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The Challenged Interplay of Integrative Aims and Shared Leadership: Experiences From Nordic Practice

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ABSTRACT

To tackle the accelerating societal polycrises, contemporary planning has to deal with increasingly complex questions, which defy sectorial and scalar boundaries. Therefore, a need for integrated planning has emerged and shared leadership logic has gained popularity in municipal planning organizations. Still, their potential mismatches have remained unacknowledged. Exploring experiences from everyday practice, this research provides theory guided analysis on how shared leadership is not automatically in line with integrative aims, but its interpretation and operationalization should move from individually-focused selective self-organization in the operational sphere towards collective sensemaking in the tactical sphere to support adequate overall awareness and shared understanding.

Introduction

> The words made sense. All the little things made sense; only the whole thing did not. (Le Guin, 1974, p. 6)

Current planning practice is challenged by multiple simultaneous socio-ecological polycrises. The world is facing record-beating weather events, decreasing biodiversity, sixth mass extinction, overshooting of earth system boundaries, and energy crises to name a few (Bradshaw et al., 2021; Hugonnet et al., 2021; Lohmann & Ditlevsen, 2021). Such complex issues are intrinsically wicked by nature (Lönngren & Van Poeck, 2021) and ask for transdisciplinary multi-actor knowledge integration and co-creation.

Old public administration approaches founded on hierarchy, stability and predictability have become increasingly ill-fitted to address such complexities (Drescher et al., 2014). To reach a more holistic approach, a need for more complexity absorptive practices (Ashmos et al., 2000) has been identified. Collaborative governance has received increasing practical and research attention as a model for dealing with sustainability-related complexities through multi-actor processes (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2021; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Molenveld et al. 2021; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021), further extending to planning as boundary spanning in a trading zone (Balducci & Mäntysalo, 2013) as well as New Public Governance (Tuurnas, 2020). Whereas these models focus on the interactions in multi-stakeholder arenas, this paper sets the focus on a

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narrower scope: the intra-organizational leadership logics of municipal planning organizations, which also act as leaders of the formal interaction processes (as suggested by Bianchi et al., 2021). In the context of Finland, planning and decision-making are still strongly within the jurisdiction of municipalities despite the increasing attention on multi-actor collaboration (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010). Hence, planning and collaboration processes are embedded in these institutional and organizational models and act as arenas of their enactment. Whereas multi-actor collaboration has received considerable research attention through collaborative governance and other models, the intra-organizational realm of municipal planning organizations has received only minor attention. Previous research (e.g. Huxham & Vangen, 2013) has identified many challenges in the collaborative models of leadership. However, research on their impact on other simultaneously existing targets, such as integration, has remained limited.

Here, the focus is put on two recently implemented, but potentially conflicting goals: integration (Nadin et al., 2021; Vigar, 2009) and self-organization, which is commonly operationalized through shared leadership (Chapman et al., 2016; Crosby & Bryson, 2018).

Self-organizing systems are built on the actions of independent actors, enabling emergence and spontaneity beyond hierarchical command and control (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). One of its operational enactments on intra-organizational scale is shared leadership, which is defined as leadership that is distributed over the organization beyond traditional hierarchical roles, highlighting the agency of individuals and teams (Zhu et al., 2018).

Integration and self-organization both rely on a social process and collective action (Zeier et al., 2021) in settings with strongly entangled and complementary expertise (Imam & Zaheer, 2021; Zhu et al., 2018). However, while integration aims at cross-sectoral and -scalar synergies and consistency as well as improved coordination and cooperation of activities and policies (Kidd, 2007; Nadin et al., 2021; Rydin, 2012), self-organization via shared leadership has been suggested to lead to the decentralization, deconstruction, and detachment of values and objectives, as well as the individualization and passivation of the actors (Child & Rodrigues, 2012). Consequently, an empirical concern of the fit between integration and self-organization has arisen. Still, little empirical research has been done to analyze the experiences of planning amid integrative aims and self-organized logics in public planning organizations, or in public administration organizations more generally (Jakobsen et al., 2021; Vogel & Werkmeister, 2021).

The context of this paper is the increased need for knowledge integration to address complex socio-ecological challenges, such as climate change. Particular attention is given to *shared leadership* as an operational leadership model in planning organizations. To respond to this need, this article explores how shared leadership influences the operationalization of integrative aims in municipal planning organizations in Finland. Municipal planning organizations are defined here as the ones responsible for municipal scale planning (strategic, neighborhood, detailed etc.) operating under municipal strategies and operational logics. Without questioning the previously acknowledged potential of shared leadership, the focus here is on its possible unforeseen misfits with the aim of integrated planning. The article hopes to act as a discussion opener of the daily practices which may challenge the capability to address the polycrises.

The paper is organized as follows. First, the article sets the stage of planning with complexities and thereafter presents current understandings of integrated planning and shared leadership. Then, the methods and context of the research are described and the findings are presented. In the end, discussion of how the shared leadership practices are in line with the increasing integrative requirements in public planning organizations is concluded to suggest implications for both planning research and practice.

Planning With Complexities: Why Reductionism is Not Enough in the Polycrises?

Complexity is often a basic property of multi-actor processes such as planning due to the range of sociorelational interdependencies (Innes & Booher, 2010). Also the context of planning is a complex adaptive system, bringing in external complexities into the practice. The internal (de Roo et al., 2020; Morçöl, 2012; Sengupta et al., 2016) and external (Batty, 2021; Moroni & Chiffi, 2021; Portugali, 2021) complexities of planning and public administration more generally (Eppel & Rhodes, 2018) have also been acknowledged by recent academic discussion. Planning with wicked complexities (Hartmann, 2012; Rittel & Webber, 1973) requires more complexity absorptive and adaptive approaches, which has been acknowledged for example by discussion on co-evolutionary planning (Bertolini, 2007; De Roo, 2016; Kosunen et al., 2020) and polyrational planning (Davy, 2008).

While acknowledging these, this paper sets then a focus on the internal structures of municipal planning organizations, as the dynamic and constantly changing operational environment in and around planning organizations is not only contesting practicing planners but requires complexity absorption and adaptation also from the socio-institutional sphere of public planning organizations themselves (Schulze & Pinkow, 2020; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

Previously common leadership models in public planning organizations were based on complexity reduction strategy. Complexity reduction is based on the principles of suboptimization, deconstruction, linear cause-effect relations, stability, and manageability leading to reduced holism in thinking. Such a model is typically applicable to linear systems, which have a low level of interaction between relatively few easily definable parts and have streamlined routines and hierarchical structuring of work (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). Recently, for example new public governance and collaborative governance (Bianchi et al., 2021; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021; Triantafillou, 2020; Tuurnas, 2020) have moved also the institutional focus towards complexity absorption, which is often operationalized through self-organized models to allow the increase in internal complexity, which may simultaneously lead to ineffective manageability.

Complexity absorption encourages a more flexible and autonomous style of collaborating across sectoral and scalar boundaries through holism, non-linearity, emergence, systems understanding and constant adaptability of practices (Ashmos et al., 2000). It relies on a social process to avoid "symmetry of ignorance" (Rittel, 1984) that disables the ability to work with complex questions. To apprehend the realm of growing complexities, it is necessary to "move away from disciplinary tunnel vision towards a critical realist version of interdisciplinarity" (Næss, 2021, 1). Hence, knowledge from various actors needs to be integrated in the processes to improve understanding of the complex issues of planning (Kidd, 2007; Rydin, 2012).

Prerequisites of Integration in Planning

To produce a good quality environment and better serve diverse actors through embracing the complexities and enhancing the absorptive capacity, some planning organizations have stated aims of integrated planning, which is defined here as "the management of cross-cutting issues that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields and that do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual government departments" (Holden, 2012, p. 2). The thought of integrated planning is nothing new as such. Academic discussion of integration in

planning has been ongoing already since the 1970's (Kidd, 2007; Koglin, 2015; Stead & Meijers, 2009).

The potentials of integrative practices range from cross-sectoral synergies, horizontal and vertical consistency, more holistic focus of goals, improved understanding of cross-sectoral effects (Nadin et al., 2021), and enhanced social learning (Rydin, 2012); to reduction of inefficient duplication (Kidd, 2007). Despite its potentials, integration is not a straightforward process due to the diverging values, policies and ideologies between the participants. Hence, integrative practices need to be enabled at the organizational level, which has been identified as a prerequisite for all other spheres of integration (Cowell & Martin, 2003; Kidd, 2007).

In this article the focus is on the social sphere of this organizing sphere, as for example Vigar (2009, p. 1572) has suggested that integration should also consider "the soft institutional infrastructure of everyday practices, informal rules and cultures."

Integration has been conceptualized as the outcome of such social interaction processes (e.g., Stead, 2008). Various factors ranging from the individual to the societal level influence these interaction processes. Here, they are called prerequisites. These prerequisites will later be utilized as a framework in the analysis.

The theory-led framework of integration is founded on the prerequisites as identified by Healey (2006), Kidd (2007), Smith (2014), Stead and Meijers (2009), Daneshpour et al. (2018), and Saunders et al. (2019). Based on these, four main categories of intra-organizationally bound prerequisites were identified: social awareness and willingness to collaborate; encouraging diversity and boundary-crossing; clarifying overall strategy, coordination and responsibilities; and embracing complexity, holism and long-term thinking (Table 1).

Social awareness and willingness to collaborate depend on five partly overlapping elements. First, integration needs to be founded on adequate institutional structures and organizational practices, which encourage collaborative mindset and intersectoral dialogue (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Eriksson, 2016; Hrelja, 2015; Kidd, 2007; Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009). Lack of collaboration may result in incoherence across actors and sectors that deal with similar issues (Eriksson, 2016). Second, integration requires reciprocal activity and mutual support between the actors to encourage collaboration (Kidd, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019; Stead & Meijers, 2009). Third and fourth, collaboration can be further enabled through empathy and positive attitude to strengthen trust and reciprocity (Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009). Fifth, willingness to

Table 1. Collaborative prerequisites of integrated planning as adapted from 1: Healey (2006); 2: Kidd (2007); 3: Stead and Meijers (2009); 4: Smith (2014); 5: Daneshpour et al. (2018); and 6: Saunders et al. (2019).

Prerequisite	Description
Social awareness and willingness to collaborate	Cooperative structures (3,5); reciprocal activity (2,3,6); empathy and positive attitude towards others (3,4); good relations between partners (4); and willingness to share knowledge and ownership (1,2,3).
Diversity and boundary-crossing	Embracement and appreciation of diversity (3,4); representation of diverse needs, values and knowledge(s) (3,5,6); and systematic boundary-crossing engagement and dialogue (2,3,6).
Overall strategy, coordination and responsibilities	Overall strategy and monitoring against strategic goals (3,5); consistent aims and objectives (1,2,4,5); clarity of procedures (3,5,6); and clarity of roles and coordination (3,4,5,6).
Complexity, holism and long-term thinking	Recognition of 'bigger picture' (3,4); embracement of systems complexity (2,3); and long-term thinking and reflexivity (3,6).

share knowledge – including tacit – and ownership of the issues during the integration process is needed (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Healey, 2006; Kidd, 2007; Stead & Meijers, 2009).

Diversity and boundary-crossing includes three elements. First, they need to be systematically and explicitly embraced in the organizational practices and processes (Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009) to enable adequate heterogeneity of perspectives. In addition to who participates, it is important to consider who has not been involved in the process (Saunders et al., 2019), as integration in some directions may reduce connections in other directions creating new divisions (Healey, 2006). Second, diverse needs, values, and knowledge(s) need to be represented in the integration (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019; Stead & Meijers, 2009). Third, boundary-crossing engagement and dialogue need to be systematic over time (Kidd, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019; Stead & Meijers, 2009) through a cross-sectoral approach (Rode, 2019).

Overall strategy, coordination and responsibility is the third prerequisite and embraces four elements. First, an overall strategy is required to systematically monitor the policies against the strategic goals (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Stead & Meijers, 2009). Second, to enable this, the aims and objectives should be consistent (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Kidd, 2007; Smith, 2014) and mutual adjustment of policies over scales and sectors should be enabled (Healey, 2006, p. 69). Third, clarity of procedures is required (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019; Stead & Meijers, 2009) to enable the fourth element: clarity of roles and coordination in the process (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019; Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009). Integration requires a certain degree of structure and comprehensiveness while simultaneously enabling autonomy (Eriksson, 2016; Rode, 2019; Wiek & Walter, 2009). Experience of ambiguity of roles may lead to perceived loss of power and authority in the organization (Stead & Meijers, 2009).

Finally, complexity, holism and long-term thinking as the fourth prerequisite includes three elements. First, integration requires the ability to understand the bigger picture and to identify cross-cutting issues (Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009). Second, it needs to embrace systems complexity (Kidd, 2007; Stead & Meijers, 2009; Verhoest & Lægreid, 2010). As third, ignorance of complexity (Kidd, 2007) may lead to reduced capability of dealing with long-term issues (Saunders et al., 2019; Stead & Meijers, 2009).

Shared Leadership as an Enactment of Intra-Organizational Self-Organization

Self-organization refers to a collaborative process without direct coercion or control from the outside (Jalonen et al., 2020, p. 6). It can be defined as the spontaneous emergence of order in systems that unfolds through the complex and nonlinear interactions between multiple actors (Stacey, 2010). Despite its more general foundations, self-organization is increasingly often seen as a solution to increase complexity absorption, agility, and employee motivation in the intra-organizational sphere as well. Discussion of intra-organizational self-organization has begun already in the 1950s, increasing over the years.

Recently, multiple organizations have adopted self-organized or decentralized practices to enable empowerment and innovation, cost-reductions, motivation and adaptation in their processes. In such settings, the actors act in parallel without centralized control with rich interconnectivity (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The typical risks include increasing contradictions and growing individualization (Gergen, 2011), biased participation that favors the most advantaged and/or extreme segments of the population (Torfing et al., 2019) as well as systemic distortion (Bella, 2006). Such distortion is often unintentional, but typically take place in social, knowledge-

intensive and value-laden processes in which the participants aim at promoting information and actions that respond to their own values.

In organizational settings, self-organization requires incentive, trust, exchange of ideas and boundary-spanning to take place (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016; Nederhand et al., 2016). In planning organizations this means, for example, the ability of actors to initiate and proceed with their own ideas, working groups and networks to organize around new tasks and processes. In organizational sciences, self-organization may refer to the individual level of self-managing (Magpili & Pazos, 2018) or self-direction (Bäcklander, 2019) or to group level operational logics of self-regulating work groups or shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2002). Here, shared leadership is the focus.

Recently, the focus of collaborative, networked and relational governance and leadership models (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Torfing et al., 2019; Wang & Ran, 2023) has reached the intra-organizational level of public administration through shared, distributed and collective leadership (Zeier et al., 2021). Although such concepts are used interchangeably, their logics differ from each other. What they share with each other is that they differ from traditional management theories by setting the focus on more relational, collective, unplanned and uncoordinated practices (Jakobsen et al., 2021).

In shared leadership the individual actions are expected to be aligned with common organizational goals (e.g. the city strategy in a municipal planning organization) despite the increasing autonomy. Working towards a shared overall goal is the fundamental logic of behavior in a shared leadership system even as leadership is decentralized and leadership roles may shift among the actors over time (Zhu et al., 2018).

Shared leadership has acknowledged potential especially in settings which are built on specialized knowledge(s), non-routine tasks and creativity (Pearce et al., 2009) by supporting organizational learning and information flows across boundaries, reducing information asymmetries, and increasing motivation by empowering the feeling of autonomy. However, recent research has also identified research gaps of shared leadership in the public sector. First of all, the concept has been suggested to lack precision in the context of the public sector (Chapman et al., 2016). Second, the impacts of it have not been explored in planning (Tian et al., 2016).

As a summary, the research problem of this paper links together two recent strands of research, which have not yet been explored together in the context of planning (Figure 1): the growing interest in promoting integration, and the impacts of shared leadership as a model on this. Whereas integrated planning is often viewed as 'bringing together,' self-organized shared leadership may sometimes act as a 'detaching force' when not strategically aligned by giving more agency to individual autonomous actors.

Methods

To explore the identified research needs with adequate resolution, the research utilizes two illustrative examples from Finnish municipal planning organizations for two main reasons. First, municipalities hold a planning monopoly in Finland and are important actors in the context of planning (Mäntysalo et al., 2015). Second, interest in studying new forms of leadership in public expert organizations has increased due to their marginalization in generic leadership theories (Spicker, 2012), making the research topical. Considerable effort has been put into developing public sector leadership overall (e.g. Stenvall & Virtanen, 2021), but research on the experienced impacts of shared leadership on specific goals has been lacking.
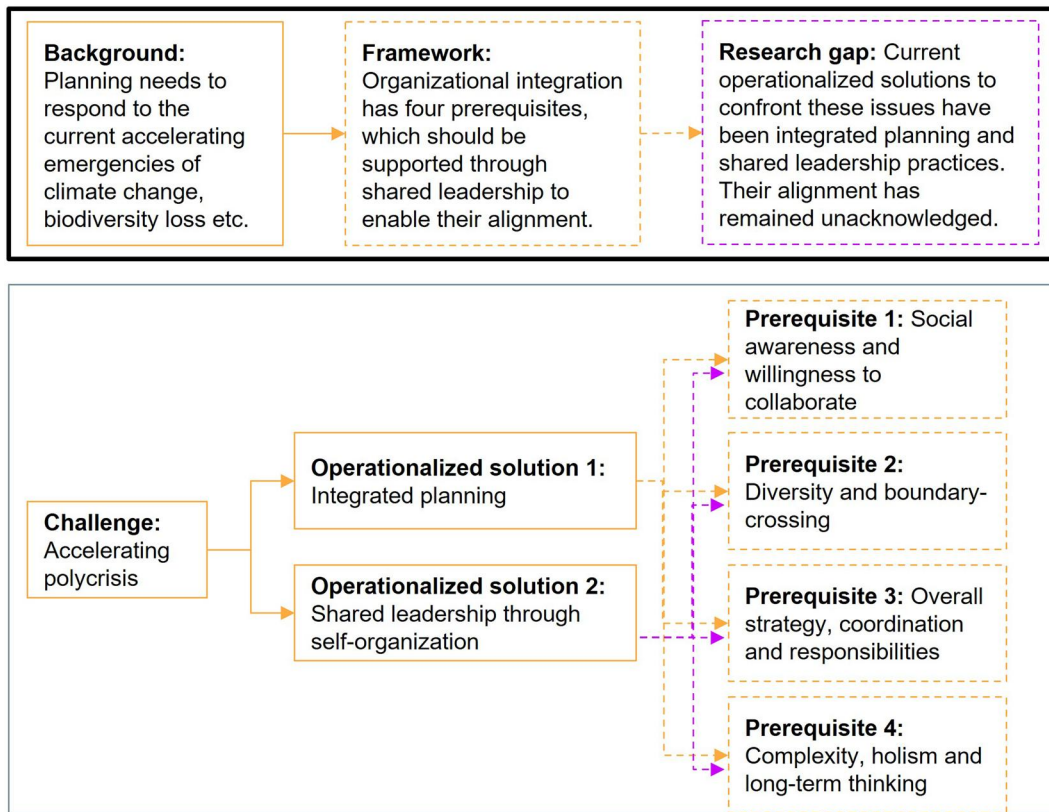
Figure 1. Research gap.

Table 2. Research data.

	A	B
Nr. of interviewed planners	13	12
Duration of interview data	636 min	611 min
Transcribed length of interview data	91 pages	85 pages

The research data was collected from two large Finnish municipal planning organizations through 25 in-depth interviews with practicing planners. Both municipalities are among the ten largest in Finland (over 80,000 inhabitants). Details of the data are outlined in Table 2. To follow the ethics of researching sensitive questions in real-life settings, the anonymity of the participants was preserved, and the two cities are called here A and B and detailed information of them is not shared. The operating environment and organizational culture are considerably similar in both organizations, confirmed by experiences of some respondents who had experienced both organizations. Both organizations employ predominantly architects, engineers and geographers who work on various scales of planning. Majority of the interviewees had worked in the organization for over 4 years and seen the change from the previous managerial philosophy towards more shared practices. In both cities, multiple simultaneous planning processes are ongoing and local public debate of planning has been rather active over the years. To improve agility, shared leadership logics have been introduced in both cities, but utilized within an administrative hierarchy. Hence, the formal structure does not completely follow the change in

the leadership logic. As well, in both cities most planning takes place within existing urban structure and requires the ability to integrate a diversity of knowledge(s). Consequently, the context is suited for studying shared leadership and integrated planning.

The interview protocol included questions on how the shared leadership logics had been introduced and implemented, of the experiences of cross-boundary knowledge integration and of the experienced overall understanding in the intra-organizational sphere. The interviewees were first asked to define how they interpret shared leadership, what kind of information they have received on the theme, and how they see the clarity and meaning of the target overall. The rest of the questions focused on reflecting the theme through prerequisites of integration as categorized in Table 1. All in-depth interviews were organized one-on-one, lasted 45–60 min, were recorded and later transcribed. Altogether 176 pages of interview data was structured with ATLAS.ti using the list of prerequisites. The findings are reported according to the experiences as stated by the interviewees (e.g., 'increased'/'decreased') and need to be further explored also with more quantitative means and comparative methods in the future.

Experiences from the Practice

The need and logics of adopting shared leadership had remained somewhat unclear to most interviewees, according to their experiences. Although all were aware of the aim, many felt uncertain about why and how to operationalize the aim. Both organizations have offered education for leaders and experts on the theme, as well as offered overall descriptions of the logic.

Social Awareness and Willingness to Collaborate

Many interviewees pointed out that social skills and willingness to collaborate are essential for shared leadership. The interviewees suggested that genuine listening and interest in others' expertise supports information sharing and knowledge integration and the experience of trust and belonging. The experts explained that in rapidly changing and uncertain settings, they appreciate the feeling of safety to express their thoughts especially when dealing with diverse knowledge. Some interviewees pointed out that in addition to the individual self-organized groups, goals and values should be explicitly discussed. When the groups start to distance from each other, also the overall aims may start to detach, and strategic direction of the organization may weaken. As one expert explained, shared leadership has just moved the institutional divides from administrative silos to value silos:

> The institutional divides will always be somewhere … When we tackle them in one place, they will just move to another place. So, it is not an answer for better utilization of knowledge. It will just merely create fuzzy processes and overlapping work. (Planner, B)

The experienced power play and challenges had led to increasing protectionism at the individual level, challenging the needed interaction and collaboration already intra-organizationally. Some interviewees explained that the increasing individualization had led to a growing lack of trust and unwillingness to collaborate with experts of differing values. Consequently they had noticed that experts had started to protect their own tasks to improve their own status and standings in the organization:

> People have clearly started protecting their own tasks. They do not easily share information or expertise. They just try to protect their projects and themselves, not to lose their own status in the administrative game. (Planner, A)

One interviewee described that the organization had mostly identified the current challenges of collaboration and overall unawareness, but the issues had not yet been actively tackled. Instead, some experts and working groups had become collaboratively passive or ignorant, as they were unaware of what was expected from them:

> In the future, we have this great new thing, which will always solve all challenges. Someone else must first do something, and only then we can act. It is always like that. That with one more change everything will be fine. Now, I do not know what is expected from me, so I just better stay aside and wait. (Planner, A)

Diversity and Boundary-Crossing

Many interviewees pointed out that diversity and boundary-crossing often introduce increased value differences in the processes. According to the experiences, this may often lead into socio-emotional turbulence, which may reduce the willingness to collaborate. Many interviewees pointed out that the value-related differences are rarely explicitly discussed, even as they may lead to conflicts. Some interviewees explained that already the organizational goals may be contradictory depending on the perspective from which they are assessed. This caused uncertainty as to who should have the last say in how the goals themselves should be coordinated and integrated in the processes:

> There is a huge variety of values. Nobody can be right about everything, but the discussions easily lead to a challenging situation, as there is a variety of people and opinions discussing the issues […] Often it is just easier to let it be and accommodate to protect yourself and the social sphere from the contradictions. (Planner, B)

Another interviewee reflected on the same matter at the individual level describing that:

> Sometimes there are tasks that need to be done even when they contradict with your own understanding and morale. In these situations, you just do it, and then try to live with it if the diversity of views and the possible contradictions are not openly discussed during the process. But this does decrease the quality of the processes when you don't understand the justifications. (Planner, A)

One interviewee went even further in the reflections suggesting that the diversity of views should not even be actively brought into the discussion, but the diversity should rather be actively to protect the processes from too much social turbulence:

> It should be up to the person oneself to assess whether one can work in an organization where one cannot stand behind all given values. (Planner, A)

These described challenges of introducing a diversity of views into the process often led to increasing inertia and like-mindedness in the process, which then reduced the possibility of integration and missed critical reflection of the objectives and practices. According to the interviewees, experts in the process turned more easily towards like-minded colleagues to advance the issues, which then led to narrower overall understanding and a lack of critical reflection. Even as the challenges were explicitly identified by the respondents, like-mindedness was still actively advanced as it increased the feeling of effectiveness, safety and belonging when the arguments were not continuously and actively contested during the process. According to the experiences, this protectionism decreased the opportunities of knowledge diversity and integration, as the self-organized teams began to distance themselves from each other:

> Sometimes it is just easier and safer to protect yourself from all of those challenges, which are involved in the badly coordinated collaboration processes even when it leads to radical decrease of integration between various views. (Planner, B)

Overall Strategy, Coordination and Responsibilities

According to the interviews, the increased level of shared leadership together with the lack of vertical integration had led to reduced coordination between the strategic and the operational levels. Many interviewees explained that administratively the actual decision power had remained at the higher levels of the formal organization hierarchy. This had led to a situation in which the operational and strategic level goals were not always in line, and there was a lack of communication and coordination of activities between these levels. One interviewee suggested that this had often led to a situation in which only the operational level tried to utilize shared leadership and consequently:

> Sometimes the tasks come back directly, saying that it needs to be done in a completely different way. (Planner, B)

Due to this, the operational and strategic levels had become more detached from each other, creating a tactical vacuum in between:

> There are huge gaps between the hierarchical levels. Experts do not have a clue of how and by whom the decisions are made. […] Questions are interpreted as one is just trying to be difficult. Which then leads into decreased motivation and psychological safety. (Planner, A)

The tactical vacuum also challenged work in individual processes, as the incoming information and guidelines were experienced as unanticipated and sporadic. Hence, many interviewees explained that the collaborative and decision-making spheres had become more challenged due to the experienced tactical vacuum. The interviewees explained that due to the shared leadership mandate, operational level self-organization had significantly increased as overlapping processes were advanced without coordination. The experienced disintegration of communication then led to reduced overall understanding:

> Now the operational level tries to manage the strategic issues, and the strategic level tries to interfere in the operational issues. This leaves too much room for unclear interpretations. The responsibilities are unclear, and everyone just tries to cope with that mess. (Planner, A)

Some interviewees explained that the lack of clarity between organizational hierarchies and shared leadership had also led to uncertainty as to whose orders to follow when instructions came simultaneously from multiple directions. Some experts, thus, suggested that shared leadership would also require better process and project management culture to avoid increasing workload for only some individuals as well as overlapping projects, processes and working groups:

> A project management system would be required to have an overall view of the situation. Now there is no understanding of how much resources the individual processes and working groups require, as there are new ones coming in continuously through the doors and the windows. (Planner, B)

Finally, many interviewees explained that shared leadership together with the lack of coordination and overall awareness had considerably unclarified roles and responsibilities between experts. Consequently, the experts and operational level working groups had started to turn inwards to protect their own role, advantage and objectives. This ambiguity had also effects on their willingness to collaborate and share their expertise in the process. Due to the lack of trust and protectionism, the experts had then begun to make themselves and their work more visible by initiating new projects and working groups and by focusing increasingly on external communications for example in social media, more than on knowledge integration in the actual processes:

> This is how I have analyzed the situation. The weakest ones are always ready to give up on their opinions and values so that some others can advance their own issues. With such [complex planning] issues, one

just directs the issues to their own direction. And certain themes are not advanced or discussed anymore, because of these persons. And the alignment with overall goals is not discussed. […] even fundamental peculiarities get done because things are not openly discussed. (Planner, A)

Complexity, Holism and Long-Term Thinking

Most interviewees were aware of the aim for shared leadership in their organization. Regarding holism and overall understanding, the interviewees suggested that shared leadership had led to growing self-organization. This had then increased the experience of ambiguity, fragmentation and overall awareness in their everyday work. Many interviewees further explained that the definition and actual meaning of shared leadership and the related self-organization had not been opened adequately, and everyone followed their own interpretation. This led to experience of ambiguity, as the perceived logics and 'rules of the game' differed considerably within and among processes:

> The work is so fragmented currently. Everything just feels like a mess. It somehow does not settle down at all. It must be tiring for many. (Planner, B)

The increased self-organization had led to increasing change dynamics in which multiple processes were advanced simultaneously without coordination. This had led to the experience that the system was continuously out of sync and that planning one's own work had become impossible:

> During the past years, there has been continuous change. […] One has to wait for some new signpost to receive new information continuously […] There are unexpected changes behind every corner as it [the whole] is not coordinated in any manner. You don't know what to prioritize and where your expertise would be the most needed. […] Neither the individual nor organization knows how to prioritize between competing needs. (Planner, B).

The interviewees experienced that shared leadership had led into a situation with a lack of overall awareness of what is happening in the organization and where decisions of integration were sporadic and based on individual level assessment. Instead of holism and integration of perspectives, the processes were described as messy, sporadic, and based on the reasoning of powerful actors. Many interviewees pointed out that shared leadership and the increasing self-organization had, thus, introduced a lack of coordination and overall strategy. Consequently, not only the processes had begun to detach from each other, but also the individual level dynamics had moved to a more individualist direction. This had then further increased horizontal siloing at the operational level.

With a lack of overall awareness and coordination, the siloed and possibly overlapping activities had increased ineffectiveness and sometimes contradicted with each other and the overall organizational goals. One practitioner explained how these individualist dynamics have recently narrowed down the overall awareness and understanding:

> The work has become much more siloed lately. We have somehow distanced ourselves from all other processes and experts, which has drastically narrowed down the overall understanding. […] The dynamics have moved into a more individualist direction. That may easily lead to a situation in which everyone just focuses on their own expertise and making their own work and name visible but does not have the time or interest to develop an overall understanding. (Planner, B)

Discussion

Increasing urban complexities and the ongoing polycrises set requirements for more integrative planning practice. Simultaneously, some municipal planning organizations have adopted shared

leadership practices, leading to increasing self-organization. But how does shared leadership influence the operationalization of the integrative aims? Whereas both integration and shared leadership are often regarded as positive forces in knowledge-intensive processes, the findings suggest that the current operationalization of shared leadership has partly challenged integrative planning practice by: decreasing diversity of actors; increasing detachment between the self-organized groups; enabling the development of a tactical vacuum between the strategic and the operational spheres; and increasing protectionism, siloing and lack of trust in the collaborative sphere.

Increasing Protectionism, Decreasing Information Flows

Collaboration, coordination, and knowledge co-creation through social processes are essential elements of organizing, whereas organizational integration is a critical prerequisite for the other types of integration (Kidd, 2007). However, the findings suggest that the actual operationalization of shared leadership in municipal planning organizations is not yet adequately collaboratively founded, but strongly individually focused. This has led to increased experiences of horizontal fragmentation at expert, project, and process levels as well as decreased information flows between them. Instead of encouraging knowledge sharing and collaboration between expertises, the individually-focused operationalization of shared leadership has led to a panacea of diverse and partly overlapping or even contradictory processes, programs, projects and pilots in the organizations. This has partly led to the overproduction and underutilization of information, as information flows between the experts or self-organized groups have decreased and the knowledge dynamics have turned inwards.

Consequently, shared leadership has not only unclarified the roles and responsibilities of experts, but also influenced some other key prerequisites of integration by leading to decreased willingness to share information and a lack of reciprocal activity (Kidd, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019; Stead & Meijers, 2009) and collaborative structures (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Stead & Meijers, 2009), which together lead to decreasing trust between actors. Together these have increased protectionism towards one's own work. This raises important questions for future research: how does experienced protectionism influence social learning practices and knowledge flows in actual planning processes; and what are the implications of this on the actual planning solutions?

Increasing Diversity Between Self-Organized Groups, Decreasing Boundary-Crossing

Integration requires the ability to acknowledge cross-cutting issues in a holistic manner through embracing systems complexity (Stead & Meijers, 2009). The findings suggest that shared leadership is currently leading to increasing horizontal and vertical detachment between expertises and hierarchical levels of planning organizations. Individually-focused self organization has led to increasing ambiguity of roles and protectionism, simultaneously decreasing diversity and holism within the self-organized groups. Consequently, recognition of the bigger picture and systems complexity (Kidd, 2007; Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009) as basic requirements of integration are not actively nurtured. The narrowing down of understanding may consequently decrease the understanding of complex urban challenges, and the complexities may still be left unaddressed despite the benevolent aims.

Effective complexity absorption and knowledge integration require collaboration, knowledge co-creation and information flows across boundaries to allow diversity. Simultaneously, meaningful leadership sharing and self-organization require trust, exchange of ideas and boundary-spanning practices among diverse actors (Nederhand et al., 2016). Diversity may also reveal the limits of expertise, which may stay hidden when a process is founded on a strongly selective practice of like-minded action and "symmetry of ignorance" (Rittel, 1984). The findings suggest that this selection takes place both in the social and knowledge spheres (who is invited and what the participants are willing to share with each other). Accordingly, while diversity between the self-organized groups increases, their internal diversity may even decrease. Based on previous research, selective self-organization may even lead to systemic distortion when the interaction is strongly biased towards like-minded experts (Bella, 2006).

Consequently, there is not adequate representation of diverse knowledge(s) (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019; Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009), nor systematic boundary-crossing activities (Kidd, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019; Stead & Meijers, 2009) to support knowledge integration. Instead of supporting diversity and collaborative action, the current operationalization of shared leadership has actually sometimes enabled the reduction of knowledge diversity. Considering integration, this raises two important questions for further research: whose knowledge and perspectives matter – or should matter – in the processes; and is there knowledge(s), which are systematically left out of the self-organized groups?

Emerging Tactical Vacuum between Strategic and Operational Spheres

Strong coordination and hierarchies have been seen as a challenge to integration, as they may limit the flexibility and autonomy of actors (Eriksson, 2016; Rode, 2019; Wiek & Walter, 2009). Still, even integration requires a certain degree of overall strategy and clear procedures (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Stead & Meijers, 2009) together with consistent aims and objectives (Kidd, 2007; Smith, 2014) and mutually adjusted policies (Healey, 2006). The findings of this research suggest that increased autonomy of shared leadership is widely appreciated as it gives more freedom to define one's own work in the operational sphere. However, the increased autonomy has also led to a range of integration challenges due to the increasing vertical detachment of the strategic and the operational spheres leaving a tactical vacuum in the middle. According to the findings, the current operationalization of shared leadership and self-organization are strongly individually-focused and operational level decisions are made autonomously at the lower levels of still existing organizational hierarchies. As the autonomous groups move towards their ends without adequate overall view, the work becomes fragmented, operational level decisions detach from overall strategy and coordination and responsibilities become unclear. The findings further suggest that the tactical vacuum decreases overall awareness on all levels of the organizations, decreasing their capability to approach urban complexities through integrated processes.

Consequently, the prerequisites of overall strategy (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Stead & Meijers, 2009), consistent aims and objectives (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Healey, 2006; Kidd, 2007; Smith, 2014) and clarity of procedures, roles and coordination (Daneshpour et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019; Smith, 2014; Stead & Meijers, 2009) are not yet adequately addressed or collectively enacted. Shared leadership is not only changing the operational logics of planning organizations, but also integration and knowledge resilience at the micro level of individual experts, at the meso level of projects and processes and at the macro level of the whole intra-

organizational sphere. Considering integration, the findings suggest a need for collective sense-making in the tactical sphere to tie the strategic and operational spheres together. For future research, this raises an important question: who uses decisive power in the planning organizations that operate through shared leadership?

Conclusions

Planning organizations need to cope with the growing complexities of planning (de Roo et al., 2020; Sengupta et al., 2016). To support this and to strengthen lower levels of governance through sharing power and responsibility, planning organizations have adopted practices of shared leadership, self-organization and knowledge integration. Still, the findings suggest that the simultaneous presentation of these approaches has led to two intrinsic mismatches, which together decrease the potential of knowledge integration to cope with the systems complexities amidst the polycrises.

First, the current individually-focused operationalization of shared leadership has led to increasing like-mindedness and monorationalization within working groups, enabling horizontal fragmentation. This has led to decreased diversity within working groups, while diversity between the self-organized groups has increased. The self-organized groups are horizontally distancing from each other, leading to a lack of knowledge integration between them. The second mismatch challenges integrative practices by reducing knowledge diversity within the groups, decreasing boundary-crossing and collaboration between groups, reducing the understanding of systemic interrelations between issues, decreasing coordination between projects and responsibilities, and enabling the siloing of the knowledge sphere when the diverse groups do not communicate adequately.

Second, the individually-focused operationalization and the subsequent selective self-organization have further increased horizontal fragmentation as described above, but also created a tactical vacuum between the strategic and operational spheres, enabling vertical fragmentation. Due to the individualization of self-organization, the overall strategic coordination does not extend to the operational realm. This mismatch challenges integrative practices by weakening the overall strategy, strategic coordination and awareness of responsibilities, by leading to the overproduction and underutilization of information as well as unintentionally overlapping projects and processes through decreased information sharing between the self-organized groups, and by simultaneously decreasing the ability of holistic and long-term thinking.

Together, the mismatches may enable increased sectoral, scalar and value fragmentation in planning, reducing holistic understanding of the complex operating environment and decreasing the organizational ability to deal with the accelerating polycrises. Without acknowledging the overall view, the scale of the problems and the enormity of the solutions required, we will not manage to meet the goals (Bradshaw et al., 2021, 1). A siloed world is at odds with the needs of the growing complexities that essentially require knowledge co-creation through a diversity of perspectives. Integration in planning organizations should not only be an individual level achievement, but a shared social process in which the individuals are willing to transform their own thinking also in unexpected ways during the process to enable adequate overall awareness and strategy-aligned operations.

Shared leadership and its operationalization through self-organized practices have multiple potentials as identified by previous research. Figure 2 presents the process of this research, which focused on the potential mismatches of integration and self-organization as current modes of
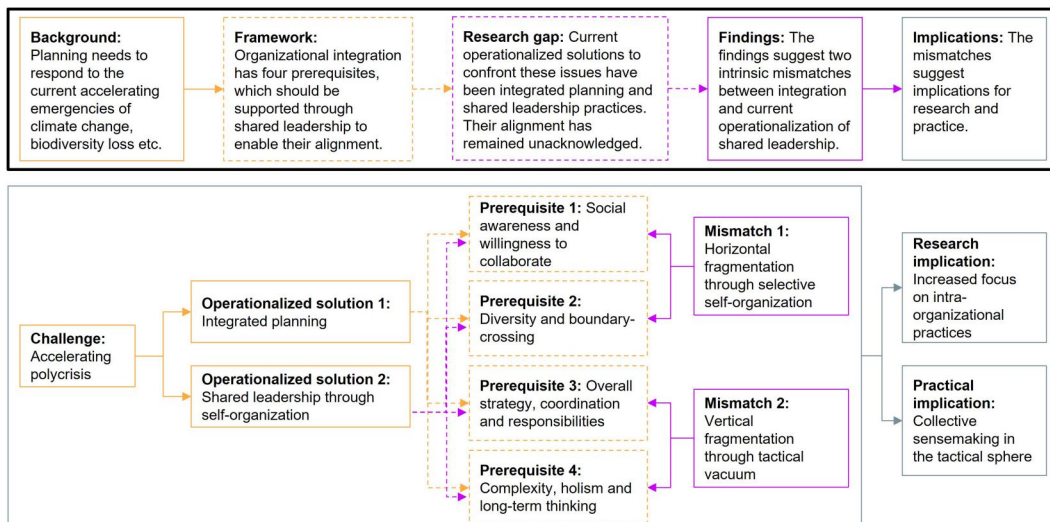
Figure 2. Research process and its implications.

operationalizing aims towards tackling the polycrises. According to the findings, shared leadership is not automatically in line with the integrative aims, but to align it with the need of integrative and holistic practices in planning organization, its interpretation and operationalization should move from individually-focused selective self-organization in the operational sphere, towards collective sensemaking in the tactical sphere to support adequate overall awareness and shared understanding. The research adds to existing literature by providing an empirical example of how well-intended goals may have unexpected outcomes. Planning is a future-oriented profession that has a profound impact on the societal ability to act on the pressing polycrises.

The findings suggest that further research of how current intra-organizational practices, leadership models and goals may support or hinder this ability.

This paper took an analytical focus on the experiences of fitting together integration and shared leadership in municipal planning organizations. However, further research is needed to understand if these models, even when fitting together, support the practice in dealing with the complex societal challenges.

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Disclosure Statement

Notes on Contributor

Susa Eräranta, is a researching practitioner and a Professor of Practice in the Spatial Planning and Transportation Engineering research group at the Aalto University. Her research interest is in exploring the complex dynamics of diverse living beings in the practices, processes and networks of planning.

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