

Planners as Gatekeepers: Spatial Justice Through the lens of Planning Theory in Helsinki

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Abstract. Planning practice is a device of controlling land use and ideally corresponds to societal demands. It can contribute to spatial justice through its two roles, substantive and procedural. Planning theory, on the other hand, studies both roles of planning practice focusing on the interplay of power. Helsinki witnesses a rapid and dynamic urban growth with the Finnish capital city plan adopting bold ideas aiming to create pedestrian friendly urban centers further from the inner city. Among other objectives, the city plan employs anti-segregation policy in certain areas. Ethnic retail has been emerging in Helsinki at several locations not only fulfilling socio-economic needs of immigrants but also enhancing public street life and creating urban hubs. In particular, ethnic retail is clustered at two strip malls located in two neighborhoods under urban renewal. Two competitions were organized to guide the land-use based on the objectives of the city plan. This article studies how urban planning policy and planners have steered the urban renewal outcome. The findings show that the planners can serve as gatekeepers allowing specific outcomes in favor of certain actors. The article contributes to literature analyzing planning practice through the theory lens.

Keywords: *power, planning theory, minority groups, spatial justice, Helsinki*

