

RY 4/2015, English Summary

Welcome to the Theme Issue on Building Control Reforms and Information Flow, of our Magazine RY Rakennettu Ympäristö.

Ms. **Aila Korpivaara**, Senior Construction Adviser of the Ministry of the Environment, opens the issue with remarks on the Finnish Government's goal of concentrating Building Control in a number of larger regional units, instead of having a separate unit in each local community. These larger units would be economically self-sufficient, and would also have better resources and be able to implement building regulations in a more predictable way. The new Government policy of de-regulation will probably mean less strict rules for conversions and small-scale building, particularly in rural areas.

The Government also aims at concentrating municipal services in multi-purpose service centres, and providing these services in electronic format. Already, a Project is under way to join together the services of Building Control, Environment Protection, and Environmental Health Departments. The Project has been initiated by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities.

As a new General Plan of Helsinki City is being prepared, some of the ideas being presented remind us clearly of the famous 100-year-old town plan drafts of the Architect Eliel Saarinen. Emeritus Professor **Staffan Lodenius** of Tampere Technical University wonders whether this simply means that a circle closing in town planning trends, or whether the designers are now using very traditional methods of presenting their ideas. In either case, the General Plan Draft contains some controversial elements such as turning the major entry routes into central Helsinki into city boulevards.

There has been a breakthrough in the last two years in the electronic services available to the clients of Building Control, as the Ministry of the Environment has now completed its Lupapiste Project. This new service means that the clients can digitally submit all applications, notifications, and queries related to a building project, anywhere, any time. The results of the project are presented in two articles. First, Mr. **Joona Majurinen**, M.Sc. and Manager of the SAdE Project (the National Action Program on eServices and eDemocracy), is happy to report that the pilot City of Järvenpää already receives all of its applications in digital format. This now goes for the City of Hyvinkää as well. Throughout the country, the digital service now has 17 000 registered users.

Mr. **Risto Pesonen**, retired Manager of The Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries RT, and a Free Editor, points out that the service is being developed further. This will help Building Control work in two ways. Using digital services will in itself help raise productivity. And when there is an exceptional work load in one community, BC officials can adjust, and have already adjusted, the load by delegating some of their work to officials in another community using the same digital services.

The document flow through the Building Control process has been under scrutiny, to allow a systematic passage of digital documents from the first draft plans all the way to the BC Department's permanent, and also digital, archives. There is nothing in the present legislation to prevent this. At the same time, ways to boost the use of digital Building Information Models are also being examined.

There are two large, sparsely populated local communities in the Oulu Region: Pudasjärvi City and Taivalkoski rural community. The Building Control Departments of both communities are independent. Our Editor, Mr. **Lauri Jääskeläinen**, has visited the duo and has found interesting aspects in them both. Pudasjärvi has a very lively log construction industry, and Taivalkoski is the birthplace of one of the country's most popular modern writers, Mr. Kalle Päätalo.

Our Editor goes on to give us news of the actions of the CEBC, The Consortium of European Building Control. The Consortium meets twice a year, and conducts comparative surveys on the organization and practices of BC Departments throughout Europe. The World Bank has just finished a survey called Doing Business, on national processes in Land Use. Our Editor takes a closer look at the processes in different European countries and finds that the processes fall into several different categories, and that there are a lot of differences between the building regulations in European countries.

One of the drawbacks of urban life is environmental noise. It makes life less pleasant and causes health problems, and protecting houses and apartments against noise is often costly. Mr. **Ari Saarinen**, Senior Environmental Adviser of the Ministry of the Environment, says that as population density in cities increases, more and more people become exposed to high levels of traffic noise. There is no patent medicine for protecting people from noise, but instead, it takes a wide selection of ways and means.

Ms. **Katri Isotalo**, Editor, joins the discussion on noise, adding that as much as 90 per cent of noise in Helsinki City comes from road traffic. There have been surveys and action programs on noise exposure, but calculating the number of people exposed to noise has proven tricky. Most models do their calculations on the basis of the noise levels outside the building wall, and this of course ignores the effect of noise abatement provided by the building itself.

From June 1, some changes were made in the Finnish Land Use and Building Act, concerning the competence requirements for designers and the classification of design assignments. There has been some concern about how these new regulations affect the designers of treatment facilities of domestic wastewater in rural areas. Ms. **Erja Väyrynen**, Senior Architect (Ph.D.) with the Ministry of the Environment, advises us to follow the Ministry Guidelines from 2011 when choosing a designer for an external treatment plant, and to refer to the basic regulations in the Act itself when the facility will be a part of a new house being designed.

When choosing the method for renovating the exterior of a building, technical considerations should always come first. It is essential to consider what the building's life cycle costs will be and how much "mileage" the renovation will give to the building. Mr. **Juuso Kieksi**, B.Sc, and Mr. **Arto Köliö**, M.Sc., both of Tampere Technical University, emphasise the importance of the Project Plan phase, when clear targets are set for the renovation. Also, the condition of windows and balconies should be carefully surveyed.

Ms. **Katriina Etholén**, M.A. and Freelance Editor, presents the former cotton mill of Leigh Spinners near Manchester in the U.K. Although cotton weaving there has come to a stop, the facility now produces artificial turf. The Mill is now under renovation, and much of the work is concentrated around the Steam Engine Room, with still houses a functioning original steam engine. The project also aims at creating new commercial activities for the building complex.

In our Spring issues, we published two articles by Mr. **Olli Lehtovuori**, a retired Architect, presenting architectural attractions on the coast of Turkey. The Writer now finishes his series with a presentation of the medieval Ottoman Architect, Mimar Sinan. Mr. Sinan is the designer of the Suleiman Mosque in Istanbul and the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, and a lot of experts consider him the finest Architect of all time.

We wrap up this issue with a look at the history and architecture of the City of Prague. Mr. **Markku Rainer Peltonen**, a Berlin-based Architect, gives us a concise analysis of the past of the City and some of its buildings. Besides history, he also brings forth modern, functionalist, even cubistic, buildings in the city center, and gives us an idea of how the cityscape is being protected and how tourism affects the City.

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