

Dissertation Release**09.08.2021**

Strategic city-regional planning suffers from a lack of a clear institutional basis

Title of the dissertation	Dialectical institutionalism: Spatial imaginaries in tensions between strategic and statutory planning in city-regions
Contents of the dissertation	In Finland, strategic city-regional planning lacks a clear institutional basis. City-regions cross administrative boundaries and the central government has encouraged local governments to enact flexible, co-operative and strategic planning for addressing city-regional planning challenges and opportunities. However, at the same time, the government has not introduced any formal institutional adjustments in the pre-existing statutory planning system that gives the planning powers to the municipalities and encourages them to focus on local issues instead of city-regional ones. The dissertation developed an institutional approach to strategic spatial planning, dialectical institutionalism, which aims at understanding how the international discourse on city-regions led to the development of such an ambiguous institutional context for city-regional planning in Finland, and how the actors in city-regions have aimed at dealing with the tensions inherent in the ambiguous context. The dissertation proposes that the practices of city-regional strategic planning might overcome the tensions by creatively interpreting and integrating the norms of strategic and statutory planning. An alluring imaginary of city-region might persuade actors for such new interpretations. However, although the imaginary might persuade actors to join in for city-regional strategic planning and advance city-regional transformation, the interpretatively flexible imaginaries might also be employed for advancing municipal interests and existing power structures of the statutory planning system. To avoid this, city-regional strategies should connect the persuasive imaginaries to development projects or other shared material objects in the urban environment. The dissertation draws on case studies of city-regional strategic planning in the city-regions of Helsinki, Kotka-Hamina and Aalborg.
Field of the dissertation	Spatial Planning and Transportation Engineering
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