



Studying small-town revitalizations

SOME EXAMPLES OF METHODOLOGY, SOME
RESULTS AND THE COMPACT CITY OF THE NORTH

So what did we wanted to do?

Introduction: Downtown revitalization as popular mean to tackle decline in (Finnish) small towns

- How downtown planning engages with processes of place-making
- How is shrinkage included into particular downtown infrastructure projects?
- Challenges & opportunities for centre revitalization in small towns

Conceptualization: Assembling of places

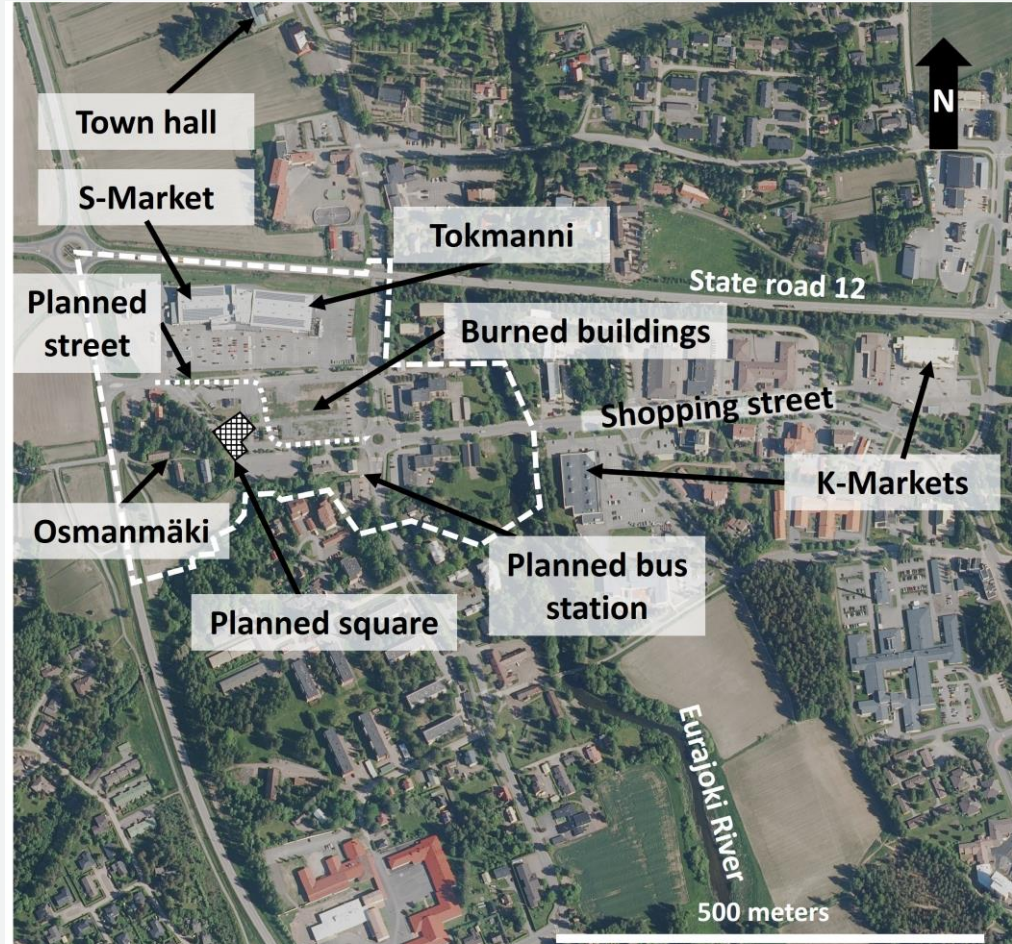
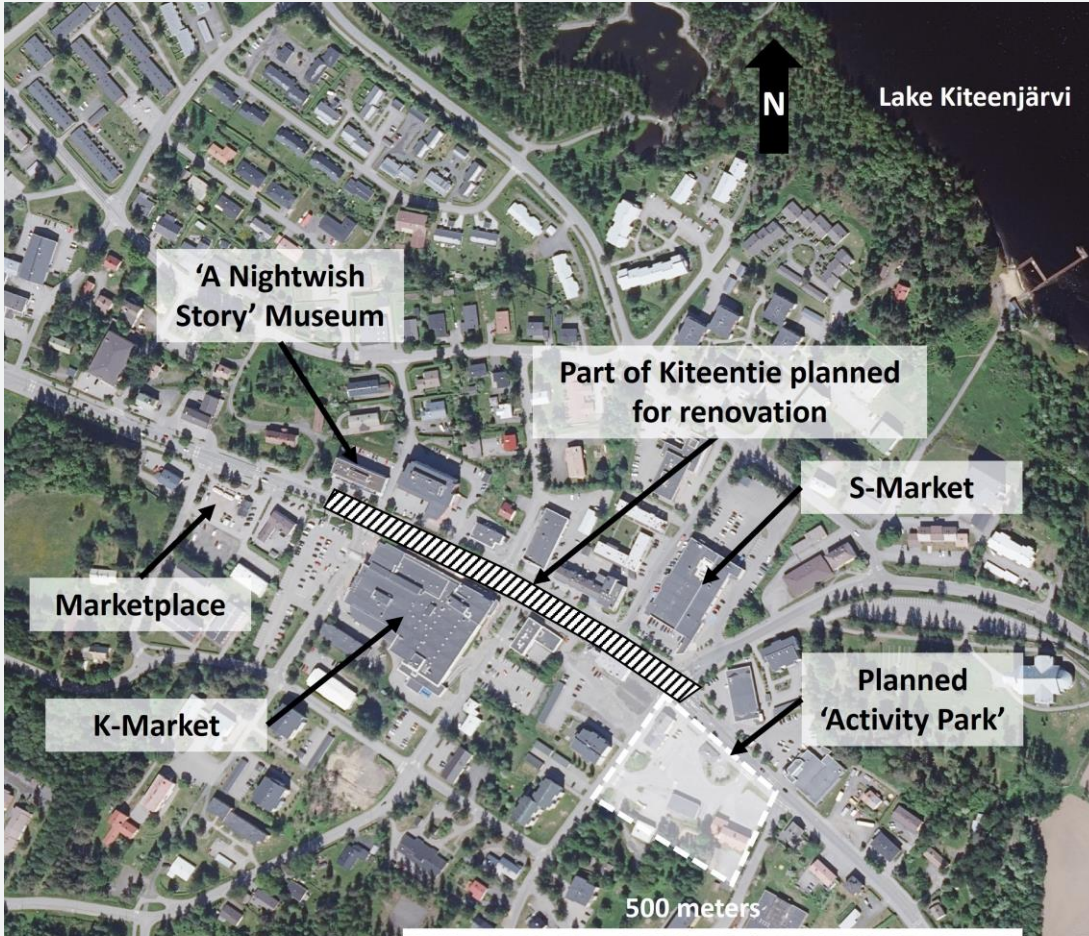
- Place-ma(s)king in planning vs. place making as assembling process (Fincher et al. 2016; Woods et al. 2021)
- Planning for shrinkage as “policy experimentation” (cf. Coppola 2019)
- Small town centre revitalization approaches (Nordic & European)
 - Flexibility & conceptual definitions: structural, multiuse, planning paradigm (cf. Carr & Dioniso 2017)
 - re-branding, centralization, public spaces,... (cf. Tunström et al. 2018)

So what did we do...

Getting an overview of the place components first.

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A two phase approach of data collection

Phase I

- Planning & related document analysis (spatial planning focus in our case)
 - Spatial planning documents, municipal reports, media (project related), research
- Look – talk – look approach
 - Walking the location (plan vs. place)
 - Talking to planners & entrepreneur association (focus based)
 - Rewalking the site (interviews vs. place)

Results from Phase I (the planning side)

- Tackling shrinkage as motivator for downtown revitalization
- (Smart) shrinkage components mixed with urbanization attempts: compact, flexible (public) spaces
- planning as “place-masking” rather than to align with assembling of place (unrealistic/unsuitable/naïve?)
- Influence of large commercial actors & planning firms
- Flexibility rather pragmatic then in relation to provide an alternative to growth/positivist oriented traditional planning paradigm

Challenges:

- External shopping centers
- Lack of attractiveness for investment (worsening currently)
- Car “lobby”
- Place-ma(s)king of consultancy plans
- money

But what about processes between visionary planning & placemaking ?

Phase II

- Extend the scope of data collection (what do you want to know!?)
 - Documents & secondary sources (beyond planning perspective)
 - Extend scope of interviewees (youth, social, commercial, political, critical,...): *revitalization for whom?*
 - Walk, feel, engage and revisit (varying ethnographies)

Results in the making....

Visions and (good) ideas vs. local realities...in shrinking places

- Are demographic & societal trends applicable to, and feasible in the locality (e.g. move to country side, digital nomadism,...)
- How would you like to live there? Consider a social experiment with clear self-critical assessment!
- How is live for other societal groups and how can it be improved (if it can)
- Who will be willing to invest in the place?
- With whom is the place competing!?

Nonetheless: here is some vision commonly used

The compact city of the North (Tunström et al. 2018)

Some key issues:

- **Centralization & densification** (focus on the core)
- **densification with focus on increased housing** (need based or planner vision?)
- **Planners/visionaries reliance on hope for positive change** (realistic?)
- town centres as dynamic: need for flexible solutions
 - Non-commercial, multi-stakeholder public spaces
- town centre developments vs. external (shopping) developments needs to be considered
- challenges to balance the needs of different users



Kiitos!

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