Perceived neighborhood quality and socioeconomic status

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Abstract (300 words):

Densification of urban areas, particularly near centers and good transport connections, is one of the main focuses of local planning strategies in the Helsinki metropolitan region. The effects of densification are, however, largely unknown, due to densification being a recent and ongoing phenomenon. Alongside planned densification, unplanned income and ethnic segregation have also slowly lifted their heads in Nordic metropolises, with Helsinki being no exception to this trend. There has, however, too date been a slow response from the urban planning sector on how to deal with issues of spatial inequality.

This paper seeks to understand the issue of perceived spatial disadvantage with the help of a large residential survey, looking at the results in the context of neighborhood socioeconomic status. How satisfied are residents in densely built areas in the Helsinki metropolitan area with their neighborhood, and how do they perceive neighborhood quality? Do the results, aggregated to a postcode level, correlate to neighborhood socioeconomic status (SES), measured by income, employment, education and tenure status?

The key findings suggest that perceived neighborhood quality, along with residential satisfaction, are both closely correlated with neighborhood SES. Areas of socioeconomic disadvantage are perceived as less aesthetic, with more untidiness and buildings in poor
condition. Residents in areas of lower SES are also generally less satisfied with their neighborhoods and experience more perceived unsafety.

A large share of residents in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods have both less resources to move out of unsatisfactory conditions, but also possess fewer resources to counteract negative spatial effects while living in the area, possibly leading to deepening disadvantage in certain areas. This paper contributes to the intersection of land use policy and social studies by shedding light on the link between perceived urban quality as a possible contributor to spatial inequality in areas which are already socioeconomically disadvantaged.

- Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Katriina Rosengren is an architect/urban planner by training. She has a long practical experience in sustainable land use planning in consultancies and municipalities, widened by research experience in ecological and social sustainability. She is now writing her cross-discipline PhD thesis ‘Neighborhood satisfaction in dense subcenters of the Helsinki region’ for the Department of Architecture at Aalto University in Finland under sociologists' supervision. She is also a researcher at the Department of Sociology at the University of Turku, studying the novel intersection of land use and segregation policies. She also is a visiting researcher at the Finnish Institute of Health and Wellbeing, where the data for her doctoral thesis has been gathered.