the potential to further expose issues of politics, decision-making and narrative legitimacy in planning processes: whose stories are retained, and under what guise? How are these negotiated?

## **Narrative Studies and Planning – Story and Narrative**

So far, narratology or literary studies have had limited impact on the study of narrative in urban planning (see however, Keunen and Verraest, 2012). Urban planning and theory are not, however, the only fields in which the past few decades have seen an increasing interest in questions of narrative. Indeed, as Kreiswirth (2005) points out, in “the last decade narrative has become a significant focus of inquiry in virtually all disciplinary formations” (p. 378). Theorists within literary studies and the social sciences have developed models with which to adapt narratological concepts to non-literary narratives, such as biographies, media narratives, patient diaries, to name but a few examples (see e.g. Bruner, 1991; Heinen and Sommer, 2009). The result has been a conceptualization of narrative that can, with some modifications, also be adapted to urban planning.

What counts as “narrative” in the context of urban planning? Reflecting a widely accepted approach in narrative theory, Gerald Prince (2003) has defined narrative as the recounting of real or fictitious events by one or several narrators to one or several narratees (the person or persons to whom the narration is addressed) (p. 58; see also Fludernik, 2009, p. 5). This broad definition can be applied with relative ease to urban planning documents: planners (or a planning agency) can be seen as the narrator(s), who recount a story, usually aimed at the inhabitants of the area affected by planning, who in their turn act as narratees. Most of the recounted events will be real enough, but planning documents tend to involve also conjectured elements, such as claims about what an area will look and feel like in the future. In addition to planners’ narratives of a particular area, there is a wide variety of narratives produced by others: by inhabitants (in writing or speech) or more generally by interested parties; narratives distributed by the press, or recounted by politicians.

Giving a definition of narrative will not suffice without also identifying the characteristics of story. Story and narrative form a crucial binary pair in narrative studies. Story can be understood as the mentally constructed event (or sequence of events) a narrator has in mind, and narrative as the actual recounting of these events in question (see however, Ryan, 2005, pp. 347–348). What are the minimum requirements for a story? Is, for example, a list that outlines the national land use objectives (a standard component of Finnish urban planning documents) a story? Drawing on the definition by Marie-Laure Ryan (2005), a story is defined here as 1. involving one or more human-like agents, 2. presenting a world that goes through some kind of (not entirely predictable) change of situation and 3. the event(s) in the story is/are associated with mental states (p. 347). A brief discussion of one specific example from planning documents will clarify how these features of story may appear in planning documents. The following text, part of the impact assessment in the local component master plan of Jätkäsaari, tells the story of a changing Helsinki, and Jätkäsaari’s role in the overall development:

Jätkäsaari is a part of Helsinki’s southern district, to which also Etu-Töölö, Kruununhaka and areas south of these belong. The number of inhabitants in this area has declined during the last four decades from almost 150 000 to 96 000, in other words, with more than 50 000 people. The construction of Ruoholahti has raised the number of inhabitants momentarily. The losses due to out-migration, however, have continued. In the year 2003, for example, 539 more people moved away from the southern district than into this area.

The construction of Jätkäsaari will improve the vitality of the central city. (Helsingin kaupunkisuunnitteluvirasto [henceforth referred to as Hk] 2008, p. 60); all translations by the author unless mentioned otherwise)

Various instances can be singled out as the “human or human-like agents” in this story: depending on the perspective, the agents in the story are the area’s inhabitants, and/or planners of the area involved, or, in case we allow for human-like protagonists, the personified area itself can be seen as acting as agent, or the city or the planning agency. A transformation of the area (presumably for the better) constitutes the “change of situation”, and the “mental states” from our definition of story could refer to the underlying, implicit political issues at stake in the decision-making.

In the course of this article, this particular story – of Jätkäsaari as being situated in the Helsinki centre, and of its development as benefiting the city’s viability – will reappear several times in various, and sometimes very diverging, narrative forms. While stories (such as the regeneration story) can be generic, narratives are specific: they are made individual by specific wordings, style, all the intricacies stemming from being narrated from a particular point of view, and from being directed towards a particular audience. The narrative quoted above does not only tell a regeneration story, it makes several rhetorical arguments, in specific wordings: it posits the earlier loss of

inhabitants as undesirable, it equates urban vitality with the number of inhabitants, it marks Jätkäsaari as an area identified with the central, core area of the Finnish capital. Narratives, the actualized emanations of stories, concretize much of the rhetorical attributes that remain abstract in stories. Bearing in mind the distinction between story and narrative makes it possible to trace how stories are shaped into differing narratives, to fit different purposes aimed at different audiences. Such transformations in context or authorship can restructure the role and meaning of any given story, which is why it makes sense to look at the various levels at which narratives act in the context of planning. Three such types of narratives are proposed here.

### **Narratives *for, in and of* planning**

In order to examine the transformation of narrative material from one context to another, a threefold taxonomy of narratives used in relation to planning is proposed here. These comprise narratives for planning (narratives that planners can draw on in their practices), narratives in planning (i.e. the planning process as story-telling) and narratives of planning (the storytelling that follows in the wake of planning practices). The first category consists of narratives that do not emanate from planners themselves: narratives that can be consulted, appropriated or commissioned by planners, which is why these are called here narratives for planning: stories told by locals, legends and myths, literary narratives and so forth. The second category, narratives in planning, consists of the activities and documents emanating from a planning department, which can be considered as part and parcel of the “persuasive storytelling” Throgmorton argues planning to be (2003). The third and last category is that of narrative of planning: the storytelling that takes place after or alongside (and sometimes considerably aloof from), the actual planning processes, for example by branding and media agencies, but also by locals.<sup>1</sup>

### **Narratives *for* planning**

Several of the theorists who emphasize the importance of narratives in the context of urban planning are concerned not so much with the narratives in planning (documents), but with the extent to which planners are able and/or willing to draw on local narratives. Urban theorists have increasingly treated the narratives produced by citizens in regard to particular places and environments as highly valuable experiential data. An awareness of the local stories in a community is explicitly seen as beneficial for a more inclusive, democratic and sustainable city (Eckstein and Throgmorton, 2003; Depriest-Hricko and Prytherch, 2013; Hajer et al, 2010, pp. 24–26). A genuine connection between planning narratives and narratives shared by the affected community may even be crucial for success, since influential information in policy-making tends to be the kind of information that is linked to locally shared narratives (Innes, 1995, p. 185).

Two broad strategies to make local narratives useful for planning have been suggested. The first is to compile collections of local narratives for planners to draw on. The second is to encourage the people affected by a particular development to actively volunteer their own views, experiences, memories and visions about a particular place, in other words, to ask them to contribute their personal narratives to the ongoing planning process. The first strategy, which amounts to what is called here a narrative mapping of place, has – amongst others – been advocated by Childs (2008), who suggested that perhaps “municipal urban designers should create anthologies of neighbourhoods’ stories to help inform projects” (p. 185). Such a project of narrative mapping would do more than merely collect the narratives of local inhabitants at a given time, to include also the local and collective memories of a place over a longer span of time. In contended cities, shared narratives and what Bakshi (2014) calls “memory discourses” may constitute particularly sensitive material, but in all environments, the extent to which urban design reflects, moulds and negotiates

narrative memories of particular communities will have their repercussion for the eventual interaction between the completed design and the end users – the citizens.

The recent paradigm shift in planning practices towards more participatory planning has entailed an increased interest in activating local inhabitants, and in the possibilities to provide these with a forum to engage with planning by providing their own stories (see e.g. Healey, 1998; Forester, 1999). “Digital storytelling”, and the possibilities offered by Geographic Information Systems are but some of the several, rapidly expanding innovative methods inspired by new media that have been developed for urban planners with the aim to reach a better understanding of subjective and intersubjective knowledge of the city (cf. Elwood, 2006).

One of the important questions that arises from examining planning cases in terms of how they conform to different types of narratives is that of a story’s ambiguous status or complex authorship. Whereas in the case of a narrative database, stories would have been primarily produced by locals for a local audience, and selected afterwards, the narratives collected through participatory processes have a more complex status. Such narratives produced by locals within a context supervised by planners (or by actors commissioned by planning agencies) fall somewhat in between the categories of narratives for planning and narratives in planning – one might say that they have double authorship. This in-between status of local narratives generated in participatory processes should attune planners and urban theorists to challenges involved in working with this sensitive, hybrid category. Double authorship means that such narratives could easily be appropriated or bended to specific purposes, and that they can be influenced by dominant narratives in planning. If local voices are really to come across in participatory processes, it is crucial that the end-result of such processes take into account genuinely local narratives, in other words, stories that are recounted in their original wordings, not merely local stories rewritten or summarized by planners.

In the case of Jätkäsaari, no locals (in the strict sense) could have recounted narratives for planning, since the area has not been inhabited since the late 1910s. However, even a cursory examination of the literary and historical accounts of this area may shed light on the kinds of narratives this area has in store, especially if we consider Jätkäsaari as part of Helsinki’s long shoreline, an area with a distinctive identity. One of the crucial stories that can be found in several of the narratives in literature and historical documents of this area is that the waterfront functions as a place largely outside of the normal urban fabric, a peripheral area in transformation. On the basis of a comprehensive survey of Helsinki novels published between 1890 and 1940, the suggestion has been made that the waterfront of the Finnish capital is an area defined by its liminal properties, setting it aside in cultural terms from the city centre (Ameel, 2014, pp. 128–129). Similar observations have also been made in a historical overview of Helsinki’s shorelines within the Finnish capital’s urban planning history (Lehtovuori, 2012). As will be seen, this is a story that remains largely untold in the narratives in planning of Jätkäsaari.

### **Narratives *in* planning**

As pointed out above, planning is increasingly understood as a form of storytelling. Planners are seen as producing and negotiating narratives (Ivory, 2013), as authors communicating through built form (Filep et al, 2014, p. 309). One of the most coherent conceptual frameworks on planning as narrative has been provided by Throgmorton (1993, 1996, 2003), who has worked for decades on narratives and planning and who proposes a vision of planning as “persuasive storytelling”. Van Hulst (2012) has further developed Throgmorton’s approach, arguing that storytelling can provide a model of and for planning. Narratives in planning are defined here as the narrative activities and

documents produced and authorized by a planning department in relation to a particular planning project.

To what extent do local narratives for planning find their way in the narratives in planning? In the case of Jätkäsaari, several forms of local stories are present in planning documents and descriptions of planning processes, but only in the form of rewritten and summarized narratives. In the local component master plan, the history section provides less than half a page of text, beginning the historical overview in 1913, when building of a cargo harbour in the area began (Hk, 2008, p. 11). The earlier history of the area as a small group of islands inhabited by fishers, and used by Helsinki's citizens as a recreational area, is only tangentially referred to. There is no information on how or why certain stories were selected, and there are no original local narratives (diary entries, letters, historical documents) or direct references to these.

In the planning documents relating to Jätkäsaari, narratives by affected parties, such as those by the inhabitants of the neighbouring areas, are generally not recorded as individual stories; instead, they feature exclusively under the guise of reactions to the planning processes, as commentaries to narratives in planning. Inhabitants of neighbouring areas were invited to give their opinion as part of standard planning procedures, and planning documents do include some references to the views presented by citizens during the preliminary planning phases, as part of the section "opinions expressed" (Hk, 2008, pp. 64–65; Hk, 2009a, pp. 88–89). In this case, too, all local stories are available exclusively in rephrased form, although the local component master plan refers the reader to the City Planning Department web page, where the orally presented comments have been made available in written form.

The dominant story told in narratives in planning of Jätkäsaari is that of an area that forms an integral part of the city centre – a narrative that in effect realizes in language the processes that the planning has set in motion. It is a story told in many of the extensive textual narratives produced by the Helsinki City Planning Department (Hk, 2008, 2009a, b). To fully gauge the role of this recurring story, one additional concept, complementing the distinction between story and narrative, is needed: that of the micro-narrative. Crucial for a story is that it involves a change of situation. Typically, this takes the form  $A > B > A'$ : A presents the founding situation, followed by change B, and resulting in a modified situation A'. A micro-narrative differs from fully fledged storytelling in that it does not involve recounting all three stages, but only one of the three, referring to the other two implicitly. Typically, this takes the form  $[A > B >] A'$ . A micro-narrative, then, describes a change of situation only by implication; the full chain of events is suggested rather than narrated in full. It is a narrative that tends to be presented in the form of one sentence, and may resemble the advertisement slogan. In planning, micro-narratives are of particular importance, since they tend to encapsulate strategic planning objectives. In the case of Jätkäsaari, the prevalent micro-narratives argue that this area, until recently underdeveloped and situated at the shoreline fringe of the capital, will develop into an integral and distinctly "urban" part of Helsinki's city centre. In official documents (including internet sites and official brochures) emanating from the City Planning Department, micro-narratives of this story are often, in one form or another, amongst the first arguments, or they function as the title of the text. In the Planning Department's Jätkäsaari website, the first sentence states that "Jätkäsaari will become an urban part of the city centre, with on-street shops and cafés" (Hk, 2013). In the local component master plan, several micro-narratives evoking the same strategic vision can be found. An intriguing added sense of immediacy is added in the Finnish original of the text because it uses the present tense to express the future, something which is perfectly normal in the Finnish language. Literally, the text says that "Jätkäsaari is an urban part ...", while the context makes it clear to the reader that the narrative describes a transformation taking place, or about to take place, and that the tense is to be read as a future tense.



Micro-narratives are incidentally also frequently picked up by the media and by private companies involved in a project, and they are conspicuously present in narratives commenting upon planning (“narratives of planning”, see below). Several private and public partners of the Helsinki City Planning Department use micro-narratives remarkably similar to those found in planning documents to define the area: “Jätkäsaari, which will be built on the site of a former container harbour, will be a firm part of Helsinki’s city centre” (Lemminkäinen, 2013); “... the newest property is built in Jätkäsaari, part of the city centre and near the open sea” (Hoas, 2012); “the former container harbour Jätkäsaari will change into an attractive residential area in the city centre by the year 2023” (Ramboll, 2014).

The emphasis on Jätkäsaari as a new, but distinctly “urban” city district, extending the existing fabric of the city centre, is closely bound up with the narrative of Helsinki’s development following the turn of the twenty-first century. Earlier developments, including sprawl, suburbanization and decreasing inhabitant numbers in the centre, are intended to be countered with a narrative of inner city renaissance promoted by, amongst others, political actors who have Edward Glaeser’s *Triumph of the City* (2011) on their night table (see e.g. Soininvaara, 2015). The predominant narrative of Helsinki’s development posits densification and the expansion of the urban chore as a means to attain a more sustainable, attractive and socially cohesive city. The rationale behind this narrative of Jätkäsaari – and, more generally, of the Helsinki waterfront – resonates also with a range of contemporary international planning cases. Similar kind of post-industrial development areas are at the forefront of early-twenty-first century development, from Hafencity in Hamburg to Thames Gateway in London, and from Swedish Karlskrona to Donau City in Vienna. And similarly to what happens in Jätkäsaari, strong narratives – broadly understood – are conspicuously visible in the context of these planning developments (see e.g. Walter, 2013).

Although some of the narratives in planning outlined above are primarily concerned with giving future inhabitants a general idea of what the area might look and feel like, several of these narratives are not to be seen as merely superficial additions to the tangible developments on the ground. The narratives found in the planning documents proper, in particular, have a thoroughly performative character: they will translate planners’ visions, and their selective synthesis of earlier narratives of this area, into the stone, glass and concrete of the built environment. And while the narratives presented by the planning department pose as factual statements (of the type “Jätkäsaari is... located in...”), they are describing a slowly changing situation, as well as actively acting upon it. It is illustrative of Throgmorton’s insight that rhetoric is not only persuasive, but also constitutive (1993, p. 121), or following John Austin’s analysis of the speech act, it is a narrative act that performs a perlocutive function (1962, pp. 101–107). The description of Jätkäsaari as city centre does not communicate factual information about a present situation, but actively shapes the world, by informing the audience’s and planners’ vocabulary of this specific area, and by concretely steering the development on the ground.

### **Jätkäsaari’s Identity Marker: The Hotel Controversy**

Given the fact that the planning practices surrounding a specific area may continue for years or even decades, successfully disseminated narratives in planning may be picked up in local narratives of planning, and be fed back into the planning process as genuinely local narratives for planning. In Jätkäsaari, this process can be seen at work, in particular, in the case of a controversial hotel project. The process, which took several years and is still unfolding, also illustrates the procedural and communicative nature of planning, in which narratives in planning are continuously adjusted to reflect changing societal and political preferences.

At the background of Jätkäsaari's hotel project is the importance planners of the area attached to a creating a clear identity marker and landmark, as well as new taste for high rise in Finnish cities in the early twenty-first century. The first plans of Jätkäsaari allowed for a tower hotel of up to 16 storeys (Hk, 2009a) – a fairly radical proposal from a Finnish perspective. In 2012, changes were proposed to allow for a 33-storey tower (Hk, 2012a), to be constructed by a Norwegian private investor. Upon completion, it would have been the highest building in the Helsinki peninsula. When local voices challenged this ambitious high-rise project, they did so by using and adapting the stories narrated by the planning department itself, embracing the narrative of Jätkäsaari as part of the centre in their argumentation against high rise. Indeed, a height of five to seven storeys is presented as typical of Helsinki by the Helsinki Planning Department itself (Hk, 2008, p. 5). If Jätkäsaari was supposed to be part of the city centre, it followed that high-rise buildings did not fit the profile. The independent blogger Arto Pesonen was one of the commentators presenting this view: "Jätkäsaari is part of the city centre", hence, the tower hotel does not fit the area (Pesonen, 2013). Opponents ranging from local groups to the Helsinki City Museum (Hk, 2012b, p. 2) drew on the narrative of Jätkäsaari as part of the city centre to contest the building of high rise in this area.

In the Planning Department's official reaction to the objections made by the City Museum and by other actors involved, the status of Jätkäsaari, as either integral part of the centre or as peripheral district, was presented as ambiguous. The Planning Department argued that there was a distinction between the "new" and the "old" centre, and claimed that the location was so much on the margin of the centre, that the hotel would not interrupt the "homogenous urban structure of the city centre" (Hk, 2012b, p. 3). In its defence of high rise in this area, then, the Planning Department distanced itself from its dominant narrative of this area, and tried to make a case that Jätkäsaari was both within the city centre, and simultaneously, outside of the "historical", "chore" centre of the city. Some public commentators sided with this position. Blogger Hannu Oskala, for example, associated with the Green party which is part of the city's coalition, argued in his blog that the urbanity of Jätkäsaari was different from that of the "old" city centre, which was why he did not oppose the hotel project (Oskala, 2013).

In May 2013, the city council voted down the plans for a 33-story hotel with one vote difference (43–42) (Hk, 2013); in November 2014, it gave the go-ahead for a considerably downsized hotel of 16 storeys, the scale proposed in the original design (Hk, 2015). While the outcome reflects general uneasiness on the part of Helsinki politicians and voters to accept radical high-rise buildings in or near central Helsinki, it also reflects how narratives may move from one context to another during planning processes. Examining how storylines are transformed from narratives for planning into narratives in planning and back illustrates that a similar story can be used either to oppose or to support specific narratives. It also points to the difficulties local parties may have in bringing their own narratives of a specific area and its development across. After all, this narrative interaction was to a considerable degree defined by frameworks set out by the dominant player: the planning department. The recycling of a narrative of the department itself, by opponents of the department's plans, reveals some of the cunning, but also some of the impotence of local voices when trying to counter dominant narratives on their own terms.

### **Narratives of planning**

Planning can be considered as storytelling (narrative in planning), and local narratives can be drawn upon during various stages of the planning process (as narratives for planning). There is also a wide variety of stories that is generated around planning projects, without being directly engendered by planning agencies themselves. Such narratives of planning are defined here as the collection of

narratives that come into being about a given planning project independently of the planning department itself: stories told by locals to each other, newspaper covering, literary fiction describing the area undergoing development. While being somewhat peripheral to the planning process proper, these narratives tend to be important for the way in which the results of planning will be perceived and experienced. In long-term planning practices, narratives of planning may be consulted, and be fed back into narratives in planning in the guise of local perspectives. Urban branding is one of the most explicit and most extensively researched forms of narratives of planning, even though it does not necessarily have a sizeable impact on planning processes proper. It has become one of the most conspicuous strategies with which planning-related narratives are put to use, and presents a form of city storytelling that has been analysed by several theorists in explicit narrative terms (see Jensen, 2007; Russell et al, 2009). In a climate of growing global competition, cities increasingly draw on symbolic politics, in which city narratives are used to create an urban brand (Ilmonen, 2008; Mommaas, 2004).

Narratives of planning are distinct from narratives in planning in terms of their intended audience as well as in terms of their narrators. While planners are expected to direct their narrative to all citizens affected by the planning project, media representatives, branding agencies or politicians talking or writing about the very same project are more selective in their intended audience. In terms of their timeframe, too, this category differs from narratives in planning. Narratives of planning comprise stories told long after a development has reached its completion as well as narratives that come into being the moment a planning process becomes public. Several of the narratives of planning, such as media or branding narratives, are to some degree hybrids, narratives with a double authorship, produced outside of the planning department, but susceptible to manipulation by planners. Most importantly, narratives of planning differ from narratives in planning in that they do not directly affect the material, built infrastructure on the ground. This is an important point to bear in mind when examining participation in planning, which tends to suggest that inhabitants will be enabled to affect narratives in planning – the kinds of storylines that will find their way into the built environment – while participation still often takes the form of a post-date commentary round – potentially not much more than narratives of planning.

The narratives of planning in the case of Jätkäsaari show a varying degree of complicity with the narratives forwarded by the planning department. The award-winning branding campaign by the design agency BOTH (Both, 2013), for example, commissioned by the planning department of Helsinki, can be considered as an example of such a hybrid – a narrative of planning that remains close to the simultaneous narratives in planning documents. An equally interesting case is presented by Jätkäsaari's Facebook page: emanating from the planning department, it can be considered to be part of the planning department's narratives (narratives in planning), but in the way it reposts and links narratives by other users, it also directs a particular way of telling stories of the area (narratives of planning). At the height of the hotel controversy, Jätkäsaari's Facebook page was forwarding posts by vocal defenders of the hotel project (Helsingin kaupunki, 2012a, b). Narratives of Jätkäsaari produced by the media and by private companies function more independently, but as noted above, there tends to be a noted similarity between micro-narratives found in planning documents proper and in those found in media narratives of planning. The following micro-narrative from the construction magazine *Talotekniikka* ("Building services technique"), for example, reads almost like a direct adaptation from a promotional brochure for Jätkäsaari: "Jätkäsaari is one of the most recent developments in Helsinki. It will become an urban and unique part of the city" (*Talotekniikka*, 2012).

Narratives of planning can refer to a specific area and its development in spectacularly imaginative ways. Antti Tuomainen's novel *The Healer* (2012/2013), a dystopian novel partly set in future

Jätkäsaari, gives a revelatory perspective on the vision of Helsinki's waterfront development as posited by Helsinki's planning department. In *The Healer*, the city planners' vision of integrating peripheral Jätkäsaari into the central city is crumbling under the strains of global upheaval. As a result of an ecological catastrophe, Jätkäsaari (and similar zones currently being developed in Helsinki) returns to the status it has had for much of Helsinki's modern history: a marginal zone of the city, outside of the borders of the decent, the moral and the normal. Society in this novel is punished for its hubris, and the areas that had been reclaimed from the city's watery fringes are the first to go. The narrative of Jätkäsaari in Tuomainen's novel feeds into the pre-planning narratives of the area as an essentially liminal space, while simultaneously bypassing and contesting the planning narrative with its focus on the area's centrality.

## Conclusion

Urban planning is increasingly conceived as a form of "persuasive storytelling" (Throgmorton, 1996), with planners actively engaging in "city story-writing" (Healey, 2000, pp. 527–528). But what counts as narrative, what kinds of narratives can be identified and what can a narrative examination of these types add to existing research? Three distinct types of narrative in the context of urban planning are singled out here: narratives for, in and of planning. These categories originate in specific contexts; they are aimed at particular audiences and authorized by particular narrators. The threefold taxonomy of narratives in the context of planning proposed in this paper aims to dispel some of the conceptual unclarity that continues to surround the study of planning narratives. It also provides a hermeneutic tool for scholars, planners and the general public to talk in more precise terms about authorship, context and objectives of planning narratives. Bringing concepts from literary and narrative theory to bear on questions of planning narratives, this paper argues that, similar to any other narrative analysis, an examination of narratives in planning practices will have to bear in mind the dichotomy story-narrative; the difference, in other words, between an abstract story and the concrete, context-specific rendering of a story. A second relevant concept presented here is that of the micro-narrative, which could be helpful in examining condensed narratives, especially in form of strategic narratives in planning that are easily picked up in media narratives of planning.

The key findings of this paper relate to the examination of stories that "travel" between different types, and the case of planning narratives with ambiguous status. When categories partly overlap and where narratives have hybrid authorship, such as in the case of local narratives that are gathered in participatory processes (partly narrative for and partly narrative in planning), but selected and rendered by planners, the examination of stories and their possible transformation is of particular relevance. Looking at travelling stories or narratives with ambiguous authorship can enable a more critical assessment of appropriation and misuse of planning narratives.

Narratives in the context of planning are not aloof from the actual developments in the built environment and in people's lives. On the contrary, narratives lie at the chore of how planning functions and of how it shapes the very real everyday environments, and the lives, of people. Narratives in planning, in particular, are constitutive (in addition to being persuasive, see Throgmorton, 1993, p. 121), and have their material effects on urban developments. In the case of Jätkäsaari, the material effects of narratives for, in and of planning are only now taking shape, and it may be too early to fully gauge the extent to which planning narratives of this area as integral part of the urban centre will transform into the stone and concrete, and into people's everyday experiences. In the case of the Jätkäsaari hotel tower project, it is a narrative that has, in any case, been effective in downsizing the projected high-rise tower hotel.

More work will have to be done to further examine the applicability of concepts from literary and narrative studies to the study of planning practices, and to determine what analytical tools will be most valuable for carrying out a narrative analysis of narratives for, in and of planning. As Throgmorton and others have indicated, the study of rhetorics (including such rhetorical categories as metaphor and figures of speech) could offer some of the most promising avenues of research, and genre and plot offers a second possible avenue of research. In any case, the most auspicious results will likely derive from an examination that looks at planning from cross-disciplinary perspectives. Current urban regeneration practices, which are increasingly couched and understood in terms of narrative, affect so many people internationally, and in such radical ways, that it would seem only logical that their analysis and assessment be informed by a range of relevant fields of study, from planning theory and urban sociology to ethnography and narrative studies.

## Notes

1.

The threefold taxonomy of narratives for, in and of planning resembles in its wording Hendler's conceptualization of theories in, of and for planning (Hendler, 1995). Hendler uses these terms to differentiate between theory aimed at defining planning (theory of planning), theory focusing on planning procedures (theory for planning) and "subject-oriented" theory (theory in planning). However, in drawing up a taxonomy of narratives in the context of planning, I have been more indebted to Van Hulst (2012), who speaks of storytelling as model of and for planning, for inspiration.

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