Towards Post-Human Urbanism

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Abstract

"Post-human" is, of course, a provocative concept in the context of architecture and urbanism, which have essentially based their ethos on designing and planning a "human-centred" environment. However, the concept is actually not as radical as it might seem: although it does question some of the taken-for-granted assumption of classical humanism, particularly the universality and a-historicity of human nature and the legitimacy of needs justified by this universalism, it is not a doctrine against human beings. Against the ideology of "cities for people" (Gehl 2010), post-human critique highlights the fluidity, the diversity and the contested nature of human identities.

What makes this theoretical perspective relevant in today's urbanism is the fact that the universalist human being is rapidly dissolving. The growth of multiculturalism is an unavoidable phenomenon in European cities as the result of immigration and increasing mobility of work. However, its perception in urban planning is by no means self-evident. Contemporary planning discourse is rather characterized by an almost systematic avoidance in this respect. It is this silence that will be studied in this paper, by using the method of archaeology of knowledge introduced by Foucault in his books Words and Things and Archaeology of Knowledge.

An attempt is made to explain this observation with reference to the strong functionalistic tradition in the Nordic planning agenda and the tacitly adopted biopolitical definition of legitimate needs of the urban citizens. The Utopian ideology of a class-less planning for the 'human being', with its biopolitical undertones of biologically determined features of the population, will necessarily clash with new demands for culturally oriented, specialized services and spatial practices that multiculturalism necessarily entails. This is confronted with the seemingly 'transparent' and generalizable planning ethos that has remained unquestioned, hidden by the emphasis of physical planning along with social and cultural 'soft' policies.

This study is part of a multidisciplinary project BEMINE: Beyond MALPE Coordination, Integrative Envisioning, carried out at the Department of Architecture, Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture.

1. Introduction

The presence of citizens from various cultural backgrounds, with the corresponding needs and values, is a growing and unavoidable feature of European urbanizations. The European population is getting older, and the average fertility rate of 1.58 will not allow sustainable growth or even reproduction. The lowest total fertility rates are in Southern European countries, but also in Northern Europe they are well below the reproduction minimum of 2.1. Finland has seen a rapid decline in the yearly number of births for seven years in a row, reaching an all-time low number of 50 321 and a total fertility rate of 1.49 in 2017 (Statistics Finland). The logical result is that population growth is already totally based on immigration: while the net migration was 3 273, the natural growth was negative with 2 695 less births than deaths. Paradoxically – though understandably – this development has aroused political opposition among the populist parties, in Finland as well as in other European countries.

In this paper, however, I am not addressing this phenomenon as such, but rather its consequences and challenges for urban planning. One would assume that the rising phenomenon of cultural diversity would be addressed in one way or another by planners, even in countries where the proportion of residents with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds is still rather small, like in Finland. But, as we shall see, this is not actually the case: contemporary planning discourse is rather characterized by an almost systematic silence in this respect. It is this silence that I want to study in this paper, by using the method of archaeology of knowledge introduced by Foucault in his books *Words and Things* and *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Since this method was famously criticised by Dreyfus and Rabinow, we need to dwell for a while in the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology. I agree with Tiisala (2015) that archaeology can be given an interpretation (following Foucault's own 'pragmatic turn') that avoids the problems discussed by Dreyfus and Rabinow. I am particularly interested in the possibility of an 'archaeology of silence', the concept originally coined by Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization*.

The paper is structured in an unorthodox way. After discussing the methodological framework (in Chapter 2) the contemporary planning discourse in Helsinki and the surrounding Uusimaa region is

analysed (in Chapter 3). The result, as we shall see, is almost a total lack of discursive statements addressing the emergent cultural diversity. Finally, directions for theoretical ways for explaining this phenomenon are discussed (Chapter 4).

2. The Archaeology of Silence

Foucault's archaeology of knowledge is a methodology developed in his books *Madness and Civilization* (1973, orig. 1961), *The Birth of The Clinic* (1973, orig. 1963), *The Order of Things* (1985, orig. 1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1985, orig. 1969). It is based on an analysis of historical discursive formations, where statements are taken as events, and the relationships of these statements is studied inside the discourses. This does not mean that they would be unrelated to non-discursive elements, but the way they are formed is not based on a reference to transcendental objects (AK p. 49) or the experience or meaning-giving of the subject (AK p. 54). Thus, Foucault is using double-bracketing: without denying the existence (or even the relevance) of non-discursive events, he is searching for the rules that determine the formation of statements within the group of serious speakers. Unlike language (langue) that allows an infinite set of possible sentences, the discursive formations are characterized by rarity (AK p. 118): not anybody has the authority to speak seriously (about medicine, about economics, about science, etc.), and there is a rarity of what they can say.

"This authority also involves *the rules and processes of appropriation* of discourse: for in our societies (and no doubt in many others) the property of discourse – in the sense of right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices – is in fact confined (sometimes with the addition of legal sanctions) to a particular group of individuals; in the bourgeois societies that we have known since the sixteenth century, economic discourse has never been a common discourse (no more than medical or literary discourse, though in a different way)." (AK p. 68, italics in the original).

In their famous critique of the archaeology of knowledge, however, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow argued that this double-bracketing is a problem for Foucault, since there will not be any

consistent way of grounding the rules of formation that are so essential to archaeology (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983). “The discursive practices analyzed by the archaeologist are motivated by the speakers’ conviction that they are uttering serious truths about man and society, or that they are helping to make explicit the implicit thoughts of those who were in possession of such truths. The analysis, however, substitutes for this “naive” conviction as its condition of occurrence a set of meaningless strict rules.” (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983, p. 93-94). This critique has been taken for granted by many scholars, which is a pity, according to Tuomo Tiisala (2015), since it has prevented research in the humanities and social sciences – including planning – to develop archaeology as a fruitful methodology. For instance, as Maarten Hajer was developing his discourse analysis, he was led to the later Foucault of discipline and governmentality instead of the ‘discredited’ earlier works (Hajer 1997, p. 47).

Tiisala argues that Dreyfus and Rabinow have not understood the pragmatic turn in Foucault’s thinking, which makes it possible to assume strict rules of discourse formation that are not accessible to the speaker’s consciousness, nor are based on the validity of these statements, but which they learn through practice. He refers to the unpublished manuscript of the Archaeology of Knowledge, where Foucault still defined the rules of discourse formation as statements, which would indeed have undermined his idea of unconscious rules that are followed (but not known) by the speakers (Tiisala 2015, p. 659). In the published version of the Archaeology of Knowledge, however, Foucault clearly states that the rules are part of the discursive practices:

“By system of formation, then, I mean a complex group of relations that function as a rule: it lays down what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organized. To define a system of formation in its specific individuality is therefore to characterize a discourse or a group of statements by the regularity of a practice.” (AK, p. 74).

Archaeology of knowledge is also suitable for analysing planning discourse, even though the early Foucault did not discuss it while he was interested in the archaeology of the human sciences. But how can one analyse – by using the archaeological method – that which is not said? In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault clearly had this ambition: “The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason *about* madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. I

have not tried to write the history of that language, but rather the archaeology of that silence." (MC, p. xi, emphasis original) In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, however, he seems to be saying almost the exact opposite:

"We are studying statements at the limit that separates them from what is not said, in the occurrence that allows them to emerge to the exclusion of all others. Our task is not to give voice to the silence that surrounds them, nor to discover all that, in them and beside them, had remained silent or had been reduced to silence. Nor is it to study the obstacles that have prevented a particular discovery, held back a particular formulation, repressed a particular form of enunciation, a particular unconscious meaning, or a particular rationality in the course of development; but to define a limited system of presences. The discursive formation is not therefore a developing totality, with its own dynamism of inertia, carrying with it, in an unformulated discourse, what it does not say, what it has not yet said, or what contradicts it at that moment; it is not a rich, difficult germination, it is a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions." (AK p. 119).

But how can you define the limits of discursive formation without going to the 'other side' and describe it? Does this in the end mean giving a voice to the silence? This difficulty reminds us of the famous observation by Wittgenstein that seeing the limits of your world and language (which are the same limits) is not possible, since you would in a way need to 'measure' them from the outside (Wittgenstein 1961, 5.61). But the limits that Foucault means are less all-encompassing; they are the limits of the group of experts that have the authority (at a certain historical time and place) to speak seriously about madness, the economy, science, planning, etc.

Foucault himself had the benefit of following the longer span of history to find the gaps and absences. In the *Madness and Civilization*, he pointed out the lost dialogue between the men of reason and the men of unreason (folie) that still existed during the time of Cervantes' Don Quiote and Shakespeare's Macbeth; this 'silence' we can still read from their texts. In *The Order of Things*, on the other hand, he used Aldrovandi's *History of Serpents and Dragons* as an example of the time (in the sixteenth century), when the observed facts and fiction were not yet separated, and compared it to Jonston's *Natural History of Quadrupeds*, in which the semantic dimension was simply left out (OT p. 128). This did not mean that Jonston would have known more (actually he

knew less), but he became the landmark of the transition from unity to separation (or from similarity to representation) that is still with us. A biologist of today – or any serious speaker for that matter – could never write a book on serpents *and* dragons. Also in this case the absence could be seen in the historical change in the scientific discourses.

But if we want to use the archaeological method to study contemporary formation of statements, we need to construct the 'dragons' to see where the limits of the professional discourse are. In this paper, the 'dragon' is multiculturalism (or the diversity of people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and the diversity of their needs, values, habits, religions, etc.). I will not simply say that Finnish planners don't talk much about multiculturalism (they don't), or that they *should* do that; rather I want to understand why the contemporary planning discourse in Finland is like it is, why the limits of discourse are drawn in this particular way, creating this particular rarity. Thus, the analysis must concentrate on the rules inside the discourse, revealing its hidden logic. The presence of something is, however, the absence of something else; even if the discourses themselves would not hide or repress alternative discourses, planning research can try to measure the limits of the discourses of practice also by looking at them from the outside.

It is interesting to compare the 'silence' of multiculturalism to the human-centered discourse is planning. For instance, Gehl's ideas of planning for the 'human being' of homo sapience (the erect mammal walking 5 km/h, frontally oriented and fond of other people) has no difficulty in embedding itself in the professional discourse of architects and planners, although the idea would not stand closer scrutiny. There is no way that we could distinguish a *homo sapiens* without technology (actually the making of tools started already with the *homo erectus*). Foucault's critique of the existence of such a creature (that would give justification to planning solutions) is thus a very promising perspective to understand the formation of the planning discourses.

3. The Regularity of a Practice

The Finnish planning practice is regulated by the Land-use and Building Act (132/1999) that has been in force since 2000, with several amendments. The planning system is hierarchical: the statutory plans and regulations include national land-use objectives prepared and approved by the

council of state, the regional plans approved by 19 regional councils, and local master plans and detailed plans approved by municipal councils. In addition, there are several non-statutory national and local policy documents on architecture, nature conservation, environmental health etc.

The general objectives of the Act are to "create preconditions for a favourable living environment and promote ecologically, economically, socially and culturally sustainable development." (Chapter 1, section 1). The word "cultural sustainability" is thus mentioned, but it is not given any formulation later in the Act. Citizen participation and transparency are also included in the general objectives: "The Act also aims to ensure that everyone has the right to participate in the preparation process, and that planning is of high quality and interactive, that expertise is comprehensive and that there is open provision of information on matters being processed." (Chapter 1, section 1). The Act thus uses the abstract term "everyone" that logically implies also ethnic and cultural minorities. Language is not mentioned, however, which implies that "everyone" is supposed to have proficiency in the national languages (Finnish or Swedish). In the more detailed objectives, the "everyone" is, however, categorized: Land-use planning should promote "a safe, healthy, pleasant, socially functional living and working environment which provides for the needs of various population groups, such as *children*, *the elderly* and the *handicapped*" (Section 5, item 1, my italics). The categories are clearly biological; age and physical performance are recognized, but not cultural or social features, such as customs and different cultural values, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or wealth. Biology rules: diversity is understood only as biological diversity (section 5, item 5).

In Finland, architects are the dominant professional group in land-use planning. Recently, the profession has been active in preparing architectural policy programs at national, regional and local levels. According to the Uusimaa architectural policy program from 2009 titled "Our Common Metropolis", the text reads that "with the help of architectural policy, common objectives for the culture of building will be created, to express what residents, decision makers and planners and designers want from the built environment of high quality." (p. 5). It also highlights that "It is important for the whole that different neighbourhoods recognize their local identity and respect it." (p. 7). The program thus constructed the idea of community and also *commonness*: there are

common objectives among residents, decision makers and planners, and even the different neighbourhoods can recognize their *common identity* (in singular).

In the ongoing preparation of the Uusimaa regional plan for 2050, one of the strategic focuses is "a *healthy* and *skilled human being*". Immigration is recognized, but only in quantitative terms: it is assumed that 2/3 of the growth of the population will come from immigration. But how is this reflected in the plan? Not in any way; the biological and educational features of the population (health and skills) seem to be the only 'human' categories at the regional level. The same is true at the municipal and local levels. The recent comprehensive City Plan 2050 of Helsinki is based on an assumption of rapid growth of population by 250 000. As mentioned above, the population growth of the whole country is already totally based on immigration. The situation in Helsinki is somewhat different, around three quarters of the population growth is coming from immigration, reaching 94 888 or 14,9% of the city's population in 2017. In the planning documents, however, immigration is not mentioned; the city aims to densify its urban structure, expand the city centre, change motorway-like thoroughfares into boulevards, and also build more housing on greenfields. As the basic ideology behind the plan is New Urbanism, one would expect to find something about cultural diversity. Urban culture, however, means cultural events: "Helsinki is already a fascinating stage of urban culture. A wide variety of events take place in Helsinki's districts." Or it is typical New Urbanist aesthetics: "A more urban Helsinki means more street-level shops in blocks of flats, bicycle lanes, the clatter of trams, coffee at the market place, international flavour, urban productivity, seaside saunas and district festivals." Not a word on multiculturalism, if the word is not "international flavour".

The same can be seen in detailed plans also. One of the new centrally located neighbourhoods on a former harbour area, Jätkäsaari (at the moment under construction), was planned to be "an urban and cosy seaside neighbourhood". The objective was to create "an identity of an urban neighbourhood, with unique quarters. All of them are united by a dense urban structure, where the streets are enclosed by buildings." The dominant role of physical planning is clearly visible in the documents of the detailed plans.

4. From Functionalism to Biopolitics

This short review of the Finnish planning discourses clearly reveals that, if the planning discourse is approached from the outside, the limits of the discourse formation are clearly visible, as far as multiculturalism is concerned. If one wants to find out how multiculturalism, ethnicity, or culture in a wider sense (i.e. not just cultural events) are dealt with in planning legislation, policy programs, or regional and local plans, one will find mainly silence. This is despite the fact that all statistics tell that the city of Helsinki and the region of Uusimaa – as well as the whole nation – are in front of a major change in their history: the end of the homogenous Finnish culture. This cannot be a coincidence, but it clearly reflects the rules of the discourse formation that planners are unaware but need to follow. This is obviously a very complex system, as Foucault warned us: "...complex group of relations that function as a rule: it lays down what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organized..." (AK, p. 74).

What, then, can the archaeologist uncover? My intention in this paper is not to provide any comprehensive analysis of this system, only to point out some directions where answers could be found. Two structural features seem to be repeating themselves in the planning and policy documents: functionalism and biopolitics. The former is obviously an important tradition and ideology well known by architects and planners, but its structural closure in the planning discourse is not so easy to see. The latter is less well known in planning, being a theoretical concept coined by Foucault, but it has an interesting connection to functionalism.

Functionalism still forms the main structural grid behind land-use planning; the mere division of land into housing, industries, recreational areas, public and private services and transportation seems to be unavoidable, even if mixed functions and multifunctionality are gaining ground (Di Marino & Lapintie 2018). The main ethos of functionalism is that since areas, buildings and things are supposed to satisfy human needs, they need to be functional: glasses need to be suitable for drinking, houses for living, roads for driving, schools for learning, etc. But if we go further in our reflection to more complex things, the ethic is not so evident. Suppose that I live in the city but travel weekly to my villa in the archipelago for teleworking and recreation, which is made possible

by the highway and the local road between the two locations, the car and the internet connection. Can we say that this complex 'thing' (my apartment in the city, the motorway and road between the two locations, my car, the villa in the archipelago, and the internet) is functional – for what? Or should we rather say that these things have made it possible for me to adopt a multi-local lifestyle that has its cultural history from bourgeois summer villas and later summer cottages to third-agers' multi-local living? Function (multi-local lifestyle) thus follows the form (the apartment, the motorway, the local road, the car, the villa, the internet), not the other way around as functionalism would make us believe. But if we study contemporary planning discourses, it seems evident that this last question (and its cultural underpinnings) is never asked. The environment is supposed to follow functions, period. We have clearly found the limit that planners are not supposed to cross. "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent", as Wittgenstein so aptly put it in his Tractatus (No 7).

The second theme that arises out of our analysis is the role of biology. For Foucault, biopolitics meant the modern use of power by managing the health and productivity of the population, in addition to direct disciplining of the individual bodies (Foucault 2004). It is actually stunning to see these exact features as a strategic focus of the new Uusimaa regional plan: "a healthy and skilled human being". But the biopolitical emphasis goes through the whole spectrum: from the age and disabilities of the legislation to design-for-all (but not for the cultural minorities) of mainstream planning.

Finland is of course different from many other countries where immigration and multiculturalism already have a longer history. But – partly because of this – it is also an interesting case to experiment with the methodology of Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge, to better understand the systems of discourse formation in planning practice where the homogeneous culture is challenged.

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