

Abstract: Planning Compact Green Oslo

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Abstract:

Compact city has been forwarded as a solution for obtaining sustainable cities for almost 20 years. This ideal for urban form has been implemented in national as well as local policy. The core idea is to increase densities within already built up areas, while at the same time maintain the green areas. However, in reality, a constant high pressure is put on the green areas by a constant flow of development proposals. Oslo is the Norwegian capital with approximately 600 000 inhabitants and the fastest growing municipality in Norway. This population growth has led to high pressure for in particular housing development, a pressure which also affects the green infrastructure as areas for potential development.

Planning is no longer an exclusive public activity; most local development plans are made by private actors. In Norway, unlike most countries, private actors are even entitled to propose draft development plans and submit them for political approval in the local government. Norway has therefore gone one step ahead of other countries in developing a neoliberal planning practice. The development plans are normally a particular identical with a development project which need to regulated to be implemented. This kind of planning, where building permit application and development planning is closely integrated, is labelled “project plans” in patchwork planning pattern due to their miniature format within the urban build up area. Projects plans include binding land use zoning plan and formal regulations which are specifically tailored for a particular building project. These bottom – up private

project plans challenge the logic of the hierarchic planning system; project plans seem to be less dependent on master plans than on market mechanisms.

We argue that the new interest in urbanity combined with the sustainability arguments turned the compact city into a hegemonic discourse on urban development. The densification arguments have also been adopted by developers who favour high density and inner city transformation as strategy in their urban project plans. The effect on the green infrastructure, however, is not well documented. The green infrastructure is the network of smaller and larger green areas within the urban build up area. It may be well maintained green areas as parks and pathways, but also hidden or forgotten green areas in the city.

There are potential contradictions within the compact city model, particularly between a high level of exploitation and protection of green structure. Our aim is to analyse the balancing of new construction through densification and protection of the green structure in Norwegian urban development. We address this in two ways. First analyse the role of the green structure within the Norwegian professional discourse on the compact city model. The professional discourse is described through an analysis of the contributions in the journal PLAN. PLAN is the main journal for information, dissemination and discussion on planning in Norway, widely read among academics as well as practitioners. The discourse in PLAN influences both the norms and rules related to political-administrative control as well as content of private plan provided by professional planners.

Second, the compact city ideal coincides in time with a turn toward more neo-liberal ideas in planning. Our second aim is to analyse how the neo-liberal planning practice affect the balancing of densification and protection of green structure in Oslo. We describe the development in Oslo and analyse the arguments for and against development in two development projects in conflict with the green infrastructure. This study is based on two critical cases with high level of conflict. The first is private project plans for housing development; the second is public plans for development of kindergartens. We have chosen one of each kind to illustrate role compact city ideal and green arguments in urban development.

Our preliminary conclusion is that we find it important to critically review the current practice in implementing the compact city model as an ideal to secure green cities. We find that this ideal threaten the urban green infrastructure. In order to implement a green compact city we need a new planning discourse to improve the green arguments in urban development. We also need continuously monitoring the status of the green infrastructure in all its important functions, for health, recreation, children, aesthetic enjoyment, biodiversity and hydrology.