5. Development of an old wooden house residential district

Supilinn in central Tartu

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5.1 DEVELOPMENT OF SUPILINN

5.1.1 The district of Supilinn
Supilinn lies between a hill and a river and is attached to the eastern part of the historical centre of Tartu. The border of the district is also the road from the centre of Tartu to Tallinn. Supilinn consists primarily of detached wooden buildings surrounded by yards and gardens. Unpaved streets in a grid formation run through the area. In Figure 5.4, the structure of the built environment of Supilinn in 1999 is presented.

5.1.2 History
The history of Supilinn dates back to the 16th century, when it was a suburban area of Tartu with a graveyard and a chapel outside the town wall. The district was constructed mostly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries although there are some buildings from earlier periods. In particular, the development of Supilinn stagnated during the Soviet period. The district was subject to a major renewal in the 1974 general plan of Tartu that further contributed to the decay. It is only in the last few years that some renovation and new construction has begun.

In the 1974 general plan and its 1976 revision, a new Soviet apartment block housing area was planned in Supilinn for the students and the employees of the Tartu State University. This would have meant the demolition of old structures and buildings. The arguments for renewal were based on the rationality of land-use and the quality of infrastructure in modern Soviet housing structures. The location of the university staff there would have created an intellectual atmosphere in the neighbourhood as well. However, the implementation of these planning objectives was delayed and finally, not carried out. One important reason for this was the presence of local resistance at the time when the society started to change. In particular, local planners purposefully delayed the demolition plans. The demolition was still proposed in 1986 in the conception for reconstruction. Nevertheless, a lack of finances resulted in the non-realisation of the plan.
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5.1.3 Population
Due to these uncertainties in planning and development, Supilinn remained quite homogenous. This means that no renovation has occurred in most of the buildings for decades. The basic facilities remained poor and the physical structure of the district started to badly decline. This resulted in a rapid decline in the population between the 1980s and the 1990s. In 1982, there were 3,100 inhabitants, in 1988, 2,800 people, and currently (2001) there are about 1,900 inhabitants in Supilinn. This is a 33% reduction in a decade. After independence, there have been changes in the social and physical environment in Tartu. Newcomers have renovated some of the privatized buildings in Supilinn. Other buildings continue to deteriorate and some have even been burned down.

The current population consists mostly of people from lower social strata, but there are also students looking for low priced apartment rentals and who like the special atmosphere of the place. In that sense there has been a small change in the population. In general, there is a lack of public services and infrastructure although there are few small food shops.

The future of Supilinn became a topic again in the late 1990s. In 1998, the town council approved the principles of the general plan for the area. These were to improve the development potential through intensifying the building density and the creation of a comprehensive technical infrastructure. In the development plan, the aim is to increase the population from the current 1,973 to 2,800, or a 50% increase.

More specific aspects of the plan included increasing the general housing density, preserving the milieu, lessening the protection constraints at the riverside, specifying the land-use for unbuilt areas, planning new roads for proposed future neighborhoods, creating possibilities for improved lot division, reserving the necessary land for social objectives and economic activities, creating a comprehensive system of open space through existing structure, and guaranteeing the requirement for technological development with regard to the development of the district. The future structure of Supilinn is presented in Figure 5.5. The few existing industrial areas will be replaced by areas for business and office use.

5.1.4 Social situation
As earlier indicated, there has been a major out-migration from Supilinn during the last decades. The population has decreased by about 40% in less than two decades. There is considerable stability in the population regarding length of residence in the neighbourhood. However, during the last three years there has been rapid growth in immigration to the area and the district has become a place of residence for shorter periods. About one out of ten people have lived in Supilinn for less than a year, less than four out of ten people (38%) have lived there for less than five years and slightly more than half (55%) have lived there for less than a decade (Figure 5.2). Part of the new migration is due to the restitution of old properties and the renovation of old buildings by the newcomers, part is linked to the low living costs in the area which is attractive to the less wealthy segment of society and to students. Despite this, there are approx. 150 people that have lived there for more than 30 years. This indicates that there is a negative development cycle in the neighbourhood.

Supilinn is a particularly "Estonian" district of Tartu. Almost everyone in Supilinn is ethnic Estonian (92%), was born in Estonia (88%), and speaks Estonian (95%) at home. In an ethnic sense, the district is one of the most homogeneous in Tartu (Tartu ja Tartuse 1998). This may help to create a stronger sense of common identity and of belonging. In terms of the educational level of the inhabitants, there are important differences between the Tartu average and Supilinn. In the higher strata there are no such differences; the number of people with higher education (finished or underway) in Supilinn is 21% (in Tartu 22%), but the number of people with little or basic education is significantly higher is Supilinn (31% of respondents) than in Tartu (22%). The background of the people is quite rural: slightly less than half (42%) were former rural residents.

As mentioned previously, the physical deterioration in the district and the low cost of living means that most of the people who live in the area are poor. The inhabitants of Supilinn have the lowest average income in Tartu, 1,300 EEK/month/person in 1998 (in Tartu 1,700 EEK). Importantly, there are some disparities in income that make the general outlook difficult: 6% of the households earned more than 10,000 EEK (April 1998), 18% between 5,000-10,000 EEK, 33% between 2,001-4,999 EEK, and 34% earned 2,000 EEK or less. The large number of people with a very low income means severe problems of survival for many residents in Supilinn.

Furthermore, almost every second person (47%, 40% in Tartu) claims that their future is not secure. The inhabitants also needed financial aid often (31 times in the last
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![Figure 5.3 View of a typical street in Supilinn.](image)

12 months compared to 24 times in Tartu) and other material aid (47 times in the last 12 months compared to 33 times in Tartu). Despite the low cost of living in Supilinn, 7% of the population received social aid for housing. Approx. 44% of the population perceive a need for such social help, not a particularly high percentage (51% in Tartu) (Tartu ja tartlased 1998).

Despite the existence of traditional alcohol related problems and other problems of that kind in Supilinn, security for local people in the district is relatively good. Indications of a more tolerant social atmosphere are that only 8% are very afraid of violence at home and 7% of violence outside of the home (total 15%, in Tartu 29%). In the neighbourhood, 16% are very afraid of violence which is a lower number than the Tartu average (21%).

### Table 5.1: Standard of apartments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jaamamõisa (%)</th>
<th>Supilinn (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No sewage system</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No hot water</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No toilet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No central/gas/electric heating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total renovation realised</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitary renovation</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became property owner between 1991-98</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5.2: Inhabitants impression of the living conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Supilinn</th>
<th>Jaamamõisa</th>
<th>Tartu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>much improved</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slightly improved</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slightly worsened</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worsened</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

spent less than 1,000 EEK which is too little to achieve anything substantial. About 27% spent between 1,000-5,000 EEK, 20% between 5,000-10,000 EEK, 16% between 10,000-50,000 EEK and 8% over 50,000 EEK. These figures are an indication that some total housing renovations have been carried out.

#### 5.2 THE HOUSING SITUATION

##### 5.2.1 Buildings and maintenance

The particular housing structure of Supilinn, mostly two storey wooden buildings, means that the housing questions are very different than those in Jaamamõisa. The space per person is slightly smaller than in Tartu (Supilinn 21.5 m²; Tartu 24.1 m²), but the average number of rooms per person is higher (Supilinn 1.33 rooms; Tartu 1.1 rooms). This means that the size of the rooms is rather small.

The difference in structure and age means that the functional facilities in the district of Supilinn are poor. At least 12% of the inhabitants claim that there is no sewage system in their apartment, 9% are without water (the worst situation in Tartu). 40% are without flush toilets (worst situation in Tartu), 69% are without baths or showers (worst situation in Tartu) and 80% are without central hot water (worst situation in Tartu, Table 5.1).

Because of the particular construction of the district, heating in the apartments is mainly wood-based. 78% are without central, electric or gas heating (Tartu ja tartlased 1998, 23-24). These are basic amenities that should be a part of housing everywhere, so the indicators illustrate that the situation of Supilinn is very difficult both from a technical and sanitary point of view. It is no wonder that two-thirds (65%) have carried out sanitary renovations in their apartments. The costs for the renovations vary greatly: 22% spent less than 1,000 EEK which is too little to achieve anything substantial. About 27% spent between 1,000-5,000 EEK, 20% between 5,000-10,000 EEK, 16% between 10,000-50,000 EEK and 8% over 50,000 EEK. These figures are an indication that some total housing renovations have been carried out.

##### 5.2.2 Ownership and costs

However, the lack of communal facilities results in a lower average cost of living. The general and rapid rise of costs related to heating, water and telephone in Tartu have less of an impact on the life of people in Supilinn. Nevertheless, one third (32%) said that the increase in the price of water has created problems, 29% regard increased heating costs as problematic and 21% regard the increased phone costs as problematic (Tartu ja tartlased 1998, 31). It should be taken into account that Supilinn is the poorest neighbourhood in Tartu.

Like other neighbourhoods, ownership has changed in Supilinn. Only 29% of the population have become owners of their apartment in the 1990s and about half of those lived there before in a rental apartment. Almost a third of the population (31%) have become property owners by buying their apartments from the state and a fifth (20%) by exchanging them and the remainder have become property owners through other means. A large number of inhabitants reside in buildings that have not yet been privatised because the legal owner has not been interested in such a process. Only 3% of inhabitants live in apartments that belong to a housing association. More than half of the inhabitants (55%) live in apartments in which there should be a housing association but there is not (Tartu ja tartlased 1998, 27).

This affects the physical structure of the neighbourhood as well. The lack of privatisation means that there is no interest
or possibility for renovating the buildings. About one third (38%) would like to privatise their apartment.

Only 58% live in an apartment owned by a member of the household. That is the lowest rate in Tartu. A large segment lives in an apartment that is owned by somebody else. Actually, the percentage (39%) is by far the highest in Tartu. This illustrates one of the important characteristics of the district of Supilinn: it is a place where people with fewer resources can survive. The large rental sector indicates limited possibilities for improvements in housing conditions. The satisfaction regarding housing conditions is varied among the residents (Tartu ja tartlased 1998).

5.2.3 Public perceptions of Supilinn

Supilinn is a neighbourhood with a special character and opinions about it vary in Tartu. In a questionnaire in 1998, the local authority experts perceived Supilinn as the most socially and physically degraded district. This conclusion was contested by the inhabitants who were quite satisfied with their living conditions despite problems present in the physical environment. About 20% of the people in Tartu rank the district of Supilinn as the least satisfactory neighbourhood in Tartu and 60% rank it in among the three least satisfactory neighbourhoods. It is perceived as the worst district after Jaamamõisa. The inhabitants who live in large apartment block districts like Jaamamõisa and Annelinn are especially critical of Supilinn.

There is a clear difference of opinion along ethnic lines: 37% of the population of Russian ethnic origin ranks Supilinn as the worst district, but only 18% of ethnic Estonians do. This indicates differences in housing preferences along ethnic lines in Tartu. Interestingly, in the same way, the inhabitants of Supilinn give the lowest preference to the districts of Jaamamõisa and Annelinn.

Supilinn was ranked among the three best districts in Tartu by only a few Tartu residents, and by every fifth (19%) resident of Supilinn (Tartu ja tartlased 1998, 50-54). This preference for living in a wooden building milieu is a particular challenge for the redevelopment of the district.

4.3 EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

4.3.1 The Lifestyle

Supilinn has its own particular flavour: life in Supilinn has been documented several times. In the 1990s, there were even exhibitions and films about the neighbourhood. There is a specific lifestyle and a special character there. This is why almost everyone has an opinion about Supilinn and why it occasionally is the subject of media coverage.

Between 1996 and 1999, the Postimees, the most widely distributed newspaper in Estonia and the main newspaper in Tartu, has covered Supilinn 24 times. Most of the articles discussed questions about the development of the neighbourhood. As early as 1996, the town planners presented ideas for making a master plan for the area. In 1997, the area was the subject of a special cultural interest when

![Master plan of Supilinn](image)

Figure 5.4 Master plan of Supilinn, showing the current situation.
a film and a photographic exhibition were made about Supilinn. The majority of articles in 1999 dealt with planning issues. It is worth mentioning that in many articles the local inhabitants are critical towards the planning process.

5.3.2 Development options

Though Supilinn is a relatively homogeneous neighbourhood in terms of ethnicity and the general look of the area is quite uniform, there are different opinions regarding its development.

Different interest groups see the area also from different angles. For one group, the area is rundown, deprived and a blemish for Tartu and thus should be energetically renewed. For another group, Supilinn has a potential for redevelopment and regeneration through new and economically more viable land-use. For another group, the area should be carefully rehabilitated, maintaining as much as possible of the built environment. In the end, none of these three groups can agree, except that something must be done with Supilinn.

As earlier described in detail, Supilinn is among the worst neighbourhoods in Tartu with regard to the physical condition and technical facilities of the housing. The situation has not changed much in the 1990s. In 1998, one fourth (26%) argued that their living conditions had improved during the 1990s, one fourth (25%) that they had remained the same and half (48%) that they had worsened. It is important to note that one fourth (24%) argued that the living conditions had worsened considerably. (Table 5.2)

This is particularly worrisome if one takes into account the poor condition which the neighbourhood and the inhabitants have as their starting point. This actually indicates the existence of social segregation between Supilinn and rest of Tartu. Only one out five people (20%) in Supilinn estimate that they have a higher social status than the Estonian average and only one fifth (22%) claim that their social status has risen during the 1990s.

5.3.3 The Supilinn master plan

In summary, the aims of the Supilinn master plan were:
- to increase housing density while maintaining the milieu of Supilinn
- to specify land-use for the non-built area
- to decrease the protection zone along the riverside
- to plan streets for the new quarters
- to create possibilities for re-organising the plot boundaries
- to develop open spaces taking into account the existing structure
- to guarantee the technical infrastructure in the district

This plan was only realised in 1998-99 and the details still need to be approved, so it is not possible to analyse much of what has taken place. Actually, the master plan is the reference point for further detail plans and building in the area. A local private architectural firm, Siim & Põllumaa, drew up the plan for Supilinn.

![Figure 5.5 Master plan of Supilinn, showing the planning proposal.](image-url)
The development is to be realised in three stages: the first stage includes renovation of existing roads including development of a technical network as well as the purchase of land in new areas by the local authorities for future development. The second stage includes the development of new areas, construction of a new bridge and of the area between the riverside and one major street. In the third stage, the large road to Tallinn, a pedestrian bridge and a children’s playground are to be developed. As a whole, the plan seeks a population increase of between 800–1,000 people, up to a total of 2,900 people.

5.3.4 Sustainability
Sustainability and participation have been part of the planning process in Supilinn. This is a great improvement in comparison to the time when Jaamamõisa was planned. There are however some limitations in the concepts and in the methods. The sustainability principles are implemented in the plan through the densification of the neighbourhood. This creates the conditions for a centralised sewage system and improvement in drinking water quality through a new water distribution system, and improves waste collection, the recreational value of the land, and removes the need of maintaining an unhealthy sanitary buffer zone in the area. One could argue that the principles of sustainability are merely technical-economic and hardly take into account the socio-cultural dimension.

5.3.5 Participation in planning
Participation in planning was included during several discussions and hearings with the interested partners. The inhabitants could participate in hearings, make oral comments or submit written questions. The hearing for the draft plan took place in December 1998 in which the town planning office, the consultant for planning and 56 inhabitants of Tartu were represented.

Four questions were asked: one regarding the new formation of lots (answer: it will be decided in detail planning, but it will not be enforced against the will of the owner), one regarding information about detail planning initiatives (answer: all land-owners will be informed), and one regarding the definition of density and measures that are taken into account (answer: the analysis is in progress and that draft is still at early stage); and one regarding unsuitable semi-detached housing close to a park where concerts are held. (answer: there will be more increased housing density, not necessarily semi-detached housing).

In addition, two written proposals were given: one regarding broader aspects of development in Supilinn containing 10 comments, and one containing three comments. Both proposals were given to the planners.

As well, there was a questionnaire on the Internet at the end of 1998 asking whether the rundown buildings in Supilinn should be demolished. A total of 198 persons answered, of whom 40% were in favour of demolition and 56% were against. However, it may be argued that the residents of Supilinn were not equally represented among respondents to the Internet questionnaire.

Furthermore, a meeting was held about some of the ecological aspects in Supilinn with an expert evaluation given by a natural scientist. In July 1999, another public hearing for the plan was held and 23 proposals were received that were later discussed by the town council. These comments were also taken into consideration in the environmental statement for the area.

Environmental, sustainability and participation aspects were also addressed in an environmental evaluation conducted in November 1999 by a local planning consultant agency. The study concluded that environmental aspects had been taken into account according to the law, however, it also indicated that the master plan preparation had been old fashioned in the sense that the impact assessment was not integrated into plan preparation, as it is in contemporary planning. It was recommended that there be additional study in order to give a more specific prognosis on the level of noise the large through-roads will create as well as a specific impact assessment of the development potential of the district.
5.4 DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

5.4.1 A gap between actual and potential land values
As indicated earlier, the aim of the Supillinn master plan is to increase the density of housing in the area and increase the population by approx. one third in a decade. This is to be realised through replacing currently rundown buildings with modern ones, building new streets on the large backyards in the neighbourhood and expanding the use of the riverside area. Again, the main reason is the rationalisation of land-use implemented through rational planning in order to increase the population density and services in the area. However, one objective is to maintain the particular milieu of Supillinn in order to be able to market the area for the newcomers.

Supillinn is clear evidence of the wide gap between actual and potential land values. The new master plan can also be partially explained as an attempt to improve the economic performance of Supillinn and to foster gentrification of the area. The area has more development potential than Jaamamõisa, evidently. There have already been some signs of change in very recent years in Supillinn, despite the poor general outlook.

The economic explanation for gentrification is in the background of the current situation, but the real change may in some years be explained by cultural factors. Already the initiators have arrived in the neighbourhood. One-fourth (23%) of the households have done a total renovation in their apartments and two-thirds (65%) have done sanitary renovations. There are early signs of social and physical upgrading since 8% spent more than 50,000 EEK on renovations and some households have incomes exceeding 10,000 EEK/month, also there is an increasing number of people with higher education, and there is increased immigration into the neighbourhood.

5.4.2 The role of the market
Currently Supillinn is one of the more inexpensive neighbourhoods in Tartu and the real estate development is quite poor. The development prospects for Supillinn were analysed by the real estate agents of Tartu. In a structured phone interview, the opinions of 42 real estate agents, of whom 27 were suitable to make an analysis, were taken. There were two major concerns: the existence of a modest market situation for purchasing and for rental opportunities. The change of property in Supillinn occurs in many cases directly between the seller and the buyer. Actually the land (the lot as a long-term investment) seems to be an important factor in the purchase which fits the theory on land values.

There were also some specific streets and the riverside that were of greater interest. The real estate agents estimated that the majority of potential buyers, currently young families and people with temporary financial problems were attracted by the lower cost of living in the area. As well, those seeking to rent were people in financial need.

As potential investors in the area, the most likely were thought to be young families (12 first rankings, 52 points), the middle-aged/middle-class people (8, 4 first rankings, 37 points), then international investors (7 first rankings, 32 points) and finally the town authorities (2 first rankings, 29 points).

5.4.3 The role of the master plan as strategic tool
One must bear in mind the long-term knowledge of the real estate agents or the lack of it as well. Only 3 were acquainted with the master plan of Supillinn, 11 followed it more or less in the newspaper, and 11 had paid no attention to the master plan. In this way, it seems that using the plan as a strategic tool for investment has serious disadvantages.

- special emphasis must be paid to the tangible social and environmental context of Supillinn and its current inhabitants and physical milieu.
- more emphasis must be directed to non-exclusionary methods of planning in the district and non-imperialist methods of public consultation.
- new methods of participatory planning must be used to integrate current inhabitants with political power, planning and influence on real development.
- Local Agenda 21 practices and working groups could be used to improve the contacts between the planners and the inhabitants.
- it would be useful to conduct a social survey regarding the redevelopment possibilities in Supillinn.

References

Published written material

Plans, unpublished material and Internet references