Sustainable Cities in the Nordic-Baltic Region 2019, Tallinn

THE CASE DESCRIPTION:
Post-socialist residential courtyards on the case of Mustamäe

Photo: Jorge Romea, Mustamäe September 2019

Sustainable Cities in the Nordic-Baltic Region brings together 20–25 talented students from various disciplines into a three-day intensive course and competition to solve real-world urban cases. The students, coming from all eight Nordic-Baltic countries, are divided into interdisciplinary teams. The programme is academically grounded and planned together with qualified teachers and researchers from the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, Tallinn University, University of Latvia, Stockholm Resilience Centre, and Stockholm University. This year the course is held in Tallinn, Estonia, October 31rst November- 3rd 2019. The 5 ECTS course has been organized from 2015.

Competition assignment of the course 2019 in Tallinn:

Health and wellbeing as a means of strengthening the shared understanding and identity of Mustamäe

The competition aims to generate sustainable social-ecological solutions to challenges faced in the development and planning of Mustamäe, a district located at southwest of Tallinn, characterized by soviet period housing and diversity in age and ethnicity and a clear tendency to the ageing of the dwellers. Special emphasis in the competition is on health and wellbeing and their link to nature-based solutions on the case of post-socialist residential courtyards in Mustamäe. How could social-ecological sustainability be taken into account and improved in Mustamäe? What kind of solutions are the most favorable for public health and wellbeing of the local residents? How can we deal with the tendency of an increasing motorization and the resulting problems of a mono-functional use of the courtyard areas as parking lots? How can the multifunctional purpose of the courtyards be preserved, promoting them as a social gathering space and wildlife shelter?

Background of the task

The goal of the project is to address the current challenge of an increasing amount of cars parked in the courtyards, threatening courtyards as green and community spaces and to raise the awareness for social and biological sustainability (also in terms of mobility) among dwellers concerned for their parking spaces.

Mustamäe district is located in the southwestern part of Tallinn, about 5 km away from the city center, bordering Nõmme in the south, Haabersti in the west, Kristiine in the east and north. The size of the district is 8.09 km^2, which makes up 5.1% of the territory of Tallinn. The older residential areas of Mustamäe were built between 1962 and 1980, with open areas in the center of the neighborhoods and a network of light traffic routes connecting the different directions. Mustamäe was planned as compact settlement and territory, ie residential and commercial buildings, garages and industrial areas were planned in accordance with the norms of the time. Road traffic was planned at the edges of the areas and on highways forming clear boundaries. Since the 1990s initially planned micro-district centers have lost their functional diversity due to the emergence of supermarkets and shopping malls. The need for additional parking spaces due to the increasing motorization of Tallinn's residents has reduced the (usability of) courtyard green areas, among other things.

In terms of the number of new dwellings, Mustamäe has had the lowest construction intensity in Tallinn districts. Most new housing was built in 2007, 2008 and 2015, when 8 dwellings were completed each year and in 2017 7 dwellings were completed. A total of 55 new dwellings have been completed between 2000 and 2017, which is 2% of the total new housing stock in the city.

The physical plan of Mustamäe set out to restrict the movement of cars inside living quarters. On the one hand, the number of cars entering a block was limited by using the superblock/neighbourhood unit structure with wider streets at the outskirts and only small roads inside a block. On the other hand, vehicular mobility was restricted directly by blocking the possibility of driving through a superblock. Today, more and more cars are driving around the buildings making life increasingly difficult for pedestrians. In that way, the pedestrians are marginalised inside the housing estates and one of the principal aims of neighbourhood utopias—the pedestrian priority in superblocks—is gradually phased out.

Photo: Jorge Romea, Mustamäe September 2019

The focus of the Sustainable Cities in the Nordic-Baltic Region

The above described plan of Mustamäe raises several interrelated questions, which are the focus of the Sustainable Cities in the Nordic-Baltic Region. How can local residents be engaged in the development of the area in meaningful and sustainable ways? What kind of solutions would enhance the safety and mobility of Mustamäe as a whole? How to improve the connectivity of the social-ecological systems in Mustamäe?

Competition guidelines

During Sustainable Cities in the Nordic-Baltic Region, each of the five teams will generate a solution that applies the concept of social-ecological sustainability to Mustamäe, in order to address ongoing, real-world problems identified through interaction between students, academic teachers, practitioners, activists and other experts of area. Students should develop a systemic view of the case, considering many factors defining the area, such as history, architecture, social issues, natural elements, cultural perceptions, and neighborhood location and use.

Teams may choose the scale of their social-ecological proposal, varying from e.g. the scale of the whole district, to the level of the neighborhood, and/or specific courtyard areas in Mustamäe. The teams can, for example, suggest innovative ideas for the general development of the district (e.g. in terms of mobility), or focus more closely on the (re-) design and activities in the courtyard areas and their role for social and biological sustainability in the district. Despite focusing on one scale in your proposals, please keep in mind the interrelatedness between different scales. The teams are also encouraged to comment the development plans of Mustamäe that will be introduced during the visit to Tallinn, as well as complement or substitute them with their own ideas.

The solutions can range from conceptual approaches to detailed solutions, and they can address e.g. physical sites or come up with concrete or virtual services. Each proposal should include a tentative implementation plan that lists activities, expected challenges, strengths, objectives and schedules required to achieve them. In preparing the final presentation, teams should take into consideration the task's evaluation criteria. Solutions should be presented digitally (see below: presentation guidelines), as all the proposals will be

published on the Sustainable Cities in the Nordic-Baltic Region website. Each team prepares also a short summary of their ideas (max 200 words).

Tutoring
Tutoring is available throughout the course by academic teachers and researchers from different disciplines (urban geography, real estate business, spatial planning, sustainability science and ecology).

Schedule
The detailed competition schedule is available on the competition website:
https://www.hanaholmen.fi/en/culturalcentre/sustainable-cities-2019-2021/
The final proposals should be handed in by 17:00 on Saturday the 2nd of November 2019 electronically to jonna.simila@hanaholmen.fi. After that you will have time prepare the oral presentations and the short summary of the ideas in 200 words. The solutions are presented to the jury and an external audience in the Senate Hall (Senati saal M-648) at Mare building of Tallinn University at 9.00 am on Sunday 3rd of November 2019. Each team has 15 minutes to present their ideas. 5 minutes per team will be given for questions and discussion from the jury. The jury announces the results of the competition at 11.15 am the same day.

Evaluation criteria
Proposals are evaluated based on the following criteria (each evaluated on a scale 1-5):

1. Boldness, freshness and insightfulness of the concept in improving social-ecological systems in the Mustamäe area.
2. Ability of the team to utilize each member's unique expertise to understand the complexities and to produce transdisciplinary knowledge as the basis for new and sound solutions.
3. Feasibility of the proposal in terms of costs, time and socio-ecological continuity.
4. Proposal's capacity to impact and have leverage for sustainable future.

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