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The issue of sustainable urban development in a neoliberal age

Discursive entanglements and disputes

Abstract

The city of Oslo, the Norwegian capital, is in the midst of executing a huge urban waterfront project in Bjørvika. This project has triggered several years of public debate. A key concept in the development project is "sustainable development", but it is unclear what the concept implies. Several interests are involved which emphasise different goals and different values. In this article, a discourse analysis of the concept, in this particular context, is conducted. Five discourses are identified, which overlap as well as collide. Special attention is paid to how the respective discourses are related to a neoliberal form of government, and as part of the analysis, a discussion of how cultural heritage is used to increase the city's attractiveness is undertaken. This article concludes that planning for a sustainable use of cultural heritage should imply establishing a reflective cultural policy not subsumed under economic sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainable urban development, discourse-coalitions, neoliberalism, cultural heritage

Introduction

The Fjord City project embodies the most extensive urban development scheme in the Norwegian capital since 1624, when the old town burned down and the city centre was moved further west. The present plan involves freeing up waterfront areas for housing, commerce, culture and recreation. The Fjord City extends from Frognerkilen in the west to Ormsund in the southeast. The whole area is subdivided into smaller regions, Bjørvika being the biggest one. The Oslo Opera House, home of The Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, and the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) building were among the first to be completed in the Bjørvika area[1]. The new office block for the insurance company KLP was completed recently and more are under way. The total building volume envisaged just for Bjørvika is close to a million square metres, half of which is for private apartments. Staging an urban development project of this magnitude obviously involves many different groups of stakeholders, including politicians, contractors, private developers and architects. All have to comply with the political regulations and guidelines, as well as accommodating different social interests arising from the general public and from various interest groups. It is no wonder that the project's reconfiguration of the cityscape has generated much debate in the media – with some people voicing support, others opposition or ambivalence. In this article, I shall investigate this debate and conduct a discourse analysis of a concept that occurs with some frequency in planning documents, newspaper reports and opinions expressed by the public – the concept of "sustainable development", also termed "sustainability", and "sustainable urban development". The purpose is to develop a critical reflection of the variety of meanings and uses of the concept, in order to address some challenges to urban planning in general and in Oslo in particular. Sustainable development is not a physical tool but a conceptual tool with social and physical consequences. The way the concept is used in different contexts reflects urban planning policies and ideologies. Consequently, this analysis is not motivated by semiotic curiosity only. I will pay particular attention to the implications for the cultural heritage sector – a commitment shared by different UNESCO initiatives on how to manage heritage in an urban context (Bandarin & Oers, 2012). The aim is to render visible the blind spots in urban planning, and thereby contribute to an improved ground for decision making.

Concept ambiguity

Much has been said, written and thought about sustainable development since the Brundtland Commission launched the report "Our Common Future" in 1987 (WCED, 1987). In reference to the concept's substantial meaning, the most quoted definition from the Brundtland report is that "sustainable development is a development that meets the demands of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The report also states the minimum condition required: "sustainable development must not endanger the natural systems that support life on Earth: the atmosphere, the waters, the soils, and the living beings" (WCED, 1987, pp. 44-45). This emphasis on environmental sustainability has been followed up through the Global Summits – the first in Rio in 1992 and the second in Johannesburg in 2002, and in Rio again in 2012. However, despite the Brundtland Commission's emphasis on the environmental aspects, the report also states that the environmental conditions could be combined with economic growth (Næss & Høyer, 2009, p. 74). In contrast to earlier statements of global environmental policy, reviving growth now became the top strategic priority (Bernstein, 2001, p. 64). Ecology and economics appear to be compatible as a positive-sum game. Growth is regarded as part of the solution, and not part of the problem (Sachs, 1999, p. 31). However, by linking "sustainable" to "development", a terrain of semantic ambiguity is created (Sachs, 1999, p. 33). "Sustainability" implies continuity and balance, while "development" implies dynamism and change (Giddens, 2011, p. 61). There are environmentalists denying that development as economic growth can ever be sustainable, and denouncing what they see as anthropocentric arrogance implicit in the concept (Dryzek, 2005, p. 135). "Development" on its own can also have at least two different meanings. It can simply mean economic growth, as measured by GDP, and it can refer to the economic process that take people out of poverty (Giddens, 2011, p. 62). The latter definition raises questions of social justice. But in spite of this ambiguity (development of what, for whom), sustainable development often adds up to a reassurance that we can have it all: economic growth, environmental conservation and social justice (Dryzek, 2005, p. 132).

Cannibals with forks

One popular version of this tripartition has been developed by John Elkington. He takes business life's point of view and states that the natural strategy for corporations is to carve up and devour other corporations and industries. He stresses that economic growth not only could, but should, be a prerequisite when addressing sustainability issues. Quoting the Polish poet Stanislaw Lec, he asks if it is progress if a cannibal uses a fork. Elkington's answer is yes; cannibalism with a fork would certainly constitute progress (Elkington, 1998, p. ix). The fork equals sustainability's triple bottom line, the fork's three prongs; economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social justice (Elkington, 1998, p. 70). The environmental and social issues are included because it is profitable for corporations to do so. According to Elkington, businesses which do not act responsibly will lose in the competition and weaken their position. The most interesting thing to note here is his emphasis of the need to include all three forms of sustainability, not primarily with reference to any human considerations or values, but to alleged facts about how to best run business corporations. Elkington's view has achieved a somewhat hegemonic position in the western world, and the three prongs are often used as guidelines of the issues needing to be addressed in urban planning. Consequently, as identified by Hajer and Fischer, it has become possible to claim that since there is a general consensus about sustainable development, there is no longer a need for conflict, only for collaboration (1999, p. 4). I do not share this conviction. People may agree on the (assumed) good intention behind the concept, but still lack any consensus of what the concept actually means, and how to act upon it. There might be interests involved which put emphasis on different prongs. One must also assume that sustainability is unevenly distributed within

places and across space, and that there are different "actually existing sustainabilities" (Krueger & Agyeman, 2005, p. 411). Despite Elkington's clear-cut metaphor, there is still something to gain from local empirical investigations of how the concept is used and disputed in specific planning processes.

Methodology

The empirical data in this article are taken from the public debate as it has been expressed in newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets and websites, but strategic and political documents have also been used.[2] The corpus of texts constituting the basis for this analysis illustrates several years of debate about the Bjørvika development process. The purpose has been to construct a broad picture of which discourses appear in the many attempts of defining sustainable development as a concept. The aim of this data collection has been to systemise the empirical material and present various fragments of utterances to build an understanding of the discourse(s) as a whole. I have identified discourses analytically as a coalition of people that have a particular way of talking and thinking about particular issues (Hajer, 1995, p. 13). There is no need for the actors in such discourse-coalitions to have met. They also differ from traditional political coalitions or alliances in respect of where the actors are located (Hajer, 1995, p. 66). The members of a discourse-coalition do not necessarily share the same beliefs, political ideologies or professions, but still participate in the debate because they share some of the same opinions (Hajer, 1995, p. 70). Regarding what status these discourse-coalitions have (which I will most often call discourses), I will use an epistemological understanding of discourse corresponding to Norman Fairclough's "Critical Discourse Analysis" (CDA). He insists on the necessity to view the relation between discourses and other constituting elements in the social world dialectically. CDA includes both the production and the consumption of symbolic systems, and the acknowledgement that they are over-determined by a range of other factors than just the discursive (Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer, 2010, p. 220). All more or less permanent structures are effects of social processes, but once constituted, such structures become "durable entities with their own causal powers to shape processes and events" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 363). The operation of the social world includes semiotic as well as extra-semiotic factors (Fairclough, et al., 2010, p. 210). How the debate is influenced by this will be discussed in the last part of the paper. Sediments from previous social practices, in this case to be conceived as a prevailing neoliberal economy, affect a whole range of things, from the public debate, to buildings and landscapes. Neoliberalism may be characterised as a political economic practice that "proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). However, the methodological challenge of finding neoliberalism in its various moments of actualisation, failure, normalisation and adaption, is intrinsically a geographical one (Peck, 2010, p. 33). Consequently, I will now delve into the local case at hand.

A local bundle in the sustainability jungle

1. The discourse on densification and sustainable mobility

One of the leading discourses on sustainable urban development in Bjørvika is the discourse on densification and sustainable mobility; it stresses the importance of clustering as many people as possible near public transport hubs, thus relieving them of the need to travel by car. In the National Transport Plan, published by the Ministry of Transport and Communication, it is stated that "the Government's clear ambition [is] to get more people to travel by public transport, by means of improving the quality, together with putting restrictions on the use of private cars (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2009, p. 11). Under the heading "A Sustainable Transport System" they stress the need to limit the negative environmental

consequences of transport (2009, p. 13). The director of the Oslo City Agency of Planning and Building Services, Ellen de Vibe, is an advocate of this conviction when stating that a "central location close to the busiest traffic junction in Norway makes for sustainability and a good city development with a dense population in Bjørvika – by reducing the pollution caused by car traffic, which is a burden on the city environment" (de Vibe, 2006, p. 14). She elaborates on the necessity of high-density land use in Bjørvika if what we want is to build sustainably (Lundgaard, 2007c, p. 16). She says that "Vancouver in Canada has the term 'EcoDensity', that is, high density around major transport interchanges and in housing areas" (de Vibe, 2007, p. 16). Kjetil Kleveland, public relations consultant at the same agency, states that "high density is sine qua non, not least from an environmental point of view" (Kleveland, 2008, p. 17). He asks whether a good city should not also be a sustainable city, especially in connection with the area around Oslo Central Station (Kleveland, 2008, p. 17). Sustainability is here juxtaposed with densification around Norway's biggest public transport hub – Oslo Central Station. The Planning and Building Agency warns against lowering the height of the so-called Barcode buildings (a sequence of high-rise buildings of different heights) – as certain politicians have suggested – because doing so would "diminish the sustainability of the project" (Lundgaard, 2007b, p. 27). In the agency's own information leaflet, *Byblikk*, senior architect Eivind Hartmann comments on the difference between sustainability today and in the 1800s. "The Barcode development," he maintains, "with its elongated, narrow plots and buildings of different heights, is a good solution for the area: By giving Bjørvika the [level of] densification prescribed by its central location in the city, the 'barcode' development principle would seem the optimal solution" (Hovig, 2007, p. 2). A similar idea is expressed by two local politicians: "as long as the public transport service in the area is excellent, so is the ecological benefit to Oslo as a whole" (Tellvik & Haugli, 2008, p. 15). To Erling Fossen, urbanist and leader of the political party Oslo City Action, no issue counts as much for urban sustainability as transport: "concentrating housing and jobs in the centre will generate more journeys to and from work by foot and bicycle" (Fossen, 2004, p. 40). He argues that tower blocks are a method of increasing density at transport hubs and central areas, and the higher the concentration, the fewer reasons there will be to drive (2004, p. 40). "In the struggle for a sustainable Norway, densification and regeneration around the transport hub at Bjørvika form important elements" (Fossen, 2007, p. 12). Ellen de Vibe seconds such a view: "Tower blocks", she writes, "housing commercial operations are job-intensive and, given a central location near transport interchanges, they will promote sustainable urban development" (de Vibe, 2002, p. 12). Architect and former Oslo City Antiquarian, Hans Jacob Hansteen, makes a similar comment and asks "what about sustainability? Locating jobs and homes in the vicinity of transport interchanges would obviously be ecologically beneficial" (Hansteen, 2007, p. 16). To Paul E. Lødøen, director of Oslo S Utvikling (OSU), a sustainable city means "a city based on public transport", but to achieve this, he adds, Bjørvika should not by any means be thinned out (Lødøen, 2007, p. 18). He states that a "sustainable environment and climate is a cornerstone in the Bjørvika plan [and that] without doubt it will be a good policy for the city to build compact precisely here, so that as many people as possible can walk, bicycle or use public transport in and out of the new city district" (Lødøen, 2011, p. 18). This is a coalition of meaning which adds up to a discourse quite in line with Elkington's prong of environmental sustainability. The common denominator in this discourse is the argument of protecting the environment by gathering as many jobs and homes as possible around Oslo Central Station and restricting the use of private cars.

2. The discourse on sustainable green lungs and landscapes

This discourse accentuates the importance of green lungs and recreational areas – when preserving existing public spaces and landscaping/developing new ones. As the previous discourse consisted of two interconnected parts – density and mobility (for the benefit of the

environment) – this discourse also has two sides: environmental and social. Regarding the environment, landscape architects Nina Marie Andersen and Kari Schøyen, write that "a linkage is established between air quality and green environment: vegetation filters and absorbs polluted air from detrimental particles and dust, and reduces wind and levels temperature differences" (Andersen & Schøyen, 2010, p. 5). Further, they write that the "actual documents, plans and celebratory speeches tell us that Bjørvika is intended to be a forward-looking, sustainable, blue-green city district [but that it now seems like] the vision has acquired a rather grayish tint" (2010, p. 5). They ask where the guidelines that were spelled out in the general environmental plan for Bjørvika have gone, as they are nowhere to be seen in completed or on-going projects (2010, p. 5).

However, in contrast to the discourse on densification and sustainable mobility, the ecological perspective is not the only factor to be reckoned with: people have a need for recreation as well – a need expressed as something else other than ensuring a small ecological footprint in the natural environment. People's right to outdoor recreational areas is of primary importance. Andersen and Schøyen also voice this benefit from creating (or preserving) the green lungs. They refer to a study done by the environmental psychologist Frances Kuo, and claim that people's health and ability to cope is positively influenced by green surroundings. Unbroken green areas invite people to engage in physical activity, which is "positive to human health!" (Andersen & Schøyen, 2010, p. 5). A similar conviction is expressed by Hans Christian Lillehagen, leader of Gamle Oslo submunicipal committee. He writes that access to green lungs "is essential for people's opportunities of activity and enjoyment [and that] it is part and parcel of a sustainable development scheme in which steps are taken to promote general well-being" (Lillehagen, 2008, p. 26). The introduction of an element of human needs is one thing that sets this discourse apart from the previously described discourse. So far, Lillehagen contends, "the architectural pearls have clashed with considerations of human welfare" (2008, p. 26). In the opinion of Kine Halvorsen Thorén, professor at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Oslo's green areas are shrinking. Densification is basically taken to mean sustainability, but it needs to be "balanced against the need of having outdoor spaces and green lungs close to where people live" (Lundgaard, 2007a, p. 8). She finds it alarming that so many "vital public spaces are simply disappearing" (2007a, p. 8). She elaborates on these concerns with a fellow professor, forging a connection with the urban development scheme at Bjørvika: "Development vs. green lungs has become a bargaining chip between the planning authorities and property developers. Even with the planned development of publicly owned land, as in Bjørvika, access to sunlight, light, air and greenery is controversial and given a lower priority" (Falleth & Thorén, 2010, p. 26). Pointing to the Brundtland Commission's concept of sustainable development, we now know, they say, how access to green lungs can affect health and quality of life (2010, p. 26) . Oslo City's own information magazine *Fjordbyen* stresses the same point; everyday life will be even greener, it assures the public: "New parks and green public areas will make for a luxuriant Fjord City. Hobby anglers and bathing nymphs can look forward to enjoying a clean fjord" (The Municipality of Oslo, 2009, p. 26). And it is all being done, the City insists, "within sustainable limits" (2009, p. 26). This discourse is a coalition of meaning which adds up to Elkington's prong of environmental sustainability, but in a quite different way from the previous described discourse. It is not transport or density which is at stake, but rather to secure an ecological balance parallel to these issues. The discourse also introduces an element of human needs, which reminds us of Elkington's prong of social sustainability, but is more connected to leisure and landscape aesthetics than social justice and responsibility.

3. The discourse on energy consumption and sustainable buildings

This is a discourse critical of the energy consumption in new museums and office blocks. A comprehensive write-up on so-called prestige buildings, printed in a Saturday supplement to

the business daily *Dagens Næringsliv*, may illustrate what this discourse is about. The newly constructed PwC building is an environmental disaster, it claims. Because of the enormous glass façades it devours power for heating and cooling (Butenschøn & Rønningen, 2009). Over a ten-year period, the energy consumption rate of new office buildings has risen by 40 per cent. These buildings are unpleasant for the people who work in them as well. Summer temperatures can exceed 30^{o} C and in the winter, "bits of ice slither down people's backs" (Butenschøn & Rønningen, 2009). Former president of Boston University, John Silber, says that people allow architects to foist on them exorbitantly expensive and dysfunctional buildings for the fear of being labelled reactionary fools. He fumes against what to him is the canonisation of architects and the perception of their buildings as works of art (Butenschøn & Rønningen, 2009). Architects as "starchitects" are Silber's prime target. In the Norwegian context, Morten Krogstad and architect Arne Sødal voice a similar view and write that a cramped assemblage of glass and concrete tower blocks is not sustainable since "they are expensive to construct, and the technical installations for cooling and lighting simply guzzle energy" (Krogstad & Sødal, 2007, p. 15). Architect and board member of an Oslo residents' association, Didrik Hvoslef-Eide, also finds fault with glass façades. According to Hvoslef-Eide, after tests and trials, the Bjørvika energy calculation has so far failed to "make the grade" (2008, p. 16). Although the field of serious urban development and architecture has acknowledged the concept of sustainable development, he says, the production of commercial buildings in recent years bears little evidence of it. On the contrary, what we are witnessing are "office blocks coated with panels of power-gobbling glass, and usually from floor to ceiling" (2008, p. 16). In a similar way civil engineer Einar Bjarki Malmquist argues that "whilst people in the past were interested in how buildings functioned, the only thing concerning people today is how they look" (Malmquist, 2008, p. 14). He argues that what is known as the Environmental Follow-up Programme, only requires developers to employ environmentally beneficial materials or take power consumption into account in the choice of façade solutions. In this sense, "the search for a certain look or short-term economic returns in the choice of façade solutions can easily divert attention away from the sustainability question" (Malmquist, 2008, p. 14). He is also critical of the wording of an advertisement by the property developer HAV Eiendom, whose only concern is the "search for an expression which will cause enthusiasm [and that] it goes without saying that this text will hardly catch the attention of those who are most competent on sustainability" (Malmquist, 2008, p. 14). What's needed to save Bjørvika, he concludes, is a "sustainability package" (2008, p. 14). This discourse too is a coalition of meaning which adds up to Elkington's prong of environmental sustainability, but quite different from the two previously described discourses. This is a discourse where the degree of sustainability is yoked to buildings per se, rather than the wider urban contexts in which the buildings belong.

4. The discourse on sustainable synergies from culture and capital

In an appendix to the Bjørvika zoning plan, Oslo Municipality published a "Culture Follow-up Programme" under the heading "Sustainability in Bjørvika". It reads: "culture as a competitive factor has acquired fresh urgency, given the increasingly intense interurban competition and need to develop a positive city identity, often conceived in terms of brand and vision building" (Culture Follow-up Programme, 2003, p. 4). Writing of the Opera House, the programme says "the building will come across as a monumental structure testifying to Norway as a nation of culture". It will prove a "valuable contribution to the development of the place and to enhancing the area's identity" (2003, p. 6). Moreover, the Bjørvika development should be seen in light of the City's overall policy for the capital, which involves becoming "a gateway to the world, a vital city centre, with businesses, culture and attractions" (2003, p. 7). It is also important, the program says, "to attract the interest of private and public cultural institutions (galleries, publishing houses) and to make them settle

in the district" (2003, p. 7). Elaborating a vision for Bjørvika, the same document suggests, "could be a strategic move and instrument in the creation of a positive district identity or *image*"; indeed, the "ripple effects of a vibrant artistic and cultural life would reverberate across the whole community" (2003, pp. 11-12). Given the singular attractions of Bjørvika, "residents, businesses and visitors/tourists" would prefer it to others and make it their choice (2003, p. 11). The document concludes that: "culture will be important in ensuring the success of the Bjørvika development," and "a strong cultural identity will foster economic sustainability" (2003, p. 30). A similar belief in the ability of culture to generate sustainable cities is evident in a newspaper article by senior adviser and architect, Magnus Heide Westerberg: "Urban development projects in the Nordics are characterized by the principle of complementarity. Copenhagen's Nordhavn, Stockholm's Slussen area, and now Oslo as well, where Bjørvika gets its cultural institutions […] Complementarity means culture, business and commerce playing together" (Westerberg, 2009). Former Governing Mayor Erling Lae and Vice Mayor Torger Ødegaard share this view of complementarity: "The Bjørvika plan will help put Oslo on the map as a cultural city of European standard […] There might be a need for several mutually enhancing institutions. Artistic and cultural institutions are an important driving force along the Oslo waterfront" (Lae & Ødegaard, 2008, p. 47). Former director of the National Association of Norwegian Architects (NAL), Jannike Hovland, also draws on this particular discourse in an interview with *Dagens Næringsliv*: "Spain has deployed architecture to lift complete cities both in Barcelona and in Bilbao" (Gjesvik, 2007, p. 50). Bjørvika will be an exciting prospect, she suggests, for the tourists that will be coming (2007, p. 50). This discourse is a coalition of meaning which stresses the intermingling of culture and capital as a stepping stone in the creation of a sustainable city. It may be said to correspond to Elkington's prong of economic sustainability, but not perfectly, since it introduces a strong element of culture, which he does not have a prong for.

5. The discourse on social sustainability

As with the discourse on green lungs and landscapes, this too is a discourse with a certain anthropocentric feature – but rather than accentuating the ecological conditions of human well-being, ordinary people's needs are kept in focus: the desire to see a varied demographic makeup and people's democratic right to use the city district. Human geographer Anne Aaby says that there is one thing missing: "how they intend to cater to the [needs of] children in these new urban spaces" (Aaby, 2009, p. 32). Aaby describes how Italy has defined children's participation, mobility and ability to flourish as basic to the evaluation of a sustainable city, and she wonders why this is not the case in Bjørvika (2009, p. 32). Architect Arna Mathiesen is also worried that Bjørvika may well exclude ordinary families: "The ideal of people of all ages living sustainably together looks as if it's about to collapse" (Mathiesen, 2004, p. 36). He goes on to wonder where "all the promises of sustainable urban development, promulgated in the submunicipal plan for Oslo's East Central district, and deliberated by The City Council, have gone" (2004, p. 36). He contends that Bjørvika "will obviously not be for ordinary families" (2004, p. 36). Chris Butters, a member of the organisation of Norwegian Architects for Sustainable Development, and Inger Merete Vereide of the Gamle Oslo residents' association, want to see less focus on prestigious projects and more on "the needs of ordinary people" (Butters & Vereide, 2003, p. 28). Another debater sounds an alarm that Bjørvika "could become a new area for bigwigs [and that] to get a varied mix of residents, homes need to fit people's incomes" (Husøy, 2001, p. 36). A similar sentiment is expressed by architect and writer Jan Carlsen. He argues that we need to "focus on social sustainability as well (…) develop the city, OK, but develop it for whom?" (Müller, 2009, p. 37). He says he's afraid "because the Fjord City could turn into a new Oslo West" (2009, p. 37). Also city councillor Erling Folkvord writes that the Bjørvika development is going in the wrong direction, one which does not ring true at all with what the City adopted as its resolution on sustainable

development (Folkvord, 2003, p. 2). He calls on people to "step up to the plate" and demand a revision of the proposed zoning plan for the area, so that Bjørvika can become "a district catering to the needs of ordinary people" (2003, p. 2). Despite these worries, a thematic report issued by Bjørvika Infrastruktur sought to assure readers that "Bjørvika will offer homes for everyone […] size and price variation will underpin social sustainability by including groups of people from the outset" (Bjørvika Infrastruktur, 2007, p. 29). As they see it, social sustainability implies diversity and variety with the built environment fostering social interaction and a sense of community. This discourse is a coalition of meaning where arguments are grounded in people's need – but also ordinary people's right – to live in and enjoy the new city district. The discourse is altruistic and seeks to promote heterogeneous communities and avert social segregation, and it corresponds to Elkington's prong of social sustainability.

Discursive entanglements and disputes

I have now identified five different conceptions of sustainability in connection with the urban development process in Bjørvika. This should not, by any means, be taken as an exhaustive list; however, they are discourses possible to discern in the empirical material, without excluding other ways of subdividing or categorising the arguments. Nor should the different conceptions of sustainability be understood as mutually exclusive. The discourses should be seen as a selection of the considerations which have to be addressed in urban planning. Some discourses overlap while others stand in opposition, which is clear from the presentation above. In the case of Bjørvika, the discourse on densification and sustainable mobility is opposed to the discourse on green lungs; they are in tension. If densification is the chosen policy, it could lead to the loss of the green areas. Conversely, commitment to large green areas reduces the possibility of building compact housing estates. This is an expression of the difficulties in integrating "the city in the ecology" and "the ecology in the city" (Næss, 2012, p. 8). However, there are, of course, many examples of interdiscursive relations as well – when debaters draw on two or more discourses when establishing their cases (Fairclough, 1992, p. 117). One such example is Kine Halvorsen Thorén's acceptance of densification as sustainable, as long as it is balanced against pleasant outdoor areas and green lungs (Lundgaard, 2007a, p. 8).

The discourse on densification and sustainable mobility is closely aligned to the question of proximity to transport hubs. The more residents Bjørvika has, the more people will presumably use public transport – which increases the environmental payoff. It is therefore quite a paradox to see how little the discourse on sustainable buildings takes this wider societal perspective into account, although both present arguments on behalf of the environment. However, the former discourse is often articulated by urbanites and city planners with holistic ambitions, while the latter often takes the form of a critique of actual buildings, a critique frequently motivated by allegedly greedy property developers and their appetite for short-term economic gains. It is also a critique of art – or more precisely of architecture – advanced by architects, engineers and others with an interest in buildings. Threatening to undermine their sustainability are economic short-sightedness and celebrity architects who, reportedly, are in the pocket of the property developers with an urge to flaunt themselves. The environmental foundation Bellona is concerned by all this. "The projected buildings," they claim, "are evidence of [the developers] readiness to spend money on design. But there's nothing remotely like [those sums spent] on the environment" (Lundgaard, 2007b, p. 27). While modern design and sustainability are not incompatible, the NAL says, "all concerned in the building process nevertheless need to think of environmental friendliness" (Aale, 2007, p. 14). Architect Didrik Hvoslef-Eide attempts to put a lid on the debate by cutting off the propensity for interdiscursivity and entanglements: Sustainable urban

development means, in plain language, "to economise on power [consumption] when selecting building materials, management and maintenance" (Hvoslef-Eide, 2009, p. 22). Marketing director at Oslo S Utvikling, Thor E. Thoneie, argues that "if the PwC building is an environmental disaster, the same may be said of many other projects" (Butenschøn & Rønningen, 2009). Nonetheless, colleague Paul Lødøen claims, the city council's environmental goals are precisely that – goals, not requirements. If one wants a more environmentally friendly building, there will have to be willingness among the tenants "to pay substantially more to rent space in it" (Lundgaard, 2007c, p. 16). The sustainable building discourse here stands in an antagonistic relationship to economic motives.

The discourse on sustainable buildings and energy consumption, and the discourse on culture and capital, share an interest in buildings, but from quite different angles. The buildings criticised in the prior discourse, are instead lauded as examples of spectacular and arresting architecture, without reference to their appetite for electricity or their alleged impracticality. Sustainability in this discourse is essentially divorced from environmental and energy requirements. The effort goes into finding the symbolic expression – an expression able to generate positive economic and cultural returns for the residents. Juan Herreros – the architect behind the successful bid for the planned new Munch Museum *Lambda* – has been criticised for designing a non-sustainable building and energy guzzler. This is not an issue addressed by most of the symbolic culture campaigners. In fact, they speak enthusiastically of how the magnificent 14-storyed glass-panelled building will transform Bjørvika's landscape – the very same landscape that form the background of Munch's famous painting *Scream* – and how it will reflect light from the fjord. This is a discourse concerned with pride, with showing Oslo off in a spectacular manner, clearly inspired by Richard Florida's (2002) thoughts which have inspired civic leaders all over the world. This discourse works within the neoliberal frame of interurban competition, middle-class consumption and place-marketing (Peck, 2004, pp. 740-741). Parallel to the process, it was recently announced that the existing Munch Museum is compelled to cut 16 man-labour years to get the budget in balance. A spokesman at the Munch Museum says that it is his impression that the politicians are not interested in Munch as such, other than as a tool in the urban development project (Christiansen & Korsvold, 2013, p. 8). There has been less interest in securing the financial means to maintain the existing museum building, located outside of the city centre, and shortage of resources to preserve the art collection.

Striking buildings are popular, John Silber maintains, because they are viewed from the outside (Butenschøn & Rønningen, 2009). Human geographer Heidi Bergsli says that "Bjørvika faces the world and tourists rather than the city's inhabitants" (Melgård, 2009, p. 75). It may be seen as having a symbolic component: "Who are we building for, and who will be using the new Bjørvika?" she asks (2009, p. 75). These are critical questions which analytically take us to the discourse on social sustainability. As mentioned already, Chris Butters, together with Gamlebyen residents' association member Vereide, urges us to focus less on prestigious projects, and more on the needs of ordinary people (Butters & Vereide, 2003, p. 28). The City of Oslo has adopted a programme, they add, for social sustainability and as such has made a binding commitment (2003, p. 28). The most alarming aspect of the Bjørvika zoning plan is not the aesthetic but the social component, says Carlsen. Whether Oslo-dwellers realise they're not going to get a "Fjord City for all", which was pledged by the city planners in their alluring leaflets in which the plan for the transformation of the capital's waterfront was presented, is a moot question, he says (Carlsen, 2010, p. 59). In Lars Hellberg's opinion, "the price of homes in Bjørvika will clearly and effectively prevent most people from buying an apartment" (Hellberg, 2009, p. 3). These arguments may be viewed as opposing real estate projects underpinned by neoliberal urban politics, which "serves to reinforce the right to the city of those that already have it" (Krätke, 2012, p. 148).

One of the strong discourses in the urban development process in Bjørvika is the discourse on density and sustainable mobility. Most people agree on the necessity of improved infrastructure. A huge intersection in the middle of Bjørvika has been demolished. It has been replaced with an underwater tunnel to channel the traffic away from the area. Further, there are new tram lines and several infrastructural improvements waiting to be built – all of which are perceived as a turn in the right direction. The traffic was literally blocking the possibility to develop Bjørvika in any decent way. Most people also agree on the necessity to raise dense building structures, but exactly how this is to be accomplished, is disputed. In the discourse on sustainable buildings, the quest for economic gains undermines the possibility to realise energy-saving structures. From this vantage point, property developers are, by the critics, classed along with ambitious speculators and unscrupulous window dressers. This discourse is opposed to arguments postulating a correlation between high-rise buildings and optimal land use. They claim that developers launch this type of buildings as a guarantee of the project's sustainability – even though nothing is necessarily said about the overall use of the area or the energy consumption of the buildings. The alleged window dressers are welcomed with open arms by the symbolic culture campaigners. Oslo's recently acquired symbolic materiality plays in here in a wider marketing strategy to entice people to the area and the country. The desire for financial results is countered yet again by the campaign for ordinary people's right to use the cityscape. Different types of sociality are said to be decisive for the level of sustainability. Financial gain is in direct opposition to the heterogeneous population's right to participate. Consequently, there are mainly two oppositional discourses – the discourse on sustainable buildings and the discourse on social sustainability. These two discourses lack sufficient power to become established as premise providers to the decision makers and planners in the Bjørvika case. The discourse on green lungs and landscapes could be put somewhere between conformity and opposition. The discourse on culture and capital is – together with the discourse on sustainable mobility and densification – amongst the most powerful ones. Of course, there are several attempts of integrating different aspects of sustainability, without that leading to any integrated planning policy. All five discourses stand in a dialectical relationship to structural circumstances, in this case to be conceived as economic neoliberalism, which may be both an advantage and a disadvantage to the objectives of the respective discourses. However, Hajer and Fischer argue that it is not only difficulties in the interpretation of sustainability which are problematical, but the fact that it does not compel existing institutions and planners to reconsider the normative and cultural assumptions and premises underlying their practices (Hajer & Fischer, 1999, p. 4). I will try to sketch some of these in the remainder of this article.

The neoliberal transformation of responsibility

It is difficult to account for a particular cultural sustainability, if it exists, by the use of Elkington's fork metaphor, as it lacks a fourth cultural prong. On the other hand, culture is drawn into and subsumed under economic sustainability in the Bjørvika case, as a discourse emphasising synergies from the intermingling of culture and capital. In fact, culture is used as an instrument in gaining profit, clearly stated in the Culture Follow-Up Programme: "culture will be important in ensuring the success of the Bjørvika development [and] a strong cultural identity will foster economic sustainability" (Culture Follow-up Programme, 2003, p. 30). However, most important is the fact that economic growth is so embedded in everyday practice as a norm of conduct that it hardly needs to be expressed. Economic growth is an assumed good and questioning it would be perceived as a scandalous thing to do (Fairclough, 2006, p. 58). Requirements of economic growth are not only a discourse, but also an embedded societal structure resulting from a peculiar neoliberal form of government. The debate taking place in Bjørvika in many ways reflects a political condition described by sociologist Nikolas Rose as "advanced liberalism" (Rose, 1999, p. 137). He traces the origin

to Margaret Thatcher who posed an antagonism between the powers of the state and the responsibilities of the people, and therefore wanted to revive a sense of individual responsibility (1999, p. 138). The state is no longer required to answer all society's needs. Individuals, firms and organisations "must take on themselves – as 'partners' – a portion of the responsibility for their own well-being" (1999, p. 142). The solution was to transform the organisation of the governmental bureaucracy, and, in doing so, "transform its ethos from one of bureaucracy to one of business, from one of planning to one of competition, from one dictated by the logics of the system to one dictated by the logics of the market" (1999, p. 166). Rose argues that citizenship is no longer primarily realised in a relation with the state, "but in a variety of private, corporate and quasi-public practices" (1999, p. 166). In Bjørvika, several constellations of semi-official property developers have been established, who are committed to function as commercial actors. They naturally have an interest in gaining as many square metres from their allotted plots as possible, and sell them on the market at the highest price possible. As David Harvey has put it: "the private-public partnership means that the public takes the risks and the private takes the profits" (Harvey, 2000, p. 141). It is a difficult task the discourse-coalition on social sustainability has undertaken, as there will be no such things as affordable houses in the area. Some of the same goes for the discourse on sustainable buildings and can best be summed up by Paul Lødøen's utterance, which reminds the public that the environmental goals are precisely that – goals, not requirements – and that you have to pay substantially more to rent space in (more) environmentally friendly buildings (Lundgaard, 2007c, p. 16). This declaration embodies what many critics view as an expression of a structural restraint resulting from a particular form of government. It is an expression of an institutionalised practice which Fairclough describes as an instance of an extra-discursive dimension and durable entity with powers to shape processes and events (Fairclough, 2010, p. 363). The neoliberal structural arrangement does not determine the urban development, but it influences it – discursively and materially. However, despite the criticism against the property developers' aspiration for profit, the sustainability concept is still used amongst planners and developers. Consequently, it is possible to claim that the concept has acquired a new function: to disguise the less palatable consequences of growth by the evocation of sustainability as a warrant of the project's quality – and thereby sustainability is put to work as a lubricant in the neoliberal machinery. The neoliberal transformation of responsibility contributes to "the meaning of sustainability [sliding] from conservation of nature to conservation of development" (Sachs, 1999, p. 33). Since "development" is conceptually an empty shell which may cover almost anything, all sorts of actors, even protagonists of economic growth, are able to couch their intentions in terms of sustainable development (1999, p. 33).

An international cityscape on local grounds

The Bjørvika district may be viewed as the materialised expression of a neoliberal political code. The market rhetoric is also present in the National Transport Plan. Not only will the Government "contribute to a long term structural change in the transport system in the urban areas", but also "contribute to regional development" (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2009, p. 21). In view of this goal their primary aim is to "strengthen the long term value creation", and by establishing sustainable transport, they want to "strengthen the competitiveness of business life" (2009, p. 50). This competitiveness is also – in many ways – materialised in the Barcode sequence of high-rise buildings housing several financial institutions. From an architectonic point of view, the buildings invoke shapes, colours, textures and compositions, found in comparable projects internationally. Alongside the white marble Opera House at the surface of the water, they were raised to lift the whole area and entice tourists and capital to Oslo. Even though the Opera House is more site-specific, it still has the atmosphere of being a piece of extraordinary architecture inspired by prevailing

international models. The whole area has a certain feeling of being deterritorialised – the freeing of self-identity from the limiting constraints of particular places (Fairclough, 2006, p. 24). However, irrespective of the international orientation, Bjørvika, with its surroundings, also has several medieval landscapes and structures that have been preserved. In the east there is "Middelalderparken", a medieval park where the old capital was located before the fire in 1624, and in the west there is the medieval fortress Akershus, where the new city was rebuilt after the fire. Several persons, amongst them Jørn Holme, Director General at The Directorate for Cultural Heritage, have launched the idea to reduce the building volume at the so-called "Kongsbakken" area to achieve an unbroken view from the fortress across to where the capital was founded (Kolstad, 2009, p. 6). To connect to local history, the Municipality has named Bjørvika's main avenue after Queen Eufemia, who used to live in the area in medieval times. Plans have also been made to reopen some of the rivers which have been piped for decades (The Municipality of Oslo, 2009, p. 35). The river banks are also to be modelled to adhere to the historical landscape. Further, there has also been a suggestion to move the famous Viking ships from a museum on a peninsula nearby to the medieval park – despite the severe risk of demolishing them in transit. Recently, an expert committee concluded that the ships should not be relocated due to material considerations (International Expert Committee, 2012). Several debaters have complained that this decision will not make Bjørvika the tourist attraction it was meant to be – downplaying the fact that the report's conclusion was based on a risk assessment – not considerations of attraction value (Skrede, 2012).

In many ways, what is happening in Bjørvika is indicative of Roland Robertson's description of "glocalisation" – a hybrid between the global and the local. He questions the thesis of global capitalism and the "commodification and homogenization of culture across the contemporary world" (Robertson, 1992, p. 173). Robertson claims that global capitalism both promotes and is conditioned by cultural homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity, and, as part of the argument, he states that international tourism is one of the most conspicuous sites for the contemporary production of the local and the different, as well as the on-going production of the universal (Robertson, 1992, p. 173). To create an attractive outward-directed hybrid, the discourse on culture and capital is vital in the Bjørvika case. You may see the reopening of the rivers as a victory for the discourse on green lungs and landscapes – and obviously it is – but it is dependent on the evaluation of the area's market potential. The quest for economic growth by increasing attractiveness to tourists and visitors is an explicit goal. The material and symbolic re-invention of the place's local history is part of this strategy – where the local becomes draped in a layer of international appearance.

Concluding remarks

The prevailing neoliberal urban planning paradigm is a durable entity with its own power to shape processes and events (Fairclough, 2010, p. 363). However, the different discourses also produce space and become tangible realisations (Harvey, 2000, p. 177). When discourses are operationalised, they turn into other things: new practices, new identities, new material realities (Fairclough, 2006, p. 30). But the mere existence of alternative discourses is not necessarily the most important factor in the transformation and development of the city. It is primarily those discourses which pass through the mechanisms and processes of selection and retention that can contribute to social (re)construction (Fairclough, 2006, p. 28). Consequently, there is a need to assess what status the different discourses on sustainability have in Oslo and Bjørvika right now. Sustainable mobility and densification is the chosen policy with its perceived environmental payoffs. Some landscape resettlements are to be made, and different infrastructure, aside from roads and public transport, is in the making. But these improvements take place at the mercy of the area's market potential. Luckily, one might say, this is defined as significant in the case of Bjørvika. The driving discursive force is the conception of synergies from culture and capital. This discourse manifests itself and construes

and transforms the geographical and architectonic landscape in its own image. The discourse-coalitions on sustainable buildings and social sustainability are up against what they see as a restraining neoliberal barrier. Based on the prevailing order of things, there will be no such thing as affordable houses in the area. Without more stringent legislation on the environmental aspects of the buildings, subsidiaries or new constellations of developers, with other agendas than mere profit, there will hardly be any success for the discourse on sustainable buildings. There is also a potential disadvantage of the intermingling of culture and capital. Culture, in this discourse, is more or less lumped together with Elkington's prong on economic sustainability, but when using culture and cultural heritage – be it landscapes, Viking ships, excavated archaeological remains or works of art – as instruments in urban development, one should take care not to evaluate them by their assumed market potential. According to the French philosopher Dany-Robert Dufour, moral values have no market value (Dufour, 2008, p. 160). Still, we have to assume that we can (to some extent) predict the moral demands of future generations (Davies, 2010, p. 267), e.g. that they will care about the environment, cultural landscapes and cultural heritage. To sustain implies continuity and the handing over to future generations, but neoliberalism tends to privilege exchange-value over cultural-value. It emphasises cost reduction and subjection of economic activities to the average rate of profit, and social activities to terms of their contribution to capital accumulation (Jessop, 2010, pp. 175-176). The fork metaphor may be seen as a reflection of the neoliberalisation of capitalism – but it is not evident that a "refined" form of cannibalism is any improvement in this respect. Corporate cannibalism is a dubious guarantor for sustaining the reminiscence of the old. Planning for a sustainable use of cultural heritage should imply an addition of the fork's missing prong: a reflective cultural policy not subsumed under economic sustainability – including a set of moral and cultural values not favoured in the neoliberal paradigm.

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[1]The PwC Building was completed in 2007, and is designed by a-lab architects. The National Opera and Ballet opened in April 2008, and is designed by the architectural firm Snøhetta.

[2] The majority of the data are collected from Retriever – the Nordic region's provider of news monitoring. The data are collected through several keywords with truncation.