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

Doctoral candidate: Kaisa Granqvist, M.Sc., born in 1986 in Vantaa, Finland

Time of the defence: Friday 20 August 2021 at 12:00 hours

Place of the defence: Online in Zoom: https://aalto.zoom.us/j/68798582528

Opponent: Dr. Juho Luukkonen, University of Helsinki, Finland

Supervisor: Professor Raine Mäntysalo, School of Engineering, Aalto University, Finland

Electronic dissertation: https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/109013

Doctoral candidate’s contact information: Kaisa Granqvist, Aalto University, kaisa.granqvist@aalto.fi, phone +358408337754